home is where the heart is

by setosdarkness

Summary

Chuuya tries to have a good, normal life—just, after all that shit that happened, everyone deserves a nice, normal happily-ever-after, right?

[ the one where chuuya attempts to find his one true love by dating the entire bsd cast, as he fails to realize that he's... lowkey married to dazai already ]

[4/16/18 as of CH22 - >1 year & 110k words later, they're finally getting highkey married!]
Abilities from the world, but doesn’t end up killing Ability-users]

• while the endgame is soukoku, the fic has a lot of chuuya interacting with a whole slew of characters. i’m really, really curious about (a) how chuuya would interact with other characters; (b) how the bsd cast would react to a world where abilities suddenly disappear.

• also, 2017 has started out crazily for me, but i’m... alive again. thank you for all the messages as always!!! much appreciated ♥ ♥ ♥

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

☆ ☆ ☆

Thing is… Chuuya knows he’s good. He knows he’s dateable, he’s excellent boyfriend-material, he’s a well-adjusted human being able to adjust to the world that now doesn’t have any Abilities whatsoever.

He’s good.

He’s got a great body – well-maintained despite having had the power to literally bend gravity and not have to lift a finger to do anything, because even during the time when For The Tainted Sorrow answers his call in less than half-a-second, he’s distinguished himself in the ranks of the Port Mafia as the best martial artist in the region… and that’s not something that’s achieved with a happy-go-lucky strength training and a half-assed cardio regimen.

He’s got a well-cushioned bank account – he knows how to handle investments and he has excellent budgeting skills, able to afford glass-window lofts that scream wealthy bachelor more often than not, able to import customized Bentleys and Lamborghiniis with hardly a flicker of his hands signing on his checkbook, able to splurge on airflown crates of Romanee-Conti and sometimes showing some local support with 35-year old Nikka Taketsuru Malt Whiskies.

He has excellent insurance coverage – especially on his car, he won’t make the same mistake again – and he knows how to stride into a roomful of extravagance with the confidence of a model, the tailor-fitted suit of a socialite, the fashionable hat of an artistic billionaire.

He never misses the opening night of Salome – if there’s a mission, it doesn’t matter because he possesses great time management skills too – and he’s a patron of the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall. He can discuss La Damnation de Faust and Le Nozze di Figaro without losing steam.

He’s able to play the Violin Sonata in G minor, B.g5 with considerable proficiency, despite a certain someone’s commentary about him faltering during the last 13th to 15th minutes, therefore not really allowing him to showcase the trill about this Devil’s Trill. (He tells that certain someone to fuck off, because even with the help of the stolen Stradivarius, he’s only able to replicate the first two movements, which is way less than what Chuuya can accomplish.)

He’s working on Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto and that certain dumbass can suck it if he’s able to do so. He’s also steadily approaching completion of performing all of Mozart’s known compositions, a choice that definitely doesn’t have anything to do with the fact that Beethoven is that guy’s choice of poison.

His weekends are spent attending invite-only wine-and-cheese samplings, director’s club showings of black-and-white movies, short road trips while burning through two sticks of gifted cigars, culinary adventures in lobster thermidors and flambéed beef steaks.

He publishes poems – under a pseudonym, because there’s a lot of fuckers who will make trouble for his sanity if they heard of this – every month, subscribes to three literary magazines, submits
reviews – in French, he’s not stupid enough to do so in Japanese and draw eyes to himself – about world politics to various circles.

He’s good.

Fucking awesome, even.

So here he is, in a bespoke suit that single-handedly caused Higuchi’s fainting spell earlier (though it’s more likely to be because of the cost rather than how it looks like it’s framing his ass), fedora against his chest and a bouquet of Holland tulips in his hand, and wondering what the fuck went wrong.

“It’s, you’re…” The youngest daughter of the previous MEXT Minister fiddles with her hands, tomato-red blush high on her cheeks. She looks like Chuuya’s her dream come true, but she also looks like she’s downed too much champagne. “You’re too good for me, Nakahara-san.”

What the fuck.

☆ ☆ ☆

It’s not a dating spree.

It’s not that he’s running away from problems.

It’s not, god forbid, running away from things such as feelings.

“Why are you on a dating spree, Chuuya?”

He freezes, like the cartoons with children wrist-deep in cookie jars. He’s here to check up on things, primarily because nobody wants to tiptoe into (the remains of) Motojirou’s laboratory to ensure that there’s nothing too explosive there. He’s honestly not expecting to run into anyone else, given the unholy hour (after driving all over town to shake off the bewilderment over his date’s ending).

“…I’m…not… Ane-san.”

Damn it.

☆ ☆ ☆

It’s not a dating spree, but he’s twenty-five now.

It’s been three years since Fyodor’s ass has been thoroughly kicked to some Siberian underground prison or the other (Dazai has contacts there, why is he not surprised that he’s even more terrifying than the KGB?). It’s been three years since Ability users have been demoted to ‘normal’, if normal means having blood on your hands since birth and suddenly having their extra edge against the criminals who continue to roam the world removed. It’s been three years since the Special Ability Department has been refurbished to something just-as-secretive, because there’s nothing to monitor
with regards to Ability-users in Yokohama anymore.

It’s been three years since Mori-san has expressed his desire to retire and leave the Port Mafia in the hands of the next-in-line, which Chuuya thinks to mean is him, if only the actual first choice is a massive asshole. (It’s been three years since Chuuya’s accepted that Mori-san is a lying liar who lies, but isn’t everyone?)

Thing is, he’s lived for twenty-five years without the teenage experience of fumbling like a hormonal idiot, without the supposedly-normal montage of frolicking across the park with crepes on one hand and a significant other on another. He’s been really good these past few years, hasn’t he?

He does deserves some peace and quiet and normality and a fucking life, doesn’t he?

(“No you don’t, petit mafia!” he can almost hear Dazai yell against his ear, that fucker.)

☆ ☆ ☆

“Why not get someone from a pool of people you already know?”

“That won’t—”

…work.

Damn it, he hates it when Dazai makes logical suggestions.

Chuu ya glares at him suspiciously – and there’s a lot of suspicious things about Dazai right now – starting with the fact that he’s successfully broken into his penthouse suite yet again without tripping his supposedly-state-of-the-art security alarm.

Handling wild animals is dangerous, but Chuuya doesn’t dislike danger, with or without his Ability. Nevertheless, he crosses the foyer and approaches his living room couch with skittish carefulness.

Dazai’s hair is wild, almost as though he went here right after waking up and rolling all over his stupid lumpy futon (it’s not like he has no money – even if he spends an unhealthy amount of it hiring assassins to take him out of this world – so why not buy a new, thicker one?). Despite the sort-of homeless look, those brown eyes are sharp and assessing when they meet his.

“Now, where’s my consultation fee?”

Chuu ya slaps Dazai’s grabby hands away, seconds from them reaching into his pants to take his wallet.

“Consultation fee?!”

Dazai has the nerve to tilt his head at him innocently. “I just gave you the answer to your life’s puny questions!”

“You broke my security alarm system.” Chuuya eyes the half-empty wine bar in his living room, as well as the broken glass window just a few steps away. “And my bulletproof window.”
“I was gonna jump off your building—”

“—and cause a goddamn scene in my apartment—”

“—but I saw you had a Le Pin as I was falling so I crashed here instead.”

“What the goddamn fuck.” Chuuya exhales loudly and deeply and wonders why the fuck is this happening to his life.

Aren’t things supposed to be over?

Aren’t things supposed to be normal?

Aren’t things supposed to settle down so he can get a break from all this?

Stupid fucking Dazai giving him a headache.

“…So?”

“So?” Dazai parrots him and waves his wallet at him. Because of course he still manages to pickpocket him. Chuuya slumps on his couch and brings his legs up and kicks at Dazai’s stomach, shoes and all.

“I’m sure you already have a suggestion of who I should date next.”

For a moment, there’s an almost surprised look in Dazai’s eyes, like he’s sincerely not expecting Chuuya to figure out that he’s a meddling piece of shit who has nothing else to do but think of disastrous recipes for an ex-partner’s love life, like he’s genuinely out of his depth in predicting the fact that Chuuya knows how to play this game well enough to get the worst out of the way first.

It only lasts a moment though, a particularly evil smirk crossing Dazai’s face.

“I don’t have a suggestion,” Dazai says slowly as he takes hold of Chuuya’s right heel. “What do you take me for?”

“A meddling asshole bored out of his mind who’d like to make my life hell.”

Chuuya’s nothing if not honest.

Dazai’s smirk grows even as his eyes shutter emotions out. “I have a list.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“No offense, kid, but I’m not really into blushing virgin schoolboys.”

Chuuya’s honest and it’s best to get things like that out of the way before they spend more time in each other’s orbits.

Nakajima Atsushi, to his credit, blushes but doesn’t yelp like a wet, offended cat. He doesn’t protest either when Chuuya takes his seat out for him, drapes his jacket over the back of his seat for him.
Dutifully, like it’s a line he’s been harassed into saying: “Dazai-san says that you’re a blushing virgin yourself, so we’ll match.”

“HE DOESN’T KNOW THAT!”

“So it’s not true?” Nakajima looks honestly intrigued, his multi-colored eyes practically sparkling at him, like Chuuya’s an interesting mouse. Abilities no longer exist in this world but it’s still mildly unnerving, knowing that this is the man-tiger.

Chuuya bites his lip as he reins in his composure. They’re on a cozy bakeshop, granted it’s fancier than most, but still pretty public. “It’s true, but—”

“So there’s no problem!”

“There’s a lot of problems.”

Chuuya sinks to his chair in dismay, because Akutagawa’s going to be insufferable after this, and if he’s in a prissier mood than usual: (1) Higuchi’s voice will be pitched higher than a songbird being cooked alive; (2) then Gin’s going to be more trigger-happy when it comes to waving her knives around; (3) then Hirotsu-san’s going to be ten times more imposing with his disappointed-grandpa look; (4) then Elise will not have a chaperone to buy her sweets; (5) then Mori-san will slink out of whatever his retirement bucket list item of the day is and attempt to outdo Akutagawa’s insufferability; (6) which ultimately means that Ane-san will order him to fix whatever it is or else he’ll need to entertain her to relieve her stress and he’s not quite ready to part with either his most expensive bottle or his dignity once she forces him to help out at the courtesan house.

Nakajima doesn’t look like he quite believes him, so Chuuya gestures for him to slink closer so he can draw an annotated flowchart on the napkins in their table.

Minutes later: “Do you get it now?”

“Akutagawa’s going to be pissed if he finds out about this date?”

“When he finds out,” Chuuya rubs at his temples. “And that’s what you’re focused on?”

“So does he like you or m-me?”

“For shit’s sake,” Chuuya exhales and waves at the waitress for more napkins, three cups of coffee (all for him) and three slices of cake (all for Nakajima, because he looks like someone with an insatiable sweet tooth, just like the mentor he’s been unfortunately saddled with).

Once the orders arrive – an excited “Thanks, Chuuya-san!” before the man-tiger polishes the first plate in record-time – he draws a mini-Nakajima, adding a fluffy tail and some furry ears just so the guy can’t mistake it. He taps at his drawing and resumes once he gets Nakajima’s attention. On another napkin, he then draws a darkly-shaded lump of emotional constipation and gloominess, but takes care to draw hearts for eyes. With the subtlety of a bombed building, he then crashes the two napkins, mushing the chibi faces together.

“Akutagawa looks at m-me with h-heart-eyes?!”

“Stranger things have happened,” Chuuya responds with the air of a man who’s suffered for a hundred years. Honestly, Akutagawa’s crush is hilariously obvious and terrifyingly adorable, if only because he’s never seen the guy trip over thin air so much while supposedly going through his daily life (read: stalkerishly appearing at places where Nakajima is).
It’s nothing (it’s even downright cute) compared to the other things that he has witnessed. To name a few: (1) Hirotsu-san being coerced by Kouyou-anesan into kimonos so he can assist in the courtesan house; (2) Elise and the newly-released Q fighting over the last piece of apple pie; (3) Mori-san carrying sardines and catnip in his pockets and strategically popping out of cat shelters in a very stalkerish and highly creepy way of courting.

Long story short, Akutagawa’s (sometimes literally) head over heels for his date for the day.

And Chuuya has an inkling that this date is for Nakajima to talk to someone who knows what’s going on, but can’t see daily (and therefore lower the possibility of embarrassment) about his feelings for Akutagawa. Normally, he’d be pissed off like hell for being manipulated into something like this, but Akutagawa’s a good kid. Stereotypically emo teenager despite being twenty-one already, but a good kid nevertheless. And this slightly airheaded, naïve man in front of him seems like the perfect match to him.

He hasn’t received any texts or messages from Dazai, so he figures that he’ll just proceed as normal?

“Would you like to get more pastries?” He rather hopes not, but he’s always game for doing whatever his date wants. Matchmaking aside, there’s no reason to not treat Nakajima nicely. “Or do you want to go somewhere else?”

“I’m thinking I’d like to bring souvenirs back to the Agency…” Nakajima’s eyes bulge as he surveys the prices though.

“Get whatever you want.” Chuuya helps him stand up towards the display of cakes near the storefront. “Don’t worry about paying me back.”

“C-C-Chuuya-san! I’m going to buy everything!”

Chuuya laughs as he requests for the waitress to help pack whatever Nakajima chooses so it can be delivered to the Agency. He’s not opposed to buying the whole supply for the day, but he can’t carry all of them, especially not if they still have to go somewhere else. “Is that supposed to deter me?”

Awestruck, Nakajima stares at him with stars in his eyes. “…You’re really gentleman bocchan.”

“I’m not a bocchan, goddamnit.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Why are you being so nice?”

Chuuya falters for a moment as he steps into his apartment. His eyes immediately go to his window, but nothing seems to be broken. Does he even want to know how Dazai broke into his place again? Not really, because he loves his sanity too much to let it go.

“…you’ll have to be more specific than that. I’m always nice.”

“You’re not nice to me!”
“Well yeah.” Chuuya hangs his overcoat near the doorway, before he sits beside Dazai, his legs reaching over the other’s lap so he can kick the other’s chest. He’d rather swallow his tongue than sit willingly beside the other, but it’s his expensive couch and he’s going to use it even if there’s vermin on it. “You’re not worth being nice to.”

“Hey!” Dazai chucks Chuuya’s leather shoes to the vague direction of the kitchenette. “I’m someone who you should be nice to!”

“How about no.”

“…You’re distracting me.” Dazai’s not the type to be distracted by a nuclear weapon exploding in front of his face, the damn liar. “Why are you being so nice?!”

“I assume you mean regarding Atsushi-kun.”

“You’re on first-name basis?!”

“He calls me Chuuya-san already. Since three years ago?”

“But you’re—you’re—you call him Atsushi-kun?!”

“You call him Atsushi. Everyone calls him Atsushi. What the fuck is the problem?”

“Akutagawa doesn’t call him Atsushi!?”

“That’s his problem, not mine?” Chuuya lifts his left foot so his toe can plug Dazai’s nose and kill him before he can say something more. It doesn’t work – Dazai only wraps a hand around his ankle and drags his foot so it’s against one slimy mouth. “He’d probably combust if he tries to call him ‘Atsushi’, the dummy.”

“You paid for the truckload of cakes for the Agency.” Dazai’s whiny words tickles against his foot. He twitches and attempts to kick the other’s nose again. It fails, again. “You even bought him a kitten! A kitten!”

“It’s a purebred Persian.”

“Fukuzawa-san was so jealous, he wanted to go on a date with you!” Fear washes over him.

“…does Mori-san know?”

“Silly Chuuya – do you even have to ask? Mori-san was there for his visit!”

“I’m…” Faintly, Chuuya reaches for his phone and thinks whether the Caribbean is far enough from Mori-san’s jealous wrath. “Is Mori-san going to kill me in my sleep?”

“He’d want you awake for torture first,” Dazai supplies helpfully.

“Goodbye.” Chuuya attempts to move to his bedroom so he can pack a luggage for a year-long vacation to save his life, but Dazai’s grip on his foot is unyielding.

“I won’t let Mori-san torture you, idiot.”

Chuuya, because he’s a stupid idiot who doesn’t learn, actually believes Dazai.
“This is all your fault, you know.”

“Mmm.”

Chuuya’s foot is back against Dazai’s lips. He wriggles his toes to lessen the ticklish feeling.

“I didn’t sign up for this matchmaking thing with those two dense idiots.”

“Hmm.”

“I mean it.”

“Mm.”

“The date was nice.”

“…it was?!”

Chuuya rolls his eyes at Dazai’s exaggerated disbelief. “Atsushi-kun’s a good kid. It was nice spending time with someone like him.”

“So… you’re into blushing virgin schoolboys?”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“You are?!”

“I’M NOT, YOU STUPID FUCK.”

“Hm, that’s a lot of denial right there…”

“Because it’s not true, asshole.” Chuuya shoves his toe against Dazai’s nose again, because he’s not a quitter. “And we have another date tomorrow.”

“See, I’m getting mixed signals here, Chuuya.”

“Does it matter?” Chuuya raises an eyebrow at Dazai literally inhaling his foot. It says so much about his life that it’s not even weird – more accurately, it’s weird, but it’s practically normal compared to all the other shit he’s seen… “Atsushi-kun’s the one I’m going on a date with.”

“Do you actually hate Akutagawa and secretly want to punish him?” Dazai’s words should be muffled, but they still sound crystal clear even when he’s speaking against his soles. “Do you want to sink my ship?”

Chuuya rolls his eyes. “He needs to talk to someone who can give him *sane* advice about Akutagawa, someone that’s not you, dipshit.”

“You make it sound as though I give insane advice!”

“You told him to surprise Akutagawa by appearing naked in his house…”

“That’s fun!”

“…as part of their first date.”

“They’ve pined for too long already, stop being a prude!”
“Rashomon’s gone, but Akutagawa still has a gun. Their first date will end in murder.”

“Atsushi’s tough – he can last a bullet wound or three.”

“…this is why we need at least three more dates.”

“Is Chuuya falling in love with Atsushi-kun?!”

“God, you’re annoying.”

“I’m Dazai, but continue.”

Chuuya lets his unrepentant kick to the other’s forehead be his reply.

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya’s just finished sending Atsushi off after their date, the man-tiger’s arms filled with bags of pet food and more souvenirs for the folks at the Agency. His offer to walk the other to the Agency’s building has been turned down, because he’s apparently being protected from Edogawasan’s grabby hands and loud tantrums about wanting to go on a date with him too (he’s made to understand that the term ‘sugar daddy’ has been thrown around).

Though, given the sight in front of him now, Chuuya figures he should have insisted on walking Atsushi home.

“NO.” He considers stomping on the ground, if it can bring his point across. “JUST… NO.”

He’s not even sure if this is because his route is that predictable, if he just has shitty luck, or if Dazai’s making money off this.

“Don’t leave, Nakahara Chuuya.”

Good god, he’s not prepared to die! He’s going on multiple dates with Atsushi, yes, but he doesn’t have a girlfriend or boyfriend yet! He refuses to die a virgin!

Fukuzawa Yukichi looks imposing most of the time, though it’s hard to take someone like him seriously when there’s an overflow of shopping bags full of sardines and cat food by his feet. “…Don’t leave… before you buy me a kitten.”

How does the Agency even operate, do they not know about salaries?! Can’t their President buy kittens on his own?!

The deep scratches on the other’s right cheek and left arm tell him a story, but still!

“…Can’t… Mori-san buy you crates of them?”

Oh god, he feels his stomach flipping. He drinks a lot of wine, but it’s hardly a cause for ulcer! Yet, he feels like there’s a hole there, acid gnawing at his insides.

“Mori…?” Fukuzawa blinks like he’s trying to place the name. Chuuya feels almost hysterical – he kind of wants to call Dazai so he has someone with him when he loses his mind – at the fact that Fukuzawa apparently doesn’t even know the Boss’ name. Then again, that’s better than the truth.
“…Oh. You mean, Rintarou.”

Chuuuya considers just throwing his wallet at the other, so he can use it to buy off all the pet stores in Yokohama, bribe the store personnel so they’ll still sell him kittens even if it’s obvious that kittens despise him.

Because, of course. Of course.

“…you call him… Rintarou…”

Of fucking course.

Because three years has passed already and old grudges are all forgiven and first-names are for losers, because it’s all about former names now. He knows Mori-san’s old name because he’s an Executive, but he’s never dared to use it. But then again, there’s nothing normal about Fukuzawa Yukichi, is there?

Or rather, things have slipped into domestic normality without any bloodshed for those two.

Fukuzawa is looking at him like he’s a particularly interesting specimen and it’s so much like Mori-san’s dissecting gaze and he’s just—over this, okay?! He’s not looking forward to being skewered by Mori-san’s jealousy-driven scalpels and he’s not going to waste time being messed up by the Agency President’s weirdness.

“…let’s just go, Fukuzawa-san?” Maybe this is a sign that he should drink his newest wine acquisition. He deserves a treat after this day. “Do you have a breed in mind?”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Oh. You’re alive.”

Chuuuya rolls his eyes as he strips everything but his undershirt and boxers, piles of clothes ending up in the genkan of his apartment that hardly anyone visits. “Don’t sound so happy, asshole.”

“I’m not happy,” Dazai quips as he grins, one hand waving a remote and—is that a new TV set installed in the wall?!—pats at the spot beside him. “That striptease is too bland, I’d rate it 4 out of 10.”

“Since you’re the expert on stripteases.” Chuuya rolls his eyes again as he makes his way to the living room that’s slowly but surely being filled by random shit that Dazai’s buying using his credit card, financial restraint an unknown concept. “Also, I’d kill you before I give you a striptease, bandage bastard.”

Dazai’s grin widens. “Please do kill me—make it interesting!”

“I’d unwind those bandages and let you choke on them.”

“Mm, so it does involve stripping, in a sense.”

“Never mind, I’d just push you off the building.”

“Not very original,” Dazai pats on him on his forehead with the edge of the remote, as soon as he’s
“Of course it’s you who’s next.”

Chuuya considers the younger man struggling not to fidget in front of him. Trust Dazai to set him up on yet another matchmaking date that doesn’t end up with his own lovelife improving.

“…Good evening, Chuuya-san.”

“Right. Good evening to you too, Akutagawa.” He considers his vague dating plans for the evening. “Would you rather we go to the art museum three streets over?”

Akutagawa coughs into his hand, Chuuya's instincts immediately placing him to the other’s side to help rub circles on the other’s back.

(“You’re such a mother hen, hat rack!”, he can almost hear Dazai crow against his ear.)

“I’m… fine.” Akutagawa’s pinched expression tells Chuuya just how much he would prefer to be coughing his lungs out than to be cared for by a work colleague. “The art museum… sounds fine. I believe in your itinerary.”

Chuuya takes a half-step away from the stubborn man, sliding his hand down to take hold of one tense elbow. He hears some bush rattle noisily and he hopes that Higuchi’s not about to get herself arrested for suspicious loitering. “You didn’t have to sound so constipated saying that.”
“…my apologies.”

“You don’t need to say sorry for every single thing too.” Chuuya wonders if Dazai force-fed Akutagawa with these flimsy manners. “Especially if you don’t mean them.”

“I see.” Akutagawa does not look like he understands, but he does look like someone who knows how to capitulate when needed. “So where shall we proceed?”

“The museum is better.” Chuuya knows that there’s hardly a lot of people there at this time; Yokohama citizens aren’t the type to huddle around art especially when it’s not even an exhibition night. “We can talk more there.”

Akutagawa’s face flushes – in embarrassment or rage or both – at that, but he doesn’t deny it. Chuuya suppresses a sigh at doing the legwork in calming down two dense idiots in love so they won’t be as anxious when approaching each other.

“Atsushi-kun loves animals. Kittens in particular,” Chuuya says as nonchalantly as he can, the moment they cross the threshold to the museum.

To his credit, Akutagawa doesn’t trip over thin air. He trips on the carpet instead.

“…I don’t.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes as he helps the man up, despite the other’s glare. “Suck it up.”

“Relationships should be about compromise.”

It’d be a wonderful, believable line, if Akutagawa’s not glaring at the wall and looking like he’s been suckerpunched.

“Right. Advice from Higuchi’s magazines aside—”

“—they’re Gin’s.”

“…Okay. Advice from Gin’s magazines aside, give me those lines about relationships and compromise once you actually manage to start one.”

“Dazai-san said—”

“A lot of shit stuff, probably, but no, your current status of stalking Atsushi-kun and passive-aggressively waiting for him to notice you does NOT count as a relationship – not in the way you want it to mean, at least.”

“—he said you’re gonna tell me that.”

“That fucker, predicting my lines.” Chuuya keeps them moving about the museum, pausing for five minutes at every painting, one hand still latched to his elbow to keep him from running away from their Talk. “So you have to build a healthy foundation first. And you can start that by being nice to Atsushi-kun’s kitten.”

“I could be allergic.”

“You could see Atsushi-kun eventually succumb to the adoration of Kyouka-chan and Lucy-chan.”

“I’m not allergic to cats.”
“Thought so.”

There’s at least ten minutes before Akutagawa speaks up, sounding lost and confused and mildly terrified about the prospect of working at not being completely miserable for once. “…And after that?”

“Fuck if I know.” Chuuya almost laughs at the scandalized expression on the other’s face, betrayed by someone he’s been led to believe to help him capture the love of his life. “Akutagawa, your tenuous… relationship with Atsushi-kun started without any of my meddling. Without anyone else’s meddling – wait, aside from Dazai pulling strings so you’d encounter each other.”

“But—”

“It will come naturally.” Chuuya lets Akutagawa’s elbow go, sensing the other’s need to pace away. Akutagawa does take a few steps forward, but doesn’t stray too far. Huh. He really is a good subordinate. “You could help him take care of the cat. Help him shop for pet food, then grab dinner afterwards. Go to the park and meet other pet owners. Read pet grooming books at the public library. Ask Higuchi for a big favor so she’d pet-sit while you two watch a movie. There are endless possibilities. Just choose one that you can see the two of you doing without bloodshed.”

“That’s…” Akutagawa looks halfway to dismissing his words, but he swallows it down, acceptance flitting over his expression instead. “Thank you for the thoughtful advice, Chuuya-san.”

“…Why does that sound like something that bastard Dazai told you to say.”

Akutagawa’s not quite smiling, but it’s near that. Chuuya feels warmth blossom in his chest, because it’s time for people to move to the normality that normal folks monopolized for a long time. A lot of people deserve happiness – Akutagawa’s one of them and he’s in the verge of accepting that without kicking and screaming. It’s good. Nice, even.

“He told me that you’d surely give thoughtful advice.” Akutagawa tilts his head a little to the right, a motion that’s so Dazai, it almost freaks him out. Like mentor, like student. “And he warned me about making sure to treat you right.”

“That asshole.”

“Where should we proceed to next?” Akutagawa asks after a few more moments, the guards for the museum starting to make their rounds to advice the few visitors about the closing time.

“Anywhere you’d like to go.” Chuuya replies easily, shrugging as the two of them begin walking out into the cool evening breeze.

“We can go to a bar.”

Chuuya laughs outright at that. “You look like you swallowed one of Motojirou’s lemons.”

“You’d prefer wine.”

“I’m fine with anywhere.” Chuuya’s not sure, but he’s probably visited every establishment in Yokohama already. There’s nothing surprising here anymore, not after living here practically his entire life, doing sweeps to expand Port Mafia territory, misguided desire to expand his world by visiting each and every shop he could. “Let’s go somewhere you’d enjoy.”

Akutagawa doesn’t say anything, but his eyes sparkle with something that he’s not able to hide quickly enough.
“Somewhere that’s not the Agency – we’re not stalking Atsushi-kun at night.”

“…I was not about to say that.”

“You were thinking it.” Chuuya sighs as Akutagawa lets out a helpless sigh. Dense idiots. “Let’s grab coffee – I’ll tell you all about the desserts Atsushi-kun likes.”

“He likes all sweet things. Just like Dazai-san.”

“There are things he likes more than others.”

“Just like Dazai-san.”

“Maybe you should cut down the Dazai talk when you’re with Atsushi-kun.” Chuuya doesn’t think he’s being biased when he says that. “Atsushi-kun doesn’t seem the type to enjoy talking about annoying idiots on his dates.”

“You talk about Dazai-san a lot when you go drinking with Tachihara. Or Hirotsu-san.”

“…Didn’t peg you as a gossip.”

“Higuchi tells me these… things.”

“Right.” Chuuya considers that as they approach a 24/7 coffeeshop two blocks away. “And those aren’t dates.”

“Even the ones with Tachihara?”

Absentmindedly, because Chuuya’s busy ordering drip coffee for the two of them: “Of course they’re not dates.”

Akutagawa mumbles something that sounds like ‘dense idiot’, but Chuuya doesn’t push him on that further.

☆ ☆ ☆

“Welcome home, honey~♪”

For one terrifying moment, Chuuya thinks that he’s gone insane.

There’s no waste of bandage soiling his living room couch, but he can still hear that godforsaken voice.

It’s only for a moment though – Chuuya slowly pats his thigh for his dagger as he tiptoes with an arm on the wall, approaching his kitchen. He relaxes as soon as he sees the firm line of shoulders and the familiar back – and that’s when Chuuya decides that he’s gone insane.

“Should I call the fire department?”

“I know how to cook katsudon, have some faith, Chuuya.”

Chuuya sniffs at the air and draws a blank. “…you’re cooking katsudon?”
“That’s too much faith,” Dazai says dryly, flipping something in the pan. “I’m cooking omelet now.”

“For a midnight snack?”

“Well, if you’re gonna criticize my menu, I won’t give you any.”

“I didn’t ask for one.” Chuuya rolls his eyes as he dumps the bag containing slices of blueberry cheesecake and apple pie on his dining table. He sinks to a chair after, his eyes on Dazai’s back as the other whirls around in his kitchen like he owns it. “Given that you’re using my kitchen without my permission though…”

“You get first dibs?”

“I’d rather not. I want to see you eat it first.”

“You want to watch me eat?”

“I want to make sure I’m not gonna end up with food poisoning.”

“I told you to have some faith, Chuuya.”

Chuuya laughs, derision in his tone instead of fondness. He’s sure of that. “I don’t think so.”

“Aren’t you having fun on your dates?”

“I wasn’t expecting that I’d be… playing matchmaker when you suggested I date people I already know.”

“You weren’t expecting an ulterior motive from me?” Dazai flips the omelet again. “That’s stupid of you, Chuuya.”

“I was expecting an ulterior motive,” Chuuya corrects him, because this is Dazai. He’s not entirely idiotic. “Just… not about smushing Akutagawa and Atsushi-kun together. Or even using my corpse to bridge our bosses together.”

“Oh?” Dazai serves the food, with too much grace and fuss about plating, given that it’s a midnight snack. “What did you expect?”

“Making me a gofer. Getting blackmail information from our mutual acquaintances. Something along those lines.”

When Dazai sinks to his own chair, he does it with a long-suffering air that’s just not warranted. “You really are stupid.”

“I’m not, you jerk.”

“Hat rack.”

“Bandage bastard.”

“Petit mafia.”

“Stupid asshole.”

“Chuuuya.”
“Why the fuck are you using my name as an insult?!”

“…Eat your food.”

“Hmph.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“I’m… not expecting you.”

“It was surprising to me too, Nakahara-san.”

“I don’t mean it in a bad way,” Chuuya backtracks a bit, because he’s honestly – pleasantly – surprised. “I wasn’t expecting Dazai to send me to meet someone decent.”

“Are you calling Atsushi-kun indecent?”

Chuuya raises an eyebrow, lips quirking at the other man’s words. “It’s hardly decent to date someone days away from dating someone else.”

Kunikida Doppo isn’t someone who’d usually collide against Chuuya’s orbit, but it’s good. Nice, even. They’ve only ever interacted in terse confrontations – right-hand men of two opposing organizations that had to tenuously work together in a war that had hosted the entire world – so it’s surprising to have to deal with each other in peacetime.

It seems like the wonderful sort of challenge though – one that doesn’t end in piles of dead bodies and autopsy reports.

This guy is the right-hand man to Fukuzawa Yukichi. More importantly, this guy is the one currently suffering the brunt of the misfortune of being Dazai’s partner. He already feels an immense connection.

“I like organized things and I dislike annoying bastards like Dazai.”

“I like many things and I greatly dislike everything about Dazai.” Chuuya laughs at the sight of Kunikida’s answering grin, thrilled and carefree, as he stretches his hand over the table between them. “I’m sure we’ll get along well, Kunikida-san.”

☆ ☆ ☆

They do get along well.

Too well even.

Kunikida takes him fishing – they drive out one Saturday on Chuuya’s convertible and they spend sunrise until noontime knee-deep in water, buckets filling with freshly-caught fish. Chuuya grills their catch over a portable grill that he suddenly (oh-so-mysteriously, if only he doesn’t smell that bastard’s rare indulgence of tobacco on the grill’s box) finds on his living room an hour before the
drive – because Kunikida’s handwritten recipe has a smudge on one edge and it asks for some herbs that aren’t available in the wild.

On Wednesdays and Fridays, they alternate between attending art exhibits and watching the currently-showing movies in alphabetical order. Each Sunday, they go for lunch on Chuuya’s favorite restaurants; Saturdays are dinners of Kunikida’s choice – mostly seafood places.

Most weekday nights they go for dinner, joined sometimes by some folks from the Port Mafia, sometimes by some members of the Armed Detective Agency, oftentimes joined by the other Mafia-Agency couple in a double-date, Dazai a permanent absence during these meals.

It’s all so normal and unobtrusive, both of them orphans and have no families aside from their respective affiliations. There’s no curfew or meet-the-parents that he needs to be nervous for. Given that the world has calmed down considerably, all of their plans go through without a hitch, their dates lined up weeks in advance on Kunikida’s notebook.

It’s all going along so well.

Too well even.

“—so you can’t bring yourself to kiss Kunikida-kun?!”

“Don’t yell, you shitty fuck,” Chuuya whines as he presses his face against his bed, headache pounding like a particularly wild drum.

He probably shouldn’t have opened his new bottle of Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon, not tonight when he’s feeling… confused about himself, but it’s rare that he approves of an American wine and…

Urgh.

He’s not drunk though – not drunk enough to miss the fact that Dazai’s half-yelling at him, that Dazai’s on his bed, fully-clothed and completely annoying.

“I mean, I know you’re a virgin, but.”

“Argh, shut the hell up.”

“You called me here, slug.”

“Urgh. Don’t remind me.”

He’s fairly sure that he only drunk-dialed Dazai. He’s not drunk enough to actually beg the other to come here and listen to his problems… is he? Fuck, he can’t remember. Shit. Urgh.

“So you called me to tell me… that your lips remain untouched?”

“It’s not like I could call anyone else,” Chuuya grits out over his pre-emptive hangover migraine.

Everyone who knows about him dating Kunikida (and there’s a LOT) approves of their match-up wholeheartedly – even Kouyou-anesan, and she has standards as high as the heavens – and Chuuya’s not in the mood to be scolded for not wanting to put out, or something. He’s probably never going to be in the mood for such a confrontation.

And Kunikida’s—nice, very nice. It almost feels wrong to not want to take things further with him.
Almost.

It’s not something anyone could simply agree with.

Dazai – who always begs out of going to dinners with them, supposedly because he’d gag over seeing his partner and ex-partner make cow eyes at each other (Chuuya has this distinct feeling that it’s more because that despite this match-up being Dazai’s idea, Dazai’s not so kosher with the idea of the two people who know how insufferable he is to band together against him) – is the only one who could probably understand.

“So he’s normal, but too normal for you?”

“Something like that?”

“I always knew he was boring but nobody believed me!”

“He’s not boring.”

“He was a Math teacher, Chuuya.”

“That has nothing to do with it!”

“It has everything to do with it.”

“Argh – he’s not boring. He’s not. Just. Too normal?”

“…you think he’s too good for you?!”

“You’re shrieking, damn it.” Chuuya throws a pillow at Dazai’s direction, but it’s futile effort. The pillow just gets smashed over his head in return. “Don’t raise your voice at me, argh.”

“You think he’s too good for you,” Dazai then repeats with a modicum of restraint.

“Sort of?”

“You’re the stupidest fucking idiot in the world.”

“Shut up, I have a hangover.”

“You just drank one glass an hour ago, you lightweight.”

But there’s none of the shrieking in Dazai’s voice anymore. Chuuya feels the pillow leave the top of his head – just as he adjusts so that his cheek is flat against his silk sheets, fingers comb through his hair, smoothing out his curls.

“Urgh.”

He tries to vocalize a protest, swat Dazai’s hands away from his hair.

He attempts to make this strange calming camaraderie stop.

He ends up sleeping soundly within the next minute.

☆ ☆ ☆
“Well, this is… awkward.”

It’s *supposedly* a Sunday lunch date with Kunikida – but the other man’s not here.

Chuuya rubs at his eyes as discreetly as he can, because despite the aspirin and bottles of water by his bedside when he woke up two hours ago to the annoyingly loud ringtone of the goddamn *mackerel* calling him to haul his ass out of bed – he’s still fairly exhausted, sleepy and suffering from a hangover.

There’s Atsushi-kun’s naïve excitement and there’s Dazai when he sees a bridge to jump on – and then there’s this.

“Good afternoon, Nakahara-san!!!”

“…good afternoon to you too.” Blond kid with superstrength isn’t a good thing to call his date for the day. Or is this guy just early in joining him and Kunikida for lunch?

…is he still dating Kunikida?

Fuck, he should have asked Dazai before he dozed off last night.

…goddamn it, it’s his lovelife, he doesn’t need to consult that bastard on this. The guy sustained himself on the tears of his heartbroken conquests, back in the day. He’s hardly the best person to help when it comes to matters of the heart that doesn’t involve death and/or stabbing.

“Yosano-san told me to order all the expensive foods twice and bring leftovers to her!” Blond kid shares the plan to drain his wallet rather enthusiastically. “She told me that you probably wouldn’t want to date me again after this, so I have to take advantage!”

“…that sounds pretty mercenary.” Chuuya doesn’t mind though. He’s warier about the fact that this guy can unleash a constant smile brighter than the sun – it’s pretty bad for his eyes. “Order whichever you want.”

Seconds after their impressive orders have arrived, blond kid seems to remember one more thing he’s been asked to relay to him.

“Oh, and Dazai-san said that he already broke up with Kunikida-san for you, Nakahara-san!”

☆ ☆ ☆

“—you—!!!”

“…me?”

“What the fuck did you think you were doing, breaking up *on my behalf*?! Did you just break my window again?! Why are there strawberry waffles on the kitchen, you know how much I hate that flavor! Also—remove your socks if you’re going to just! Laze around my bed. God, please stop breaking my windows—the building manager’s going crazy over the constant repairs, and she’s driving me nuts in turn, can’t you just take my goddamn key?!”
Dazai looks halfway between cackling in evil glee and keeping up his exaggeratedly innocent
gaping. “…which one did you need answers to?”

“EVERYTHING.”

Chuuya makes a point of removing his socks before he launches himself to his bed, utterly drained
from lunch and afternoon shopping spree with Miyazawa Kenji. He’s a pretty energetic man, if he
says so himself, but even his no-hangover self is no match to the other’s sheer enthusiasm and
brightness. He’s still wondering if there’s a remote to the kid so he can adjust the contrast and
brightness, not unlike the not-that-new-anymore TV in his living room.

Slowly, deliberately, Dazai refocuses his attention back to his video game, his legs crossed as he
leans against the headboard.

Chuuya throws his socks to the other’s face, ignoring the sputtered complaints about smelly feet
(lies).

“I DEMAND ANSWERS.”

“After my game, Chuuya, don’t be rude.”

“You fucking broke into my apartment for the thirtieth time, don’t argue with me about rudeness.”

“You also clearly don’t know how to count.” Dazai laughs at his indignation. “Kunikida-kun’s not
that great of a math teacher then, that’s probably why he quit?”

“I don’t care to count your transgressions, I’d run out of numbers.”

“Hm, do you think it’s possible to run out of numbers? You can just substitute it for ‘infinity’? Or
is that too difficult for you?”

“Don’t distract me,” Chuuya drags the video game console out of the other’s hands. The grip isn’t
too tight, so Dazai’s probably expecting it. Also, it appears to be his console, so Dazai doesn’t look
too concerned that he hurled it to the floor. Feh, whatever, it’s carpeted, it’ll live. “I demand
answers.”

“I’ll think about supplying them.”

“You—!”

“—me?”

“—are fucking insufferable.”

“Technically a compliment, because you don’t suffer when you’re with me.”

“Answer my—”

“I got strawberry flavor because I felt like it.”

“…huh?”

“Your question about the waffles.”

“I don’t care—and two, I know you got them because you know I hate them.”
“So presumptuous – I don’t do things in relation to you, you know?”

“So that’s why you keep on breaking into my suite then?”

“You have the best appliances and the most expensive TV.”

“Because you keep on doing credit card fraud!”

“It’s not like you’re using your credit cards for anything other than your wine and whatever culture obsession of the moment you have?”

“That doesn’t mean you get to use them!”

“It’s for the greater good.”

“You just wanted a UHD screen.”

“As I said – the greater good.” Dazai’s looking at him like he’s expecting something else though – and oh. Throughout their conversation – it’s absolutely shitty conversation, but a conversation nevertheless – Chuuya’s ended up kneeling over Dazai, his legs caging Dazai’s, his hands still gripping Dazai’s.

He drops Dazai’s hands.

(His only consolation is that he still keeps on wearing his gloves, because Abilities may be gone, but the scars left remain. He’d rather not broadcast to the world the mark Corruption has tainted him with.)

“Why the hell did you break up with Kunikida – ‘on my behalf’?”

“I’m all about the greater good.”

“Bullshit.” Chuuya’s knees are frozen, so instead of sliding off Dazai’s legs, he settles in, because he’s nothing if not resourceful. This close, he can punch Dazai right on the face if he says something too annoying. “Tell me.”

Dazai sighs and looks at him like he’s a particularly dimwitted brat.

Something must be on his face, because Dazai actually relents after a moment.

“…you’ve gone on dates with him, every single day, for the past three months. That’s eighty-eight dates. And you didn’t even want to kiss him or take things further.”

“That doesn’t mean I want to break up with him!” Chuuya really doesn’t think so. Love and normality shouldn’t depend on kissing – there’s too much blood spilled and too high of a body-count in this city for things like kissing to matter so much. “And even if I wanted to, why do you have to do it for me?!”

“…so your actual issue is me doing the ‘break up’ for you.”

“No—I mean, yes, it’s an issue, but it’s not the only one!”

“Is there a point in continuing to date others?”

“I wouldn’t even be thinking, right now, of dating others, if you didn’t break up with Kunikida on my behalf.”
“…so you’ll continue this… ‘dating spree’?”

“It’s not a dating spree, stop talking to Ane-san.”

“Someone has to, you’re hiding from her.”

“I’m not, I’m just avoiding the courtesan house.”

“Afraid to see beautiful ladies there rocking kimonos better than you?”

“Not about that!”

“Mm, so you’re confident in your ability to still be the best courtesan.”

Chuuuya moves to slap Dazai to stop him from speaking nonsense, but it only brings him closer, his hand caught. “Not that either!”

Dazai hums as he sticks Chuuya’s right hand against his cheek, his fingers cradling the other’s jaw. His fingers twitch with the urge to attempt to slap the other again.

“Where’s my key, Chuuya?”

“I didn’t make one for you!”

“You’re the one who told me to take a key.” Dazai huffs, reminiscent of how he passive-aggressively complains about not getting his way when they were much younger, when Dazai hadn’t fully mastered his manipulative bastard qualities. “Aren’t you becoming senile already, baldie?”

“I’m not bald!” Chuuya squirms as he tries to get his hand free, to no avail. “And I’m not senile either!”

“So I’ll have to spend money to make a key copy?”

“Don’t sound so put-out!” It’s not like Dazai’s spending money on anything but his abhorrent preserved crab and sake. He hasn’t been spending money on buying useless souvenirs and senseless gifts for women, or else Chuuya would have been called to deal with damage control already. It’s just a couple of yen – and. “It’s not like you have to make a copy, goddamnit.”

“I’m going to, you can’t take it back.”

“Stupid mackerel.”

“Slimy slug.”

“I’m not slimy.”

“You’re slimy, getting Kunikida-kun’s hopes up…”

“I did not.”

“So you admit you feel nothing for him?”

“He’s… he’s nice, okay?” And Chuuya’s very dateable, very secure in his life, very well-adjusted to a world that’s suddenly different from everything he’s fought for. But he’s not nearly as nice or as normal as Kunikida. It’s not even about the amount of blood on his hands, not even about the
fact that he’s raised as a child soldier. Kunikida doesn’t have the same dark whispers about raging
on until nothing remains, whispers that he hears despite the fact that Corruption shouldn’t be here
anymore. And if it’s not Corruption, then it must be his own voice, right?

“…so you want, what, a bad boy character?”

Chuuya sighs, the fight and annoyance leaving him in puff of air. It’s exhausting to deal with this
bastard, because his words say one thing, but his gaze sees through him anyway.

“…Just shut up.”

He slumps forward then sideways, rolling into his unofficial side of the bed. He thinks about
pushing to chew Dazai out for being so… presumptuous in breaking up with people on Chuuya’s
behalf.

It’s probably a lost cause anyway, so Chuuya just closes his eyes and thinks about how unfairly
difficult it is to live like a normal human being.

☆ ☆ ☆

“You’re… Nakazawa from the Port Mafia?”

“It’s Nakahara.”

Chuuya raises an eyebrow at The Guild’s leader – or wait, is he the leader now or did they have yet
another civil strife? does it even matter? – as he sips at his champagne delicately. He takes a half-
step closer to the American when one of the patrons nearly bump to his back.

“You’re wearing William Fioravanti.”

Chuuya’s eyebrow lifts higher – aside from Dazai, nobody else is able to identify his bespoke suits
on sight (though that’s probably because he rarely sees his colleagues on black-tie events).

“And yours… is by Brooks Brothers.” He’s not entirely sure – he’s not one for American brands
when it comes to clothing, but given that Fitzgerald is most likely back in Japan to help promote
his country since his current business venture is based there…

“Excellent eye, Nakahata.”

“It’s Nakahara,” he repeats with an eyeroll, furnishing a copy of tonight’s program from his pocket
and flashing it to the other. His name as one of the sponsors is on flowing script at the first page, in
romaji so the foreigner can easily read it.

“I’d like to call you ‘mine’, instead, if you’d allow it.”

Unwittingly, a snort leaves him – cheesy pick-up line aside, he didn’t think Fitzgerald is the type to
‘allow’ people to do things. It’s not in his personality – though the war changed a lot of things.

“But for tonight,” Chuuya demurs instead, letting the other stir him into conversation about
Japanese tailors.
“I didn’t think you were serious about the bad boy preference!”

“Good morning to you too, dumbass,” Chuuya replies dryly as he squints at the sunlight streaming to his room. He’s not quite sure what time he managed to crawl into bed, flutes of champagne nearly floating him higher than his penthouse suite. He remembers promising himself not to drink a lot because he actually enjoys opera, but Fitzgerald’s had talked about too many expensive topics and it felt apt to drown himself in alcohol to deal with him.

“Society pages have such poor taste,” Dazai bemoans this as he eagerly flips through his tablet (bought, unsurprisingly, using Chuuya’s credit card) for more pictures from last night’s opera.

“I gave you an invitation – it’s your fault you didn’t get your picture splashed all over the news.”

“I hate it when you make sense,” Dazai complains even as he’s making himself comfortable at the foot of Chuuya’s bed, spreading crumbs everywhere since he’s speaking as he’s biting onto his breakfast (or brunch?, what time is it?). “But since it pretty much never happens…”

“Get the fuck out of my room.”

“Before or after I hand over your breakfast?”

It’s not even a choice. “Give me coffee first.”

“They have some great Guatemalan beans today.”

“Huh. You actually bought great coffee today.”

“Just wait until the food poisoning kicks in after an hour.”

“Poison cannot taint great coffee.”

“Oh-so-wise words coming from a coffee addict.”

“I thought I was a wine addict?”

“One can have more than one addiction.”

“Pfft – quit the solemn act, you look stupider than usual.”

“Your hair’s sticking out in all directions.”

Chuuya’s cup is halfway empty, his belly warmed and his blood caffeinated nicely. “I look wonderful despite it, shut up.”

“Hm.” Dazai stares at him for a brief moment, before handing him a paper bag of bagels. He then flops on the part of the bed where Chuuya haphazardly threw parts of his suit before he crashed last night. It’s a testament as to how fucked-up his life is that he doesn’t even screech about his suit getting wrinkled – it’s old news at this point. “Fitzgerald didn’t bitch about your suit being more expensive than his?”

“I don’t remember.”
“Did you even listen to him during your date?”

“Is that counted as a date?” Chuuya’s all for dating if he can hopefully, finally, find someone who’ll give him a place to feel normal about.

“Uh, he said that you were his for the evening?”

“Stop stalking me.”

“It’s on the papers, idiot.”

“He gave an interview?” Chuuya remembers being stopped for pictures, but that always happens recently.

“You agreed to his statement, dumbass.”

Maybe he did? “I don’t remember.”

“You don’t look debauched though, so your virgin lips are still safe?”

“GET OUT.”

Chapter End Notes

• this is supposed to be a oneshot, but after 9k+ words, i figured i should split it into 2? also, this was written in like, 2 hours (and is unbeta-ed), so please feel free to let me know if there are glaring errors ^^;;;

• people on the list for dating chuuya: steinbeck (because WINE), ranpo (sassmasters unite), yosano, higuchi, tachihara (he deserves to be noticed by senpai), fyodor (i’m fyoya trash), ango (chuuya/traitors is my jam) and... *smudged ink* tsushima shuji and dogs.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

• chuuya dates best bro steinbeck
• 100/10 domestic soukoku
• will chuuya ever realize that he's already lowkey married to dazai tho

Chapter Notes

thank you everyone for reading so far! i realized that nah, this can't be over in 2 chapters, so i figured i'll just post as it goes???????

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ ☆ ☆

“It’s… you.”

Try as he might, he can’t quite pinpoint the name of the guy in front of him, long dark trenchcoat painting an austere outline of his body, bright blond hair almost out of place with the solemn figure. The last time he saw the guy, there’s no coat, but there’s that severe line on his mouth still, face swathed in bitterness.

“Nice to see you here, Nakahara Chuuya.”

Those eyes look dull even as the words imply cheerfulness – Chuuya’s reminded of the person he saw in the mirror in the wake of receiving a phone call from Hirotsu-san, news about Dazai’s betrayal delivered tonelessly amidst the heavy noise inside his head.

He shoots for casual as he inquires: “Is everyone from The Guild here for a reunion?”

He’s still part of the Port Mafia and protecting the source of their income – Yokohama itself – remains priority. Everyone’s been stripped of their Abilities, leaving behind scars and inerasable pasts, but wealth can buy many things – firearms, power, destruction.

“Just touring around.” It’s a lie, but there doesn’t seem to be something sinister underneath the words, so Chuuya erases the frown on his face. “And since you look like you’re still figuring it out – I’m John Steinbeck.”

Records show that this guy’s Ability was called Grapes of Wrath. There’s nothing particularly wrathful about this guy, but he supposes that Ability names didn’t always match the user – unlike his.
“Do you need company for your ‘touring around’ then, Mr. Steinbeck?”

He’s not entirely sure about the impulse to offer being a tour guide, but it’s not like he’s particularly busy. It’s Sunday and he doesn’t have anything lined up (he remembers Dazai offhandedly mentioning something about crashing Akutagawa’s date today – anything too serious and he figures he’ll see smoke from a distance).

“Mr. Steinbeck sounds so serious. Call me John instead.”

Does this count as a date, Chuuya idly wonders. Does it say something about him that he’s drawn to someone with similar sorrow in his eyes, he wonders further.

“Then it’s fair for you to call me Chuuya, John.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“You know that he can’t cultivate grapes for your privately-owned vineyard, right?”

Chuuya rolls his eyes and tugs his tie out of Dazai’s grabby, filthy hands. “He actually knows how, even if he doesn’t have an Ability anymore.”

“I can’t believe you actually asked him about that, you alcoholic.”

“It’s not like I’m actually asking him about that, you alcoholic.”

“…you’re not?”

“I’m not,” Chuuya says firmly as he looks over his form in his full-length mirror, steadfastly ignoring Dazai flitting about in his bedroom like the annoying pest that he is.

“You do know that he’s here because he’s stalking Fitzgerald?”

He didn’t know, though Chuuya didn’t really buy the vacation tour excuse to begin with. “Such a gossipmonger.”

“So you’re the rebound guy, even though my sources say that they weren’t together to begin with.”

“We’re just dating.” Chuuya doesn’t even know why he’s wasting time explaining this to the asshole who keeps on invading his personal space. One of these days, he’s afraid that he’ll inspect his other properties and find them overrun with knickknacks from Dazai’s closet. It makes him want to charge Dazai for rent – something he refrains from doing, because Dazai is an absolutely terrible tenant. “We’re just… getting to know each other.”

“You can do that in five minutes,” Dazai whines from the general direction of his bed. “I’ve got his file here.”

“Why the fuck do you have his file – wait, that’s the Port Mafia file on The Guild!”

“Hirotsu-san gave it to me.”

“Hirotsu-san is playing favorites,” Chuuya declares darkly, remembering the time he asked the man for a copy of Dazai’s file. Not because he’d like to check how his knowledge about the man
faired against the information written on paper.

“Hirotsu-san just wanted to make sure you were in capable hands~♫”

“John’s… a farmer. He’s harmless.”

“You’re tiny and you’re harmful.”

“Fuck you.”

“Really?”

Chuuya ignores that and chooses a coat to go along his ensemble. There’s still thirty minutes until they’re supposed to meet, but since the cinema is just five minutes away on foot… Maybe he should go early so he can get away from this nuisance?

“He claims to be a farmer, but he has enough money to tail his ex-boss around.” Dazai is rolling all over his bed, rumpling his bed sheets. He makes a mental note to fumigate his entire apartment. “All of his siblings are now attending prestigious schools. Did he say that he’s the one who led—”

“Look,” Chuuya interrupts, rubbing a hand across his face.

There’s a twinge of warmth inside his chest, like he’s too full, too sated, when in fact he hasn’t eaten anything since lunch. It’s a strange feeling, but it almost feels normal, similar to the feeling he gets when he gets home and sees Dazai messing around his place. It’s quite possible that Corruption leaving his body has irreparably damaged his mind.

“I… appreciate you looking into John’s file. He used to be part of Yokohama’s enemy. I get that. But I know what I’m doing, okay. I’ve survived even without your mission plans and strategy briefings.”

“…you know what you’re doing?”

Chuuya feels the confession slip out of his mouth before he can attempt to stop it. “I just want to live a normal life.”

“…I thought Kunikida-kun felt too nice and normal?”

“It’s… I don’t know what it’s like to be normal. And shut up – you’re not normal either, asshole. But I’d like to find that normality.”

Dazai looks thoughtful, in a way that he hasn’t appeared since he was promoted to Executive, many years ago. It stutters in Chuuya’s ribcage, the knowledge that Dazai hasn’t really considered his opinion since then. It hurts, but it almost hurts more that Dazai appears to be considering him now.

“So you’re dating around as a process of elimination?”

It’s not quite that, but he now only has ten minutes left. “I guess?”

“I see.”

Whatever he sees, Chuuya doesn’t get to question, but there’s a sparkle in Dazai’s expression, too brilliant and Chuuya wonders if he should expect fire in his apartment once he returns from the movies.
Dating John is easy.

They’re able to cover a lot of topics in their conversations – wine, education differences between America and Japan, balancing sheets to ensure an organization is well-funded. Chuuya’s English isn’t the best, but he’s glad for the chance to exercise it; John’s Japanese is passable for light conversation.

They’re only able to meet twice a week for a quick dinner and/or movie, because Mori-san’s getting antsy about retiring so he can dote upon Elise more, because Fitzgerald’s own Japan tour of kissing up to various companies’ asses take him all over the map.

He supposes there’s something wrong in dating someone you know to be hung-up on another person, but it’s his time to spend. Maybe he won’t get that happy-ever-after ending complete with a white picket fence, but it’s not so bad to gain a friend too.

Maybe it’s wrong to date with the goal of finding a friend instead of a lover, but whatever.

“Why did you decide to stay in The Guild when moneybags left?” Chuuya wonders if John has read that article about the one-night date between him and Fitzgerald. He probably did. “If you hated it so much, why did you decide to rebuild it?”

He figures that there’s no better time to ask the heavier questions – Fitzgerald is widely-publicized to be going to Korea tomorrow and John is sure to follow on his heels.

John smirks at him, looking so different from the guy Chuuya kicked on the face back then. “Why are you training to be the Port Mafia’s Boss when your partner left you?”

“That’s not an answer.”

“Once you find your answer to my question,” John’s eyes are sharp and calculating, as his hands move to hold Chuuya’s hands. Chuuya’s fingers stiffen inside the protection of his gloves. “You’ll realize that it’s the same as my answer.”

“…still not an answer.”

John smiles at him and it halfway reaches his eyes. Conversationally: “Did you know that there’s a sniper trained on me right now?”

“…Ha?!?”

“You didn’t sense him?”

“No—I should—”

“You’re about to ascend as the Port Mafia’s Boss – you have perfect instincts for bloodlust and danger.” John looks entirely too serene about this; Chuuya doesn’t think he’s lying, now that he thinks about it, he can sniff that bloodlust in the air just so, but he didn’t notice until John pointed it out. “Maybe you’ve accepted him as normal, so you didn’t notice him?”

“…good god, I should re-train myself.”
“Not exactly the point I was trying to make, but that will do.” John still looks like there’s a wave of sorrow hiding inside of him, but Chuuya hopes that he was able to enjoy their time together too, even just a little bit, like he did. “It’s been great, Chuuya – and I hope you know I expect great deals with Yokohama once our respective organizations grow.”

“Are you implying you dated me as part of peacetalks between Port Mafia and The Guild?” But Chuuya’s smiling, thoughts about the sniper forgotten.

“That’s fine, isn’t it?” John shrugs, before he leans in, just close enough to whisper: “How was your one-night stand with Fitz?”

“It wasn’t a one-night stand!”

☆ ☆ ☆

“I have a revised list~♪”

He’s seriously considering marching down to the Agency and demanding they give Dazai more assignments – it’s unreal how much time he’s spending loitering around in Chuuya’s apartment. But going to the Agency means risking seeing Mori-san being there in his attempts to… court Fukuzawa-san and he’s too fond of the remaining bits of his sanity to punish himself like that.

Also—

“What the hell are you doing.”

“Cleaning your fridge~~♫”

“…why.”

Should he be worried about finding some preserved remains there? He lines his shoes neatly on the genkan, changing to his house slipper instead of simply padding across his place barefooted. A matching set of house slippers are on Dazai’s feet, a sight that greets him along with Dazai’s backside as the other bends and scrubs at his fridge.

Chuuya pinches himself. “Why are you cleaning my fridge, bastard?”

“Because I’m bored and I have nothing to do while waiting for the laundry to finish.”

“…Why did you do my laundry?”

“Are you actually complaining I did your chores for you?”

“I’m worried my clothes would be ruined.”

“Trust me, the thought crossed my mind.” Dazai sounds a bit distracted as he takes out a box of different cheeses. “Want to try making pizza later?”

“You want to use up my specialty cheese board?!”

“They’re at the back of your fridge – don’t pretend you didn’t forget about their existence.”
“I’ve been saving them up for a special occasion,” Chuuya protests as he checks the wash cycle. “It’s true that laundry is the chore that he hates the most, still… “Where did you put my suits?”

Dazai’s placing back some of the things back to the fridge, leaving the box of cheeses and some other things on the kitchen counter, just as Chuuya approaches the kitchen. “I bagged them for dry cleaning – have some faith, you’re not the only one who owns suits here.”

That brings Chuuya to his closet, being generally suspicious of Dazai’s good deeds because they just don’t happen. “Some of these suits aren’t mine.”

“Who else would the rest belong to?” Dazai manages to sound fond and insulting at once. “You’re being stupider than usual, did something happen?”

“Motojirou’s experiment gone wrong, witnessing yet another cake feud between Elise and Q…”

“I’ll let Hirotsu-san know to restrict Motojirou’s budget.”

“Why not just take over Port Mafia while you’re at it.”

“Ew, I don’t want to succeed Mori-san.”

“Then stop meddling with us?”

“Though… will you hate me terribly if I stage a coup once you’re in power?”

“Bring it.” Chuuya critically eyes the non-existent muscles on Dazai’s figure. “I’ll kick your ass.”

“It should be fun, bribing everyone around you.”

“Geh. Stop fantasizing about making my life hell.”

“So you’ll hate me if I do that?”

“I already hate you plenty,” Chuuya assures him, as he fires up mail to Hirotsu-san about not listening to Dazai’s budget cuts. “Will you be here tomorrow morning?”

“…”

“Don’t look so shocked,” Chuuya waves irritably at his phone, annoyed at the wide-eyed look Dazai’s sporting. “I’m scheduling the dry cleaners to pick up the suits, but I have to be at the base tomorrow morning. I need my suits back by—why the fuck are you laughing?”

Dazai’s laughing but it doesn’t sound completely happy. To be honest, it sounds deranged, but he already knows Dazai’s insane, so.

“Just… you’re such a bocchan. Why not just bring the suits to the cleaners themselves?”

“If you won’t be here, just tell me, damn it.”

“I’m always here.”

“You should find a different, more productive hobby.”

“You think your home is my hobby?”

Chuuya traipses towards his week-old home theater surround sound system (he supposes Dazai has
started actually telling him about the credit card purchases ahead of time – five minutes ahead of time, but still), fumbling about the controls so he can play some music as they make pizza.

“Bothering me at my apartment.”

“You don’t look particularly bothered.”

“Grace under pressure and all that.”

“Pfft, you… and… composure. Pfft.”

“Stop snickering and start kneading the dough.”

“We are making pizza?”

“It was your suggestion!”

“I thought you were going all overprotective over your cheese spread?”

“You managed to do my laundry without burning down my apartment.”

“You can say ‘thank you’ like a normal person, petit boss mafia~”

“I could report you for breaking and entering, like a normal person.”

“You gave me a key!”

Chuuya’s grinning, as he slices tomatoes. “You stole my key and had it copied.”

“With your express permission~~”

“Verbal promises will not hold water under the court of law.”

“Being scholarly doesn’t suit you,” Dazai mutters as he bumps their elbows together. “But you can try saying that again with glasses, might work better.”

“You’re just gonna take lots of pictures and blackmail me about it.”

“What do you take me for?!”

“An insufferable bastard.”

“Hm. I’d also tease you a lot about looking like a nerd.”

“Asshole.”

“I guess there’s the special occasion if you really want that.”

“Akutagawa managing to trip ten times on one date isn’t a special occasion, lay off that kid.”

“One of these days, Akutagawa-kun will end up calling you ‘mom’. Atsushi-kun too.”

“Why am I a mother?! I’d make a great—”

He won’t.

Because he doesn’t even know his own parents, doesn’t have any experience about parental figures
in his life. Ane-san took him in, but she was more of his handler, more of a big sister figure. And Mori-san is many things, but a healthy father figure he isn’t.

He—

“Stop panicking about that, idiot.”

Chuuya takes a series of deep breaths, until he’s able to see his hands holding onto the knife, onions cubed without bloodshed despite his shakiness.

“…I’m not an idiot.”

“You can learn.”

“What, to be an idiot?”

“To be a father.”

“I’m not—”

“I can rock being a wine mom too, that way.”

“I… don’t understand what kind of gibberish you’re saying.”

“That’s okay. You can be the mom, while I’ll be the coolest dad ever with the cool dad jokes.”

“You’re…” Chuuya knows he shouldn’t, but it slips out of his mouth anyway. “Your parents were shit. How can you—”

“Quite fortunately, human beings are able to do things that deviate from their past. Isn’t that the point of moving on?”

Dazai’s tone is ice-cold, but he still remains beside Chuuya. Even though he knows that he said something insensitive.

“Is that why… you’re not doing suicide attempts recently?”

“I’m… fairly contented to live right now. The gap has closed considerably. Not fully, mind you.”

“You’re not breaking the hearts of women everywhere too.”

“Oh, I’m pretty sure I’m breaking their hearts still.”

“Pretty confident, enemy of women.”

“I’m not in the market anymore.”

“Good.”

Chuuya feels, rather than hears the tremor in Dazai’s voice. “…good?”

“Because nobody will buy you anyway.”

“…pffft. Eternal torment, indeed, Hirotsu-san.”

“Why are you bringing Hirotsu-san to this?”
“Never mind that.” Dazai takes the knife from him and shoos him to wash his hands. “Fitzgerald has announced his new organization merging with Steinbeck’s Guild.”

“That’s great!” Chuuya makes a note to send John an email of congratulations, maybe stalk the other’s Facebook to see if his new pictures has him looking the slightest bit less sorrowful.

“They’ll celebrate the merge with a wedding.”

“…holy shit.”

“Special occasion, right?”

Chuuya’s not listening anymore, already busy with dialing John’s number so he can yell his congratulations instead.

Chapter End Notes

• yeah, dazai was the sniper

• next chapter: chuuya dates the ladies (higuchi / gin / yosano / naomi) + overprotective bro akutagawa

“…but you’re already dating Atsushi-kun.”

“I… care about my sister. I will not put her in Dazai-san’s way.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

• gentleman!chuuya dates the ladies [part one]
• the ~first kiss~ (lol) finally happens

Chapter Notes

• sorry, i didn't manage to squeeze in yosano/naomi/gin yet, but they'll be on the next chapter! it's just that... it's already so long lol
• so chuuya’s lot more ~gentlemanly~ about his dates with the ladies! I do see him as someone who’d really put extra effort in dealing with ladies (whether he sees them as a romantic interest or not). all the places mentioned below are real date/tourist spots in Yokohama ^^;;
• as always, feedback of any sort is greatly appreciated ♥ thank you to everyone who's reading this ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ ☆ ☆

“I feel like I’m providing a support group instead of dating.”

“Are you heartbroken too?” Lucy quips in response to his honest assessment of their situation, her red braids unraveled to provide a fiery mane that curls over her face beautifully. “I wonder what the rest of Yokohama’s grapevine would say about that.”

“At least you’re accepting that you’re heartbroken, Ms. Lucy,” Chuuya smoothly avoids his date’s tart tone, opting instead to go towards the calm route. He’s chosen a quaint teashop just a road away from Motomachi, to strike a balance between playing off his date’s foreign roots but not outright going for the expensive European shops.

Lucy folds her hands over her lap, primly stating: “I’ve moved on—so the less we discuss him, the better.”

“Your wish is my command,” Chuuya says gamely, retrieving a box from his pocket and sliding it over the table.

“Laying it thick on the prince act, aren’t you.” Lucy’s eyes are sparkling though, excited about the present even if she says otherwise.

Chuuya smiles, then slides the box an inch further, nearly touching the edge of her cutlery. “Please do let me know if you’d like another design.”
It’s unlikely that she’ll request for another design, because he’s chosen the present with great care (read: a lot of unasked-for comments and complaints from Atsushi, Ane-san and Elise). And judging from her delighted gasp and the way she trembles as she gently traces the gift with her fingers—he’s made a good choice.

A red butterfly made of smatterings of ruby crystals resting on a silver hairclip – it makes for a striking hair accessory just as well as it serves as a centerpiece to be shown off in velvet-lined jewelry display cases. It’s also fairly expensive, so it will fetch a good amount should Lucy decide to resell it for being too ostentatious for a date that’s not really meant to go anywhere further.

“I usually get annoyed by people who waste their money like this.”

“You’ve worked with Mr. Fitzgerald for quite some time.” Chuuya shrugs and doesn’t take offense. “And I don’t consider this is as a ‘waste’, so please don’t get annoyed with me.”

“Too smooth,” Lucy says with an indulgent roll of her eyes, but she’s smiling. “You must really like that brooding guy.”

“Rest assured that I’m not here for Akutagawa’s sake.”

“So for Atsushi-kun’s sake then?”

“I’ve never thought that you were the type who’d do anything to go between them.” Maybe not on her own, but still. Kyouka’s apparently entering her rebellious phase, according to Ane-san. Maybe it would have been better if Lucy and Kyouka grow closer together so they could go through this together. “I am here because I wanted to spend time with you and get to know you better.”

“A model gentleman,” Lucy murmurs, definitely echoing something that’s been whispered around in the Agency. Chuuya makes a note to remind Atsushi that, once again, he’s not a bocchan, damn it.

“Now that I have declared my intentions,” Chuuya says with a smile, waving for the server to present them with the menus. “How about we take advantage of this shop’s food?”

“…a model gentleman?”

“Jealous?” Chuuya pointedly raises an eyebrow at Dazai slurping away noodles while in his dining table, one hand busy with his tablet. “That’s not something you’ve been called, naturally.”

“I’ve been called a ‘gentleman’ many times before.”

“Then you get slapped five minutes after.” Chuuya knows the entire routine – well, it’s been years since he’s witnessed it first-hand, the opening dance of Dazai being so respectful and princely, derailed after five minutes into double suicide invitations. “And get dumped right after.”

“I’m not arguing that,” Dazai speaks around his noodles, Chuuya wrinkling his nose at the action, even as he makes his way to the table after hanging up his coat. “But I’ve still been considered as a ‘gentleman’. ”
Chuuya rolls his eyes, dragging a seat out in front of Dazai. “Must be good to have such low standards.”

“You can definitely reach them,” Dazai’s eyes are laughing at him. “As short as you are.”

“Ha-fucking-ha.” Chuuya rolls his eyes and resolves to ignore Dazai for the next thirty minutes. “…where did you get these noodles from?”

“I was just walking around, trying out new stalls in Chinatown~”

“…Were you stalking me?”

“Chuuya, Chuuya, Chuuya~~~♪ I know you want to be taller, but getting a big head isn’t the way to go.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

Yokohama’s Chinatown and Motomachi are just a couple of minutes away from each other, after all. But… Chuuya squints at Dazai, who innocently (but very obnoxiously, loudly) eats his dinner. There’s no real point in stalking him around town, not when Dazai’s the one who lined Lucy up to have a date with him to begin with, especially not when Dazai makes himself a regular pest in his apartment at the end of the day, every single day, anyway.

“…They’re good noodles, right?”

It’s the right mix of crispy and spicy. Chuuya always hates moments when Dazai is right, but. “…Buy more from this stall next time.”

There’s a slight faltering in the obnoxious sounds from Dazai’s very noisy eating—but only for a moment. When Chuuya lifts his eyes to regard Dazai again, there’s a quiet sort of smile on the other’s face.

It's annoying, so he kicks Dazai under the table for it.

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“Now I feel like a dirty old man.”

Chuuya’s smiling though as he gazes upon Kyouka—all dolled up in resplendent salmon pink kimono, bright colors fitting her much better now that she’s also happier. She still has a cellphone around her neck, but it has a cutesy casing and an equally cutesy ringtone, no dead bodies turning up whenever another voice comes through the line anymore. Her hair’s much shorter than the last time they met each other; it’s not the first time he’s seen her new bob though, because Ane-san had knocked back two bottles by herself as she showed him stealthily-taken pictures, as she sobbed into his desk about Kyouka growing up into such a beautiful lady.

“Buy me crepes and I won’t report you to the police.”

She’s also developed a sharper tongue—quite possibly due to Akutagawa’s influence, given that he’s hanging around Atsushi more, and Kyouka’s not willing to give up her ‘territory’ that easily.

It’s almost adorable to see, Kyouka adopting Akutagawa’s mannerisms now that she’s not under
his thumb. Chuuya wonders if it’s worth it to let Kyouka know that it’s not like Atsushi’s masochistic enough to have fallen for Akutagawa because of his sharp words. (Or maybe that was the main part of the attraction? He’s not entirely sure, given that any Akutagawa-related discussion devolves Atsushi to either a blushing, stuttering mess… or ignites him to a hundred-word-per-minute rapid-fire soliloquy about the virtues and charms of Akutagawa.)

“Would you prefer the crepes sold on the foodtrucks or the ones from Starlight Café?”

“I want the one that has a bigger serving.” Kyouka seems to think of it again, probably remembering Ane-san’s phone call from earlier this morning. “And the one that’s more expensive.”

Chuuya chuckles, then offers his elbow for Kyouka to slip her hand to, her gracefulness in handling her past assassinations showing up now in a different form and enchanting the passersby they meet as they make their way to the popular restaurant. Starlight Café has a casual and romantic atmosphere and while Kyouka being too young for him is just one of the many issues about the possibility of them becoming a more serious couple—there’s no harm in ensuring that she has a lovely experience in one of the most recommended date spots in Yokohama.

He’s pretty sure that Ane-san will skin him alive (and let the stupid Dazai do the commentary) if he so much as makes one wrong move, so he makes sure that he has a mild smile on his face the entire time, keeping his touches light and unobtrusive all throughout.

They discuss cats, crepes, cooking light meals.

“Would you like a kitten too?”

“No, Atsushi lets me play with his.”

Ah. Chuuya doesn’t wish to remove that connection then.

“I can teach you how to cook, if you’d like.”

“…Lucy’s offered me too.”

Ah—Chuuya definitely doesn’t wish to stop that connection from forming.

“How’s the crepe?”

“Order three more.”

“Your wish is my command.”

Once they’ve ordered practically every dessert available in the café, Chuuya asks Kyouka if she would like to take a stroll in the Sankeien Garden, yet another popular spot for couples and tourists. He’s not gunning for romantic strolls though – he’s hoping to buy some of the Memorial Hall’s limited-edition fabrics for her, given that she’s expanding her wardrobe.

“Will we eat after?”

Chuuya thinks of the tea ceremony room, as well as the shops in the area. “We can have dinner after, so we can take our time in the garden.”

“But you have dinner with Dazai-san, right?”

“E-Eh, not really?”
Kyouka’s eyes are wide – it almost feels like he’s lying to his kid about the state of his marriage and it’s just so wrong.

He decides to amend his statement: “It’s… not really set? I mean, if he’s there… but we don’t really make plans? Though he’s always there, especially recently, and he’s definitely using my card to buy groceries and stuff. But I don’t have to have dinner with that bast—um, that person? I have dinner with lots of other people, too! So, what I mean to say is, I’d rather have dinner with you than that… person.”

Kyouka’s eyes are still wide, but then priorities. “We can buy more crepes later?”

Chuuya laughs, indulgent and fond and so proud of her. The Kyouka he’s glimpsed from before pales in comparison to the Kyouka he has in front of him right now. She’s moved on and she’s enjoying a world without her Ability that she’s always hated and she’s so normal now. He’s so, so proud of her.

“Definitely, Kyouka-chan. We’ll buy all the crepes in Yokohama!”

Hours later, with hands full of bags with twenty different fabrics inside, with bellies filled with crepes, tea and more crepes: “Thank you for spending time with me today, Chuuya-san.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” he returns easily, quickly, adjusting his hold on the shopping bags so he can offer a gentle touch on Kyouka’s elbow.

She’s so normal now, but he still hears the slightest twinge of loneliness in her voice, like she’s not sure if she deserves to have someone spend time and money on her, if she has the right to be happy being doted upon.

“Ladies need to go an experience beautiful things so they’ll become even more beautiful.”

He’s not quite sure if that’s true – because does it mean that if people experience ugly things, they’ll become even uglier? But it doesn’t really matter to Kyouka, especially to the Kyouka in front of him right now.

“I enjoyed spending time with you. Thank you for allowing me to do so.”

“…you sound so different.”

“Really?” He’s not faking the sentiment, but if it sounds like that— “I’m sorry if—”

“It’s good.” Kyouka nods to herself. “You sound so different when you’re screaming at Dazai-san.”

“I—I don’t, well, I do scream at him because he deserves it, but—Kyouka-chan—”

“You’re… just like Atsushi-kun. He’s different. When he’s.”

“Love makes him do weird things, huh?” Chuuya tries to break it as gently as he can. While he isn’t sure if what Kyouka feels is romantic love (Ane-san laments that it is, but Chuuya thinks that idolatry and friendship can be as intense as that, sometimes) towards Atsushi-kun, it’s probably still painful if she’s feeling left behind.

“Mm,” Kyouka hums instead, still looking forward.

He has a fleeting thought that he needs to prepare his last will if Kyouka-chan ends up crying.
“You’re a strong girl, Kyouka-chan.”

“Mm.”

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“How was Kyouka-chan?”

The voice is a bit faint.

Dazai isn’t in the living room when Chuuya arrives, but the lights are bright inside his apartment. There’s a smell of curry in the air—upon further inspection, there’s a boiling pot in the kitchen.

Curry is way too advanced for Dazai’s cooking skills though, so he’s most likely just reheating something, Chuuya doesn’t even have to check his trashbin to confirm that there’d be some takeout packets there.

Eventually, Chuuya finds Dazai in his bathroom—humming as he’s washing his hands. The smell of curry isn’t as strong here, instead overpowered by the scent of Dazai’s soap.

Chuuya stands by the doorway, eyes unseeing even as he’s staring in the direction of the beauty products lined up in two shelves. Belatedly, he realizes that he’s never had the problem of accidentally using Dazai’s strange bubblegum toothpaste or cinnamon shampoo – probably thanks to the organized shelving.

Dazai… has a lot of beauty products here. Not as much as Chuuya’s – Dazai resists in acknowledging the merits of conditioner – but it’s still a lot.

“…since when did you have that soap?”

“Just yesterday,” Dazai replies slowly, drying his hands in the process. “They’ve got some new flavors in.”

Huh.

“Want to smell it?”

Dazai doesn’t give him a chance to answer, waving his right hand over Chuuya’s nose, before moving to pinch his left cheek.

“Apple?”

“To match the apple curry for dinner.”

“It’s late.” And Chuuya’s still rather full.

“Well, I’m eating it regardless of the time.”

“Kyouka-chan’s fine.” Chuuya remembers the original question when he arrived. “She looks… happy. Despite the…” He makes some vague hand gestures.

Dazai’s hand stays on his cheek for a few more moments, before sliding down to his neck ever-so-
slowly. Chuuya’s cheek throbs, not in pain per se, but…

“You probably bought her at least twenty crepes.”

Chuuya laughs in agreement, the hand near his throat too warm. “…Am I becoming the support group for heartbroken people?”

“I thought you said she was happy?”

“She could be happy and heartbroken at the same time.”

“I don’t think that’s how it works.”

“Quite fortunately,” Chuuya mimics Dazai’s words from before, “human beings are able to feel more than one emotions at once. Isn’t that the point behind humans being social creatures?”

Dazai blinks at him, like he’s trying to absorb him and his words. It feels like an eternity, confusing and comfortable at once. He doesn’t think to take a step back, even as the grip near his neck tightens minutely.

“…Pffft—Chuuya, you’re such a stupid idiot.”

“H-H-Hey!”

☆☆☆☆

“…I was kidding when I mentioned the support group.”

“Oh come on, Chuuya-san, don’t be like that!”

Chuuya smiles as he raises both of his hands in placation, the lines of his suit remaining impeccable despite the fact that Higuchi’s not-so-playfully hitting him with her purse.

“Let me start over then,” Chuuya says as he takes a step back and kneels down in front of her, furnishing the corsage as one would offer an engagement ring. “Higuchi, would you accompany me to the photography exhibition this evening?”

“That’s so beautiful, Chuuya-san!” Higuchi quickly tugs at his wrists so he can pin the corsage on her, the glitters on her cocktail dress catching the setting sun’s light. Some of the passersby are taking pictures of them – Higuchi’s sister being one of them – and he smiles for the cameras, infectious enthusiasm spilling between them.

He’s driving them to the Yokohama Museum of Art, where one of the rising stars of the photography world is holding her third exhibit. The theme is all about the future, which is apt as the exhibition is being held in Minato Mirai.

“Do you think it’ll be awkward?”

“About us, Chuuya-san?”

Chuuya hums as they wait in the slight traffic of cars going towards the museum. “It’s just that… Tachihara asked me earlier if I don’t think it’s awkward to date a work colleague.”
Higuchi makes choking sounds that has Chuuya concerned, but she waves him off. “…A-And your reply was…?”

“I don’t think it should be awkward. Dating and work are different things, after all.”

“I’m sure that made him happy.”

“You think? I’m glad then.”

Higuchi’s choking sounds happen again; his concern gets waved off again.

Eventually, they manage to make it to the exhibition, other well-known photographers milling about, along with some of the wealthier patrons in Yokohama.

“Is that—”

“She is,” Chuuya confirms, but he locks their arms together so that Higuchi will not give in to her urge to squeal and run towards one of the celebrities and beg for an autograph.

“Ooh, is that—”

Chuuya glances at the direction Higuchi is practically vibrating towards, before confirming that yes, that’s one of the infamous haute couture models residing in Yokohama.

“Wow, you’re really loaded, Chuuya-san!” Unlike some of his earlier dates and the gossip that he’s heard, there’s no gold-digging motive in Higuchi’s excitement. “I feel so lucky you took me tonight!”

He doesn’t comment on his wealth – only a couple of people know him from before, orphaned and abandoned and clothed in tattered rags and covered in filth. Only Dazai has seen him struggle with understanding the stock market and investments, self-help books and printed web content all scattered around him as soon as mission reports are completed. Only Dazai knows of the untraceable wire transfer to his account two days after his car went ablaze courtesy of the bastard’s idea of a splashy farewell.

So he only smiles graciously and steers them towards the next photograph, a picture of an exposed motherboard atop a scattered tableau of metal chips and wires. “You’re welcome. Thank you for agreeing to come with me too.”

“Nakahara-san, it’s great to see you!” One of the event organizers whirls towards the two of them, a flute of champagne in her hand. “Our great appreciation as always for your support!”

“Michiko-san, thank you for having me, always glad to be here.” Chuuya recites the well-worn words, but manages to inject it with enough pomp that it seems sincerely theatrical. “I’m just doing my part to help support growth of our culture and talent.”

Michiko-san then turns to Higuchi, eyes gleaming in interest at finding yet another one of Chuuya’s dates. “Nakahara-san is always such a pleasure to be with, isn’t he?”

“He is!”

“Though – is your previous companion not with you?”

Higuchi blinks, both at being ignored and at the question. To her knowledge – and the Port Mafia grapevine is nothing but not resilient, especially in peacetime when nobody has to do anything too
deadly and time-consuming – the last date that Chuuya had was with Kyouka and she’s hardly the type to be included in exhibits. (Also, Ane-san would definitely have divulged any and all details about Kyouka’s date, because she was so very proud and oh-so-very heartbroken about Kyouka’s maturity.)

Chuuya stiffens and grimaces slightly. “That—he’s…busy with some things.”

“I believe he said that he was simply working on bettering his housekeeping skills, the last time we spoke.”

Higuchi places a hand over her mouth as she realizes who Michiko-san is talking about.

“He’s fairly…occupied. I’m sure he regrets not being able to come tonight to see yet another wonderful exhibit you’ve helped put up, Michiko-san.”

A bit more small talk, mostly interspersed with Michiko-san needling Chuuya about Dazai’s whereabouts. Thankfully, another patron catches the event organizer’s eye and she leaves them with a flurry of promises to speak more next time.

“…She was…intense.”

“She’s convinced Dazai is the best thing since…wine?” Chuuya’s face twists as he considers that. What kind of insanity would one have to have in order to think of such a wrong thing, he’d never want to know.

Higuchi shoots him a strange look. “You disagree?”

“She’s got the worst taste in people.”

Chuuya remembers the last photography exhibition he had attended, Dazai beside him in a tux despite Chuuya making it clear that he’s NOT invited. Michiko-san had been so delighted to titter and whisper with Dazai about the flower arrangement and the lighting and the material of his suit and this and that.

“She has a crush on Dazai-san?”

“Unfortunately.” Chuuya still remembers how Michiko-san had staggered close to Dazai then, holding on to his arm as they spoke. She hadn’t been subtle at all about her interest, undeterred even when Dazai made references to guns, even when Chuuya flat-out told her that Dazai was a pest.

“Aw, no need to worry, Chuuya-san!” Higuchi coos at him, something that she’s definitely going to regret tomorrow once he submits the final version of their rotation schedule for the next month. She’ll keep her hours and rest days, but she won’t be working in tandem with Akutagawa anymore—well, not the male Akutagawa at least.

“I’m not worried, she’s a big girl.”

“I mean, Dazai-san definitely wouldn’t go for her!”

Chuuya snorts, as he brings them to the next photograph: a picture of a person with very realistic make-up of having a half-android face. “I should hope not, she’s too old for his strike zone.”

“Dazai-san is…twenty-four now?”
“Twenty-five,” absentmindedly, he corrects Higuchi as they make their way to the final photo of the exhibition, a view from the top (from a helicopter?) of the Minato Mirai area.

“Mm, so he’s the same age as you!”

Similarities between them always irk him, so Chuuya only lets out a disgruntled grunt.

“So I guess he only goes for someone near his age.”

“…Maybe?” He’s not paying particularly attention to the people Dazai has lured before – the guy’s standards are set pretty low, just as long as they’re pretty and will agree to a double suicide.

Higuchi mutters some more things, something about ‘being the only serious one’, along with others that are too soft for him to understand. He keeps them together, as they smile and pose for the cameras when the event organizers ask for a shot near the final piece.

It’s not until Chuuya’s dropping Higuchi off at her place that they speak again. He walks her to the door and for one terrible moment, he thinks that she’s about to stab him, as she moves in two quick steps, leaning in close enough that she can whisper to his ear.

Automatically, his hands go to her shoulders, holding her back. “What are you doing, Higuchi?”

Higuchi blinks at him, confusion on her face. “Um, after spending an evening together, a kiss is a nice ending to it?”

“You wanted to kiss me?”

“J-Just your cheek!” Higuchi flails a bit so Chuuya lets her shoulders go. “Just your cheek, as thanks, because it seemed polite, I swear—”

So spending an evening together warrants a kiss? He can’t quite remember reading that from his books or seeing that—wait. Huh. A number of movies that he’s seen has the leads kissing (or attempting to, at least) at the end of spending time together.

But in that case—

“But not always, right?” Chuuya frowns as he tries to make a quick mental checklist. “Dazai doesn’t try to kiss me after we spend time together.”

Higuchi’s gaping at him, so Chuuya adds: “…thank god for that.”

Higuchi’s still standing shell-shocked, so Chuuya sighs and knocks on her apartment door so her sister can let her in after some pleasant greetings. She doesn’t even react when he reaches out and drops a feather-light kiss on her hands as he thanks her for the evening.

☆☆☆

“Oh, you’re awake.”

Chuuya yawns as he rubs the crust out of his eyes, curtains drawn but bedside lamp bright inside his room. Dazai’s standing near the foot of the bed, rubbing a towel over his hair, making it stick out in all directions.
He looks utterly ridiculous.

“You look ridiculous.”

Dazai’s eyebrow is pointedly raised at him. “So says the one whose hair is tangled everywhere.”

“Did we… I don’t remember going to bed.”

“You ended up snoring halfway through the movie.” Dazai’s lips are twitching though, even as he tries for a mock-serious look as he relates what happened last night after he arrived from sending Higuchi off. “And being the gallant and gentlemanly gentleman that I am, I carried you to bed.”

Chuuuya winces as he feels a faint crick on his arms and legs. “Why do I feel as though I got dragged against the floor?”

“Ignorance is bliss, Chuuya.”

“I fucking hate you.”

(“I hate you too, Chuuya〜〜♪” – he can hear those words whispered into him, but the voice is sounding fainter and fainter as time goes by.)

Dazai only hums at him, sitting down on the bed beside Chuuya despite being slightly damp from his shower, protests and complaints about getting the bed wet soundly ignored.

Something strange whirs inside him – snippets of thoughts about ‘spending time together’ and ‘kissing on the cheek’ and Dazai’s really insufferable and he has this gnawing, knowing, feeling at his stomach that Dazai will end up flabbergasted if he goes through with this.

Though come to think of it, how is it any different from bestowing kisses upon the hands of his dates? It’s not too different, really. It’s all just part of things that people do.

So Chuuya leans sideways, his left hand resting on Dazai’s knee to balance himself, and presses a kiss to the apple of Dazai’s cheek, practically tasting the apples ripened on Dazai’s skin.

Dazai goes stock-still, pale and rigid and it’s almost like he’s gone as still as a corpse. Chuuya grins at him, victorious about his guess regarding the other’s reaction. Instead of crowing in victory though, he just says simply: “Thanks.”

And he flounces off towards his bathroom, humming all the way.

☆ ☆ ☆

“CHUUUYA-SAN!!!”

“What.”

“DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?!”

“I don’t think so?” Chuuya squints at Higuchi – she’s way too panicked. He hasn’t released the new rotation schedules so he’s not quite sure what’s going on. “Did something happen?”
His phone buzzes against his thigh as she wails and flails and makes a racket in his office. “WHY
DID DAZAI-SAN SEND ME A GIFT PACKAGE I’M TOO SCARED TO OPEN IT WHAT IF
IT’S A BOMB I’M TOO YOUNG TO DIE.”

Chuuuya rolls his eyes about the dramatics. “You work for the Port Mafia, death is part of our job.”

“I GOT A GIFT PACKAGE FROM DAZAI-SAN. FROM THAT DAZAI-SAN.”

“Is it expensive?”

“I DID NOT OPEN IT.”

“Let me know if it’s expensive – that fucker should pay me back for dinner the other night if he
has money to buy other shit.” Chuuya can see that it’s not helping Higuchi calm down. “…Not that
I’m saying gifts to you are shit, Higuchi.”

“WHY IS HE BEING NICE TO ME?!” Higuchi wails louder. He needs to calm her down, or else
her voice will summon Gin, which will then prompt Akutagawa to check in, and then— “WHAT
ABOUT THE OTHER PEOPLE YOU DATED, WHY DON’T THEY GET THIS PASSIVE-
AGGRESSIVE DEATH THREATS?!”

“It’s a gift. Probably a bomb so it’s not really a threat. Did you hide the gift from Motojirou? He’d
want to blow it up—do it away from the headquarters, okay?”

“CHUUYA-SAN, THIS IS NOT OKAY, DON’T SOUND SO BLASÉ ABOUT THIS.”

“Just open it somewhere safe, be ready to run like hell away, there’s no need to worry.”

“NO NEED TO WORRY—?!”

Ah, he can already hear the rest of the Black Lizard Squad approaching his office. He takes out his
phone – it’s been buzzing nonstop like a particularly irritating bee for the past few minutes – and
promptly deletes a nearly-Higuchi-hysterical text message from M A C K E R E L.

[ Chuuya, is this yet another one of your French fever shenanigans?! ]

Given that the rest of the twenty unread messages are from Dazai, he deletes them all and places
his phone on silent.

It’s bound to be a long day.

(Strangely enough, he feels like he’s smiling all throughout the day.)

Chapter End Notes

• i promise gin/yosano/naomi will be the dates next chapter!!! they were gonna be
  here, but it was already 4k+, it's too long lol

  some ramblings!!!

• I mentioned this on some of my replies, but Chuuya being dense… well, it’s one part
  because I want Dazai to suffer and pine LOL but mostly because… Chuuya’s lived his
life being part of the mafia. He’s always had his Ability. Taking away those things – a peaceful world that doesn’t really NEED the mafia, a world where he’s not feared because of his Ability – he’s gonna be a bit lost. I HC him as someone who’s never had a “normal” life and he’s never had to think about what it means to be really happy. Everything that’s not related to fighting, he has to actually learn. His idea about normality/happiness comes from books/TV/pop culture/other people. He… doesn’t realize, (yet), that being “normal” and being happy… he doesn’t have to follow what everyone else does. He doesn’t realize (yet) that having Dazai with him is what’s normal, is what makes him happy.

• in addition to above, I’ve been building up Chuuya’s home (and Dazai’s invasion of it LOL) as part of Chuuya’s development. I made sure to not have Chuuya reference his apartment as “home”, because Chuuya doesn’t feel like it’s home yet. I’m alternating the domestic scenes between different rooms, because Dazai’s invading everything and Chuuya’s slowly-but-SURELY noticing it 8D once he acknowledges that his apartment has become a home because of Dazai’s presence… wELL. I hope you’re all looking forward to that.

• lastly!!! Isn’t it wonderful that Chuuya has like, 4 different modes? There’s the drunk!Chuuya, the everyday-life!Chuuya (polite, prim-and-proper, good senpai), the fighting!Chuuya… and the Dazai!Chuuya. His interaction w/Dazai is so different than his interactions with everyone else, it’s amazing to see.

:D :D :D
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

- akutagawa hijacks chuuya's date with his sister
- dazai and chuuya talk about Feelings™ and dazai's Most Important™

Chapter Notes

- thank you as always for reading! ♥
- i cannot believe how fast i'm writing for this. i also cannot believe how i can write so much for this, this was meant to be under 10k and i'm just at the halfway mark for these two idiots why did this become such a longfic *sobs forever*
- i know, i know, i promised The Ladies part 2, but the atmosphere of this installment is different from the fun dates!!!, so i figured i should just separate them??? that way dazai's "confession" (poor guy) can be the chapter's ending lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ ☆ ☆

“How do you feel about dating Gin-chan?”

Chuuya quirks an eyebrow at the question, pausing in his folding of his just-dried clothes. It’s a cool Sunday afternoon, lunch heavy in his stomach as the entire apartment smells of an odd mix of detergent and chocolate-curry-cooked-by-Chuuya. Most of his Sundays start late, especially if he has a date that goes well into the evening of the day before, so Chuuya rarely manages to finishes all of his chores in the day.

Rarely—at least, before Dazai barged in, uninvited, to his apartment and started spending more time here, helping out with the chores almost as enthusiastically as he bought more and more things that filled his living space.

Almost as an extension of their partnership that managed to function without much words exchanged between them (not just because Chuuya felt like he was about to go bald from the stress born out of dealing with the bandage bastard) – they’re able to split the chores between them without actual discussion.

Chuuya handles the ironing (because Dazai and something hot and dangerous… just no), the folding of clothes and storing them in the closet (because Dazai’s the type to not have any sort of order with his clothes, storing his socks beside his handkerchiefs, or folding his shirts in-between
his pants), as well as anything that required a lot of physical exertion (because Dazai’s flimsy arms are… pfft).

Dazai takes care of the laundry and the dishwashing and cleaning of the toilet and presumably everything else.

It should make Chuuya guilty, but given that Dazai eats junk food while on the couch as he channel-surfs… cleaning up his messes should be his own job.

So, just like the past Sundays (to be honest, Chuuya can’t remember when exactly it had started), he folds the clothes while Dazai… does something, flitting around the house.

Unlike past Sundays that don’t pose questions to Chuuya that he’s not prepared for, however…

“…so? Do you approve of Gin-chan?” Dazai approaches him, tips of his sleeves wet from his chores. He’s wearing a plain white shirt and plain white boxers and it’s so… not Dazai that Chuuya averts his eyes from the sight, mind screaming at him as to how it doesn’t compute. “Did you hear me or have you become deaf, baldie?”

“I’m not bald!” Chuuya doesn’t even understand how baldness relates to deafness, really. “And I’m not deaf either.”

“So, your answer?”

“…I’m surprised you’re asking me.”

“Mm, I figured I should check in if you’ve already decided on the love of your life, after all.”

There’s a tiny pause, smoothed over by Chuuya’s fingers folding over fabrics. “Are you still going on about those pictures?”

Dazai pauses for a moment as well, eyes boring at him. “The entertainment section of the local newspaper is still going on about the pictures.”

“Can’t help themselves, I suppose.” Chuuya rolls his eyes when Dazai exaggerates grossed-out faces at him, but doesn’t resist the unvoiced offer to help him place the clothes to their proper places. “I looked dashing there. And so does Higuchi.”

“Pffft, I caught how she was an afterthought, you narcissist.”

“Shut the hell up.”

“So you’re good with Gin-chan?”

“I don’t foresee Akutagawa being okay with this.”

“I am doubtful that you know how to answer questions.” He ignores Dazai’s pouting. “I’m so, so disappointed, Chuuya~~~♫”

“Why would you even think that I have an issue with her?”

“…You are pretty laidback when it comes to your dating criteria.”

Chuuya sighs as he doesn’t protest Dazai linking their arms together – it’s too tiring to resist and it’s not like it actually hurts. “I can’t find what I want if I don’t try as much as I can.”
“Some would argue that narrowing the sample size would be better.”

“What would be my criteria for selection?” Chuuya allows Dazai to tug the two of them towards the couch. “I don’t even know what exactly—”

Dazai’s tone is light and teasing, with just the right touch of nostalgia. That’s how Chuuya knows that he’s serious. “You’ve always been accepting of a lot of things.”

“If I can stand dealing with a gloomy, clumsy guy who kept on using English with me despite my protests about hating the language…”

“Just for that comment, I’m gonna kick your ass in Resident Evil.”

Chuuya nearly sighs in relief at Dazai swerving their conversation away from their past; instead, he pastes a cocky grin on his face as he wriggles his (always gloved) fingers against the console. “No matter the result, I’ll kick your ass for real too.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“…why are you here?”

“I’m… here for your date.”

Chuuya doesn’t understand.

“…but you’re already dating Atsushi-kun.”

Akutagawa’s face proves that it’s possible to look like an unhealthy cross of lovesickness, disgust, so-done-with-the-world, constipation and murderous intent. It’s almost fascinating to watch, if only it isn’t concerning how it looks like he’s about to choke on the spot. Chuuya prompts the man in front of him, “Are you alright?”

“I… care about my sister.” Akutagawa takes a visible steadying breath, the words foreign on his tongue. Chuuya knows – living in the Port Mafia, in Yokohama while she’s filled with criminals and criminal Ability-users alike, isn’t the best environment to admit about having any traceable weakness. “I will not put her in Dazai-san’s way.”

“It’s Dazai who brokered this date though.”

“Dazai-san is utterly ridiculous when it comes to you.”

“He is ridiculous,” Chuuya agrees as he recalls their breakfast earlier with purple-colored eggs from Dazai’s experiments with yam. “All the time.”

“No, not that kind of ridiculous you’re thinking of,” Akutagawa corrects him with a shake of his head.

Chuuya raises an eyebrow at that, sipping at his tea. With Gin not here – probably not for the foreseeable future, given her brother’s overprotectiveness – it’s best to start drinking the drink he ordered before going to his table. “Developed mind-reading?”

Akutagawa bristles at that, probably remembering the argument he had with Atsushi two days ago
(something that Chuuya’s aware of from different sources: (1) from Dazai’s embellished, exaggerated retelling of the entire conversation even if he wasn’t supposed to be anywhere near the two during the time; (2) from Atsushi’s odd mix of tears and anger as he asked Chuuya out for a quick coffee so he could vent out; (3) from Higuchi’s half-excited and half-distressed rambling as to whether this means she has a chance to be noticed by her senpai; (4) from Akutagawa’s mouth himself as he had ambushed Chuuya inside his office to dispassionately recite what had happened).

Long story short—the argument is because of some assumptions, failures in communication and lack of fluffy hugs. Atsushi has apparently yelled something about Akutagawa being the worst at mind-reading during the process.

A few seconds of bristling – just like an angry cat, Chuuya muses – but Akutagawa manages to recover. “You were smiling fondly as you were saying the word.”

“I was not.” Chuuya can feel his lips stretch a bit, so he schools them to a sterner line. “There was zero fondness whatsoever – have you seen that guy’s sorry omelets? I’d probably die within the next hour from food poisoning.”

“I haven’t seen any of Dazai-san’s cooking.” Akutagawa says that slowly, like he’s speaking to a particularly stupid child. It’s such a Dazai thing, tugging at Chuuya’s ribs for some well-experienced annoyance and familiarity and irritation. “He makes it a point to not do any sort of chores.”

“But he’s—”

Huh.

Before, when they were roomed side-by-side as they were partners, Dazai had made it a point to whine and groan and throw a tantrum whenever he had to do anything that’s not what he wanted (and it was usually just a shuffle between being a creepy asshole, torturing others, acting like a general sadist, playing game after game like a spoiled child, destroying each and every strand of Chuuya’s patience). Chores did not factor in, at all.

(Space and time for chores didn’t factor in, at all, for everything was following orders, executing people, spreading destruction.)

…Huh.

“—Chuuya-san?”

“Sorry, I spaced out.”

“I could tell - you had your ‘Dazai-san look’.”

Chuuya’s lips twitch as he says: “My face automatically feels my disgust of that man.”

“You are also ridiculous when it comes to him.”

“Akutagawa, you’re a good kid and all, but that is so wrong.”

☆ ☆ ☆
“Dazai! Why are you doing my chores?!”

The slow blinking that answers him is almost painfully loud. Dazai is sprawled over his couch, a bowl of popcorn on his stomach held in place by his left hand curled over it, his right hand hanging off the couch and touching the carpeted floor. Both of the man’s legs are stretched out, nearly hanging off the couch’s arm. The television’s bright display is colorful, almost as vivid as the pinkish-red afternoon sunlight streaming into his apartment.

“…I’m not?”

Dazai’s watching an afternoon drama – doesn’t look like Higuchi’s favorite overdramatic dubbed Spanish ones, but it does look romantic and sappy to make him want to gag. He looks so… comfortable, his bare feet almost heart-stopping in their presence, even if he’s been seeing Dazai in shirts and boxers as he pads around in house slippers a lot of times recently. He looks like he’s passing time while he’s waiting, but the only thing he can be waiting for at this moment is Chuuya coming back. Or maybe the primetime news.

He’s not doing something so uncharacteristic from the mafia partner he knows, such as doing chores, but it’s still so jarring. No, this is also out-of-character for his ex-partner – comfortable laziness did not have any room in their lives before.

This… almost-soft Dazai is—

“I mean. Why do you do my laundry?!”

“Don’t sound so scandalized, I didn’t ruin any of your clothes.”

“That’s not the point!”

“Why are you complaining about me taking your hands off your chores?”

“I’m not complaining,” he insists with a tone that’s only fifty-percent petulant now. “I’m asking why.”

Dazai tilts his head at him, brown air fanning behind him with the motion, dark ink against the white pillowcases of the throw cushions. Chuuya has the distinct feeling that he’s being dissected where he stands, gloves on his hands unable to ward off the chill from the stare.

“I don’t do anything I don’t want to do, Chuuya.”

Chuuya opens his mouth, knowing that he’s about to say something bad again, about to quip about staying in the Port Mafia despite his misgivings, about to retort something about continuing to live despite clamoring for death—

But Dazai’s always been one step ahead of everyone, including him. So he adds, a quiet smile on his face: “…Not anymore.”

“…so you want to do my laundry?”

“I am doubtful you know how to understand words, Chuuya. So disappointing~~~♫”

Chuuya rolls his eyes as he sits atop Dazai’s legs, feeling the strain on the other’s limbs. He doesn’t relent, going so far as to lean back on his couch to make himself comfortable, even if there are two wiry legs under his ass.
“I just wanted to confirm your intentions in continuing to handle my laundry.”

“Pfft, you and your love affair with your clothes.”

“It’s—it’s not a love affair!”

“I know.”

Chuuya squints down at Dazai, unsurprised to find the man staring back at him, the drama going by unwatched. “You… you said that weirdly.”

“Can you define what’s weird about it?”

“It’s just. Not normal.” Chuuya thinks about it a little more, but can’t grasp it, the moment slipping by his fingers. “Your tone. Something about it.”

“So you know me enough to know what’s normal.”

“I’ve known you for more than ten years, jackass.”

“Technically, I’ve known Mori-san longer, but I assure you he wouldn’t be able to call that weird.”

“Are you sure? Mori-san’s fairly good at reading you.”

“Mm, but that’s regarding plans, fights, games.” Dazai looks like he’s re-imagining every single one of Mori-san’s faults. “He’s shit when it comes to emotions, personal things. It’s why Fukuzawa-san is so confused.”

“Why are we discussing those two?”

“Seems apt to discuss slow-acting couples.”

“Those two knew each other for a long time, right?” Chuuya tries to remember Ane-san telling him about Mori-san’s past as a doctor. “We’re doing much better than them.”

Dazai’s legs jerk violently under him and Chuuya almost yelps as he crashes sideways, his seat shaken up. He lands against Dazai’s chest – a pained oof escaping him, as his forehead is clipped by the other’s chin.

After a few moments, the heartbeat underneath him thunderously loud in its drumbeats, Dazai manages to mumble: “…you’re heavy, Chuuya.”

“I am not,” he whispers against the thin cotton shirt, his head whirring and whirling with so many different thoughts.

“Though I will not deny that we’re doing better than them. Kittens love you and everyone else loves me.”

“You, bandage bastard, are sorely mistaken about that.”

“Everyone else aside from you, huh?”

It’s not true, but Chuuya finds his lips burnt by the contact against Dazai’s very flimsy shirt, it almost feels like he’s whispering against the other’s heart, the way they’re positioned like this.

And when he lifts his head, tilts his chin slightly, it almost looks like Dazai’s blushing, the
sunset’s colors painting his entire face a dark rose.

And when he backs down from the too-long stare between them, dropping his head back to Dazai’s chest, he realizes that Dazai’s pendant isn’t there anymore.

(He remembers mocking Dazai’s new, *disgusting*, fashion choices after the other has left the mafia, Dazai calmly returning his jabs about everything, except when he’s reached the part where he’s insulting the emerald-green pendant. He remembers Dazai saying that it’s to keep things most important close to his heart, the words almost-romantic and definitely not matching the freezing glare on his face.)

Even someone like Dazai has something important. It’s strange, to think that someone as accomplished, bastardly, cruel and deadly as the other can find time to think about important things. It’s all those multi-tasking skills, the other will claim teasingly.

“It’s gone.”

Dazai hums, sounding so serene that Chuuya almost doesn’t notice the weight at the back of his head, cradling him close. And Dazai must want to do so, because he claims to not do anything he doesn’t want. But even a *child* can want a lot of things, a lot of them nonsensical. So—

“I already have what’s most important close to my heart right now.”

And when he closes his eyes, he imagines Dazai finding his happiness.

Even someone like Dazai is capable of achieving something as normal as getting the thing he wants.

It’s hard for him to resent the man for finding it ahead of him – Dazai has always been one step ahead of everyone, especially him, after all.

He remembers reading the dossier on Oda, tracing the words that cannot fully bring to life the relationship strong enough to shake Yokohama’s foundations and future.

“Don’t be an idiot and let it go this time.”

Dazai chuckles, the hand at the back of his head moving ever-so-slightly, still-present, infinitely-warm.

“I promise you, I never will.”

Chapter End Notes

• trufact: dazai threw the popcorn bowl to the ground but neither of them noticed lol
• also, if you know me (and/or read some of my other stuff), you know that pendant's contents already lol
• chuuya sort-of-but-not-quite shipping oda/dazai is the type of delicious irony i live for *gets bricked*
• see you next water time, thanks as always for dropping by! ♥
“…you want anything?”

Chuuya doesn’t raise his head from his spot on the new ergonomic armchair in his living room, yet another purchase that he didn’t exactly authorize, but hey, the right balance of softness and firmness against his back is hard to find, so he’s willing to forgive this one. Also, it’s spacious enough that he can sit on it cross-legged quite comfortably. One of Dazai’s rare good purchases, surely.

“…World peace, a new coat, a good Camembert, a bottle of Egon Muller-Scharzhof Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese?”

“You just wanted to hear yourself nail that tongue-twister of a wine name,” Dazai accuses as he slides his arms through his coat, a grey peacoat that looks handsome on him. This year’s autumn is the coldest in recent memory and it’s just beginning. Chuuya doesn’t remember pausing in his reading, but he does look back down when Dazai’s lips twitch at him, catching him on his idle staring.

“I’m going out later anyway,” Chuuya says instead, a few hours away from his next appointment.

“Oh? A date?”

“Gin asked me to accompany her shopping.”
“I wonder if Akutagawa-kun knows about *that*.”

“If she manages to make it to our meeting place, probably not.” Chuuya looks at Dazai again, a bit thrown off by the sight of Dazai making preparations to leave his apartment. It’s been months and this is probably the first time he’s seen Dazai leave—of course, not counting anything prior to the Ability-removal operation. Dazai has left him behind so many times before this strange companionable rapport they’ve established, that it’s nonsensical for it to be so… strange, abnormal, to see him do so now.

It *should* be normal, Dazai leaving him behind.

It *should* be, but it somehow isn’t.

It *should* be.

“I’m just going to the grocer one block away,” Dazai ends up saying, both hands pressed against Chuuya’s folded knees, “then maybe shop around a bit. I’ll be back.”

Chuuya blinks, but the sight doesn’t change: of those hands, the unbandaged parts, pale and some veins visible, light against the dark material of his pants.

“…I’d rather you don’t.” He manages to say the words, but they come out strangled, his mouth dry.

The hands curl around both his kneecaps for a moment, squeezing them, before they slide off. Dazai’s voice sounds like he’s half-laughing: “I’m *hurt*, hatrack. I’d probably end up cancelling a certain order I made to a certain someone’s favorite hat-making company for a certain limited-edition hat design.”

“I can buy that hat for myself, asshole.”

“Mm, but the order window is already closed. Only ten orders for the design *forever~~~♫*”

Chuuya mentally weighs the pros and cons, but then again, HATS. “Fine, you can be back. I’ll be out with Gin later though.”

“That’s fine, I’m not *that* clingy, *slug*.”

“Fuck you and your stinky coat, *mackerel*.”

“You like my coat – I’ve seen you staring at it!”

“I do *not,*” aghast and annoyed at being caught, Chuuya swats at the other and shoves Dazai away from him.

“Liar, liar, pants on fire~~~♪”

“Just go, goddamnit.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“You look… tired, Chuuya-san.”
“I’m not,” he automatically responds, a smile easily sliding to his expression in an effort to make her more comfortable. “I’m happy to be in your company, Gin-chan.”

Gin’s foregone her usual spiky hairstyle, as well as her mouthguard, revealing the feminine face that she so sort-of shares with her brother—and no, this isn’t the time to think about Akutagawa with longer hair and a smile, because it’s probably going to show up as horror on his face and he can’t do that to Gin.

“You should have told me if you were busy, Chuuya-san.”

“I wasn’t.” Chuuya’s glad that he’s seated beside her – a bit forward compared to most of his first dates – since her voice hasn’t really evolved into something louder. “I told you – I’m happy to accompany you. Did you have an idea of what you want to buy?”

“I was hoping to buy something for my brother and his lover.” Gin’s long hair flutters in the breeze that passes; Chuuya can feel the stares of some of the patrons of the restaurant they’re in. He’s opted for a table outside despite the autumn chill, because the garden around the place is particularly beautiful, with its carpet of reds and browns, some odd flowers in yellow blooms. “And I wanted to spend some time with you, Chuuya-san.”

He can sense either a bet from some of the Black Lizard Squad members or Dazai pressuring her because that asshole is the type to stick to his plans even if they don’t really make sense – especially if it can cause Chuuya some problem one way or another. Though, it’s also equally possible that Gin just wants to go against her brother’s overprotective streak.

Either way: “I’m honored you’d want to spend your afternoon with me.”

Conversation flows in tranquil waves between them – the only spike being that time he offered his outer coat to her, thick wool perfect for the weather, something that he brought along for the express purpose of being offered to his date. He hears the sighing from their neighboring tables.

Once their late lunch is finished, they opt not to get dessert yet, not until they manage to complete their shopping itinerary.

As they leave, he holds out his arm for her, but he doesn’t quite hold her hand. He’s never really held hands with any of his dates so far, the thought of someone touching his hands, even through his gloves, for an extended period of time not really sitting well with him. He can still feel the whispers of power inside his veins, the increased pull causing streaks of reddish-black to form rivulets of taint all over his skin, forming the most on his fingers that manipulate gravity.

Gin doesn’t comment about his reluctance, slipping her arm inside the space he’s created, linking them close enough that nobody will second-guess that they’re companions, separating them far enough that everybody will second-guess if they’re actually lovers.

She didn’t strike him as someone who’s into things noted on magazines for teenage girls, but she’s dressed in a stylish dress, knee-high boots in the same design as what’s popular for this season, small purse fashionable enough to go with her outfit and big enough to contain a handgun, light dusting of make-up brightening up her face, simple pair of earrings and necklace on her.

Then again, being Akutagawa’s sister, even if it’s not particularly well-known to the lower ranks, carries enough of pressure on its own. Not to mention sharing the same past as him… – and he hates Dazai a little bit for sharing Akutagawa’s backstory with him, telling him the very night after the man took him into his wing. With or without Abilities in this world, liking cute and normal things are still seen as a weakness, after all.
“Brother could use a warmer coat,” Gin murmurs as they go inside the first apparel shop they find, just a few streets away from Motomachi. There’s bound to be more clothing shops there, but given the imported European brands that cluster on that shopping street, it might exceed Gin’s budget. While he doesn’t mind paying for it or lending her money, he doesn’t want to offer it too early, in case she also has the classic Akutagawa Allergy against anything that can be misconstrued as charity or pity.

“He could use an entirely new outfit.” He doesn’t see Akutagawa deviating from his fashion when he still has Rashomon as his sentient coat, but it’s been years. It’s definitely time to revamp his closet. “Maybe I should buy him clothes for Christmas too, even if he hates it.”

“Christmas isn’t until a few months.”

“Atsushi said that he’s already breaking Akutagawa on the idea as early as now.”

“…a wise idea.” Gin has a sparkle in her eye, excited at the idea of her brother actually agreeing to celebrating Christmas without having to pull teeth. “I should buy him two presents then.”

“I’ll buy Atsushi a gift too – as congratulations if he succeeds in his endeavor.”

Gin laughs, dainty and song-bird like. He’s reminded of her, small and trembling and shy, when she first entered the Port Mafia while hiding behind her brother’s leg. “He’ll succeed. Brother’s useless against him.”

“I don’t want to say useless…” He then remembers Atsushi texting him about Akutagawa’s adorableness as he trips over his futon (the actual mail was filled with more typos, emojis and exclamation marks, strung together with incoherent squeeing—but he got the main gist of the message even if he’s only actually read the first 140 characters). “…well, okay, he’s a little bit useless when it comes to Atsushi.”

“I didn’t think I’d get to see my brother even attempt to smile.”

“That Atsushi’s a real miracle worker, isn’t he?” Chuuya nudges her when she looks like she’s about to sob in happiness as she’s definitely remembering their unsavory childhood. “Your brother deserves to be happy. You too, Gin-chan.”

Gin laughs again, this time tinged with an almost-sob. “…you sound so old, sometimes, Chuuya-san.”

“Do I get to be your cool uncle?”

“I remember when I first saw you – you were wearing such flashy clothes.”

Chuuya tries to think back on their first meeting: Mori-san busy on meetings with top government officials so he isn’t present; Dazai a stony presence with arms crossed over his chest, coldly looking down his nose at his new acquisition to the guerilla squad. He was there… he literally ran from his prior mission (he was given more and more single missions since the days leading to Dazai’s promotion), he was wearing a *kimono* because it was an undercover mission, and since he ran right after the mission because of how important the meeting apparently was, he was covered in the blood of his enemies.

“I was confused at first – you were wearing *kimono* and your hair was loose and you looked so beautiful then. But then you started yelling at Dazai-san for taking in stray children into the mafia like some ‘fucked-up orphanage’. I didn’t know the term then, but you were being the ‘good cop’ to Dazai-san’s ‘bad cop routine’.”
Chuuya cringes slightly at that recollection, “I must have looked like some weirdo crashing that meeting.”

“Dazai-san was expecting you. He told us that if we were to be useful to him and his squad, we needed to know about his partner.”

Chuuya tugs at some of the shirts, all cotton, all in white or cream, because colors are just not Akutagawa’s thing. He moves towards the display for scarves, a few steps away from the shirt racks, where Gin’s testing the texture of some of the scarves there. Maybe a blood-red cashmere scarf will do wonders for the kid – one flashy color amidst all the black and white?

“I guess that bastard remembers that we’re partners on the most convenient timings.”

“The way he was talking…” Gin’s wistful tone turns sly. “…I thought that he was going to introduce to us to our new mother.”

Chuuya chokes on thin air.

“T-T-T-That’s—!” He remembers his outfit that day again – he must have looked like one of those mistresses that Dazai cycled through faster than underwear. Even while covered in blood. Gin’s smiling at him. “You’re teasing me, Gin-chan.”

“I’m really not.”

“Well, I guess it is true that I’m prettier than that bastard.” Chuuya considers her and makes a mental note to have them swing by one of the jewelry shops in the station area, so he can buy her a good souvenir too. Maybe a sunflower-inspired hairclip or a chandelier earring. “You’re prettier than both of us combined though. I’m glad you turned out to be beautiful despite having a stupid bandage bastard of a father.”

Gin laughs once again, calls him silly, and buys the clothes for her brother.

“Let’s grab dessert after going to Takashimaya?”

“Is that where we can find gifts for Atsushi-san?”

“The department store is safe because it has a lot of things. Atsushi enjoys any and all things, after all.”

“I was thinking of buying him things for his pet.”

“You can, but Ane-san is planning on sending him a gift check for one of the high-end pet shops already.”

Gin pauses, before considering: “Is it because brother’s in a good mood recently?”

“He apparently laughed happily enough and Mori-san heard him.” Chuuya smirks as he remembers Ane-san laughing evilly at that. “Mori-san was apparently spooked enough and Ane-san bet with him about that.”

“I don’t think I want to know the rest of the details.”

“Wise girl.”
It’s getting chillier now, but since his car is still being serviced and it’s not like he minds a little physical exertion, he’s walking back from his date with Gin – she managed to buy a backpack for Atsushi that he can use when he finally manages to convince Akutagawa that they’re not going to die if they spend a weekend sightseeing in Tokyo – when he sees him.

He’s caught off-guard – not a good sign for someone supposedly training to become the new Port Mafia Boss (supposedly, because Mori-san’s gallivanting with the Agency’s President 24/7 and he’s doing the same things as before so it’s not like anything’s changing?).

He’s caught so off-guard that the first thing that slips past his mouth is: “You said you weren’t clingy!”

Dazai has the nerve to laugh at him, a paper bag with the logo of the cheese store in this area on his left hand. He’s walking towards him, still in that handsome grey peacoat, even though it’s not buttoned all the way. He’s removing the coat as he approaches, a strange type of stripping in the middle of the road and he’s not ready to be arrested by the police for public indecency!

“Don’t look so panicked,” Dazai chides him as Chuuya eventually realizes what’s happening – Dazai removing his larger coat so he can place it over his shoulders. “I knew you’d give your coat to Gin-san like a gentleman.”

“Stop predicting me.” Chuuya knows that his request falls on deaf ears anyway. He doesn’t resist Dazai tugging his bags of purchases away from him: two shirts and one scarf for Akutagawa, a guide-to-Tokyo handbook and a matching scarf for Atsushi… and three new games for Dazai.

Dazai matches his pace in walking, their arms brushing as they make their way back to Chuuya’s apartment. He keeps his hands in his pockets. He’s still a bit full from the cheesecake and coffee, so he can take his time making dinner tonight.

“If only you’re not so predictable~~~♫”

“You walked around for hours and you only bought that?”

“Mm, if you must know…” Dazai lets out an exaggerated put-upon sigh. “I went back to your place, but the TV shows were boring, so I ended up going out again to amuse myself!”

“I got you some more games – please stop ruining my apartment with your boredom.”

“Why do you make it sound like I’m throwing popcorn all over your living room when I’m bored?”

“Because you did exactly that just a couple of days ago?!”

“That was one time, Chuuya, let it go.”

“Fuck you and the shit vacuuming job you did afterward.”

“I hired a cleaner after that!”

“Urgh. Don’t remind me, I hate people going to my apartment.”

“Which explains all of your pick-at-home dry cleaning.” Dazai adjusts the bags on his hand and
Chuuya has a feeling of what’s going to happen next seconds before it actually does. It doesn’t make it any less surprising to feel Dazai’s arm drape over his shoulders to keep the lent coat from slipping off of him though. “As well as your sign-on-delivery purchases.”

“I don’t like them going inside.”

Dazai’s hand doesn’t leave, keeping the coat in place even as they continue their trek amidst the scattered fallen leaves whirling about in the breeze. So Chuuya feels it stiffen, for a brief, dismissible moment.

“…I didn’t say I wasn’t clingy.” Dazai huffs a breath, deep and loud. Chuuya keeps his hands in his pockets. “I just said I wasn’t that clingy.”

“Pffft, semantics, you damn octopus.”

Dazai doesn’t reply and he doesn’t remove his arm, even as they ride the elevators up to his suite.

Chapter End Notes

- trufact: dazai really did go home early, but then thought about whether it's too needy to buy the Camembert cheese chuuya mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, but figured why the fuck not, he'll just go back out to buy it;;;;

- up next (tho given my pace, it's probs gonna be 1 date per chapter) (also given my general failure to predict myself, that can also be false):

  naomi ("i still haven't forgiven you for doing bondageplay with my nii-san"), yosano ("let's have a drinking contest!"), ranpo ("buy eVERYTHING FOR ME"), motojirou (FOR SCIENCE), tanizaki & poe (so they won't feel left out lol). & of course, the big 3: tachihara (senpai finally noticed me!) + ango (chuuya/traitors' otp) + fyodor (but he's in jail in this timeline, you say. don't worry, i gotchu fam)
intermission: your heart is my home

Chapter Summary

• intermission: dazai’s pov! :)
• as requested in the tumblr ask about dazai pov for this chuuya-harem fic lol
• this is set in the past, just moments after the Final Fight-o with Fyodor
• this is, quite literally, the moment dazai realizes his feelings for chuuya

• warnings: drunk!chuuya + DAZAI
• thank you as always for your support ♥ ♥ ♥

He’s leaning against a cool metal railing, splintered off from all of its buddies on the ceiling above that—oh dear, it looks like it’s all precarious and about to collapse on top of him.

On a day where everything has happened so far according to his plans—managing to use No Longer Human against Crime and Punishment just before both of their Abilities have been erased, restraining and gagging the Demon so that he’s ready for detainment, orchestrating every single person at his disposal so that they’ll arrive at this precise moment—getting crushed by an unstable building seems like a fitting end.

If he manages to just slide a couple more meters to the right, using his blood to lessen the friction of his body against the flooring, he’ll reach and topple over a broken tenth-floor window. He’ll have even more internal bleeding, some more broken bones, possibility of dying at more than fifty percent. Then again, if he stays here as the ceiling collapses – Atsushi-kun and Akutagawa-kun do not know the meaning of restraint when fighting, even as temporary allies – there’s a ninety-nine percent chance of dying.

It’s been a long twenty-two years. He’s managed to save people, screw some people over, helped others live, pushed others to death. He’s managed to stop a worldwide disaster – even at the cost of having Abilities permanently erased from this world – and he’s managed to defeat a long-time enemy. It’s a fairly eventful life, the gaping hole inside his chest that somehow has been partially filled by OdaSaku’s outlook in life still churning and gnawing at his entire being.

The people he’s currently with—he respects them, their shining brilliance in accepting life. The people he’s left behind—he respects them, their grim determination to thrive from the deaths all around them. He wants to continue existing just as much as he wants to exit this game that has dragged on for too long.

With his less-damaged arm, he rummages in his coat’s pocket – takes out his phone and a necklace. To be honest, he’s forgotten about the necklace – he’s removed it from its usual place prior to the final confrontation with the Demon, in a half-hearted attempt to keep it safe from harm.

Like a lot of things, the necklace started off as a whimsical joke, something that he’s thought of springing off in its intended target once things were less tense, reserved for a day that he needs cheering up because there’s always something incredibly fun about seeing that hatrack’s confused and enraged face. He’s fond of revealing things slowly and purposely, so he’s sure that even until now, that petit mafia is still not aware of the culprit behind his unevenly-chopped off hair.
So he ignores the necklace for a moment, focusing his efforts on his phone instead. He thinks of leaving a cryptic dying message — scratch that, multiple cryptic dying messages to various people, idly wondering if Ranpo-kun will manage to solve it quickly or if he will be tainted by the idea of a death of a colleague, lazily speculating the chances of the midget drowning himself in bottles of wine from receiving his message, half in celebration and more than half in enraged confusion.

He fiddles with the recording app — because hey, he still has a gorgeous face even if it’s a bit bloody and scratched, and these people deserve to see his face and hear his voice as he recites riddles to distract them from the fact that it apparently only takes one well-placed steel beam on top of his head to shut him up eternally.

But in a day where everything has mostly gone according to plan, it’s almost fitting that he ends up half-frozen, half-interested in the most recent recording showing up on his app. Logically, he already knows what’s in that recording. He’s the one who recorded it to begin with. But he can’t quite stop his fingers from opening the recording — the tinny sound reverberating fully inside his skull, the shaky video steady in his mind’s eye.
(It’s not an entirely coincidental meeting – Hirotsu-san has mastered the terribly neutral tone even in texts, managing to sound without any ulterior motives when he tells him about an embarrassment making a spectacle of himself at one of the bars in the outskirts of Port Mafia’s territory. But there’s no pressure in that message, no coaxing about making sure his ex-partner doesn’t die of alcohol poisoning, no guilt-tripping into taking responsibility for driving their most powerful Executive into a hot mess. It leaves him with a choice and that’s how he too-lightly makes his way to the bar that has no Port Mafia security lining up the entrances and exits.

He’s already taking out his phone and recording the plum-flushed cheeks of the midget, reddened eyes nearly overshadowed by his drunkenness, coat strewn around and shirt unbuttoned halfway down. “Too careless, Executive Chuuya~~~♪”

Chuuya, drunk as he is, merely groans like an aggressive cat against the wooden bar, questionable liquid near his mouth. He generously thinks that it’s spilled wine and drool, instead of something saltier and more painful.

“What would your beloved subordinates say about their favorite boss?”

He plucks the abandoned cellphone with one hand, stifling a grin when the most recent phone records all show his number, calls to M A C K E R E L in short bursts of 5 to 10 seconds, because he picks them up and doesn’t say anything until Chuuya starts screaming before he hangs up. The message drafts have 88 unsent items, more than half of them ridden with typos and capslock, all of them with a disquieting sense of loss and anger.

He sends all of the drafts to their intended recipient, his own phone buzzing seconds afterward and making the video shaky.

“I’m recording you so you can see how noisy your snoring is, you know. So irresponsible – I can kill you easily like this, you see.”

He thinks of a world without Chuuya and stops short, because he nearly drops his phone. He resumes recording the hatrack’s drunken snoring, incessantly poking at the other’s face – wait, he orders whiskey on the rocks and takes out the block of ice and presses it against the other’s swollen cheek instead.

Chuuya, who hates the cold ever since before, groans louder and tries to swat him away. Fortunately for his entertainment, the action only causes the man to flail about and free-fall from the bar to the floor. Unfortunately for him, he witnesses the other man’s strange ability to control his Ability when unconscious, his own Corruption corrupting him to the point that it automatically activates when he’s about to get his nose broken by collapsing on the floor, lessening the impact and instead just leaving him as a pathetic lump on the floor.

He’s never been a kind man, so he keeps the recording on as he nudges Chuuya’s body with his shoe. “Still alive, you drunkard?”

It’s not entirely unexpected, but the commotion apparently drags some semblance of consciousness to the other, blue eyes blinking blearily up at him. It’s not entirely unthinkable, but the fact that the first emotion on the other’s eyes is a mix of recognition and relief—it stops his breath short and his grip on his phone slacks again.
“D-Dazai.”

It’s a strangled sound, almost as though Chuuya’s had to wrench his name from somewhere deep, buried by years and resentment. It’s a wonderful sound, because he’s always wanted to be buried deep into nothingness. It should be a wonderful sound and instead it only makes him bend his knees as he lowers himself to be nearer to the reeking alcoholic mess in front of him.

“Where do you want me to take you, partner?”

It’s not supposed to sound so genuine, but maybe it is. He plans on dumping Chuuya on some abandoned alley regardless of his answer anyway – it’s not like he’s interested in sneaking around Port Mafia security with a deadweight lightweight on his arms at two in the morning.

“Aren’t I—” Chuuya makes a wretched, retching noise, the reddened rim around his eyes bringing out their blueness even more as he stares, blinks, stares some more. How he’s able to keep his right hand steady in angling the phone by his knee, he’s not entirely sure. “—but you’re here—already—I’m home?”

Dazai drops his phone then, the video ending with the immense confusion on Chuuya’s voice.)
Moments before the ruined building collapses entirely, Dazai Osamu’s phone records a grainy video taken with steady hands, the split-second transformation of apathy to determination captured. There’s only one line in it, spoken as a green pendant stuffed with a supposedly-shocking-joke of cut-off complementary red locks, settles into the other’s chest.

I need to go home.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

• chuuya’s date with naomi
• chuuya starts to notice dazai (congrats bro)
• chuuya accidentally (lol) asks dazai out on a date

Chapter Notes

• we’re back to our regular scheduled program! ;)
• man, i don't even know why i'm so fast with this;;;;;;; one date per chapter sounds about right though lol
• i can never say this enough: thank YOU for reading! ♥ ♥ ♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I still haven’t forgiven you for doing bondage play with my dear brother.”

Chuuya doesn’t quite drop the mug of coffee, but he does spend an eternity in openmouthed shock at his date’s grand entrance. Quite possibly, the only consolation is that this café’s staff is fairly discreet and the hour is just right for the early morning caffeine rush to be over. It also helps that it’s relatively expensive here, so it doesn’t usually draw huge crowds even at its worst traffic.

“Oh, don’t look so confused.” Tanizaki Naomi has the confidence and grace of someone who’s been a normal human being all along, none of the awkward transition from having power at the tips of his fingers to being someone who can’t expect to be immune to bullets flying to his face. “You do know what bondage play is, don’t you?”

“…I can’t say I do?”

Naomi tsks at him, carefully scrutinizing his face. For one moment, Chuuya gets this thought that Dazai’s been sending him off to younger women recently – and yes, they’re all lovely, but it’s not really conducive to his goal of finding someone to settle down with eventually.

“How did Dazai-san manage to not educate you on this?”

“I’d literally have anyone else tell me about those… stuff.”

“But that’s such a waste!” Naomi crosses her arms over her chest with a huff, scolding him like he’s been a particularly naughty child. And she’s younger than him. “Why not take advantage of what you have!!”
“If by that you mean I ‘have’ Dazai,” he ensures that there’s proper air-quotes there, “then what I ‘have’ is a useless piece of shit.”

“I cannot believe you’re still stuck in the honeymoon stage – how do you guys do it? It’s been months!”

Chuuya’s happy to be here for a date with Naomi but he’s very confused as to what she’s talking about now. As politely as he possibly can: “I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

No nonsense whatsoever, Naomi places both of her hands on the table, nearly slamming them to make her point. “You have that blissful look on your face when you call him a piece of shit.”

“That’s probably because of the coffee I’m having.” With that said, Chuuya waves a hand for a server to approach their table. “I would recommend getting their Columbian blend, paired with their house special éclair.”

“You’re really as clueless as they say.”

“…once again, I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You’re lucky you’re cute and you’re rich.”

“…thank you?”

“However, Dazai-san has convinced my brother to express interest in wanting to spend time with you, so I’m here to make sure that you will not harm my brother.”

There’s an undercurrent of steel surrounding the stern line of her lips, even as the rest of her body language has shown degrees of relaxation. She’s someone who’s lived without any tangible measure of power, but she has her own strength that burns because of her sibling. It’s a powerful sort of love that Chuuya supposes one can read about on books even from the olden times.

“You must really love your brother, Naomi-san.”

And just like that, she claps her hands together in delight. “I know right! He’s such a naughty boy sometimes, but that just makes me want to torment him even more!”

“…I see?”

“You know, you boys are sometimes so dishonest when it comes to what you want,” Naomi remarks pointedly, her voice loud enough to deter anyone from approaching their table, forcing them to listen to her sordid tales from a distance. “Like this one time, niisan said that he wants to stop, but I know that he wants more—”

☆ ☆ ☆

“You look like you’ve aged twenty years.”

Chuuya doesn’t even have the strength to flip the guy off, nearly face-faulting into his genkan. Dazai’s arms settle around his shoulders, steadying him against the wall, before the other kneels down to help him change to his house slippers.
“Though even with that, you still didn’t grow.”

“Fuck you to hell and back.”

“Also, I told you to not wear your new shoes for this date.” Dazai’s inspecting the reddened parts of his feet, rubbed raw against the leather as Naomi’s dating itinerary sent them covering the entirety of Minato Mirai twice in six hours. “Naomi-chan’s relentless when it comes to sightseeing.”

“Yeah, yeah, save the ‘I told you so’ for when I’m not listening.”

“You always don’t listen to me, Chuuya.”

“Exactly.”

“Lucky for you I’m a very nice guy, so even with your attitude, I still drew you a hot bath.”

“Stop stalking me.”

“Nuh-uh. I used my super psychic skills to predict that you’d be dead on your feet after your date.”

“Were you the guy texting Naomi-san non-stop earlier?”

“I will not confirm nor deny that.” Dazai considers it though, as he practically drags Chuuya from the doorway to his bathroom, bypassing the living room with the newly-purchased XBOX Kinect booted up, as well as the dining room ready for two place settings, and the kitchen where there’s a pot of some chicken-smelling broth that’s on low simmer. “Was it around five in the afternoon? If not, that’s probably her brother.”

“So you were the one harassing her at five.”

“Again, I will not confirm nor deny that.”

There’s a change of clothes folded atop the shelves of beauty products, placed too high that Chuuya will have no choice but ask Dazai to get them for him. The tub – big enough for two, not that Chuuya’s ever in the mood to share – is already filled with warm water, the scent of his favorite bubble bath bomb already wafting to his nose.

“Stupid psychic powers,” Chuuya mutters as he lets Dazai strip him out of his clothes, practically shoving him to the bath as soon as he steps out of his boxers. The water is perfectly warm against his sore muscles and his possibly-expired soul, defeated by the onslaught of TMI from his date for the day. “Guh, stupid temperature control powers too.”

“Yes, I know I’m the best~~~♫”

“Arrogant asshole.”

“I don’t hear you denying it though~?”

“You’re the best at predicting bath temperature,” Chuuya allows as he sinks everything below his mouth to the water. “That’s hardly an accomplishment.”

Dazai snorts as he picks up the discarded clothes and balls them up in front of his eyes, wrinkling his suit, teasing him. He’s too exhausted to go to a yelling match about proper care for suits though. He just glares as fiercely as he can, though he knows that it’s probably as effective as mewling from a newborn kitten.
…huh.

He watches Dazai falter a bit, but the moment of weakness is gone.

Hmm. Maybe not cats then.

But then, seeing that one moment – it’s something that he doesn’t remember seeing at all – wait, no, that’s not true. He’s seen that split-moment of vulnerability before. Lips parted in an unvoiced gasp, brown eyes widened in something like shock and horror, less about gore and dystopia, but more like Dazai’s seeing his entire world destroyed right in front of his eyes.

He’s seen it somewhat like this scenario, him looking up at the man, always, always, always high above and far away from his reach.

He thinks he can remember looking up at Dazai, telling him something apocalyptic, maybe something about finally finding a gorgeous lady delusional enough to want to commit double suicide with him, maybe something else?, but he’s looking up at him, Dazai’s head haloed by some sort of light behind and instead of making him look angelic, it only casted shadows into his face the creep that he is.

Dazai… is human too, isn’t he?

*No Longer Human* is gone from his system, even if he’s still the annoying too-smart guy with too-perfect strategies. He’s human too, because he speaks of having things important to him with a wistful tone, because he promises to never let things go with a quiet determination, because he can look like someone who’s afraid too.

Dazai is human, even if he’s far from normal, isn’t he?

Not that different from Chuuya himself – Chuuya is much, much better than him in so many ways, even if he’s also far from normalcy – but not too similar that it’s suffocating to inhabit the same space. Corruption still sings whispers against his mind sometimes and it helps to open his nights and break free from the nightmares to see Dazai staring back at him with too-dark and too-knowing eyes.

“—I can hear you thinking Chuuya and I can hear your mind quitting on you, you know?”

“Such a jerk,” he murmurs, submerging himself for a few seconds before pulling himself up, reclining against the tub so that his mouth is above the water again. “Stupid Dazai, did you put yourself on the list?”

He keeps his eyes on Dazai, intent on catching that moment of weakness again. It doesn’t come. Instead, Dazai takes a step forward, even though wariness is painted like a veil over his eyes. “…why are you asking, midget?”

“At this rate, I’d soon end up dating everyone from the Port Mafia, the Agency and the Guild—except for you.” Chuuya considers it a bit, then cringes as he recalls: “And Mori-san, good god, just no. And that Lovecraft guy. And Hirotsu-san too. But yes.”

“So you’re aiming for a 100% completion rate?”

“You’re making it sound like those dating sims.”

“Pffft, why are you playing dating sims?”
“The game you gave Akutagawa was giving him trouble so he asked me to help him.”

“So you played it for him? I knew he finished it too quickly, that cheater.”

“I just directed him to some walkthroughs.”

“How efficient. I’m so proud of my student.”

“He’s not your student anymore.”

“We can be co-teachers then?”

“You’re also not answering my question.”

“You’re the one who didn’t answer first!”

“I did.”

“Did not.”

“I did, you bastard.”

“Did nooooooot~~~♫”

“You sound shittier than a crying toddler.”

“You’re lucky your kids are all grown-up then.”

“Still not answering my question.”

“Urgh, fine!” Dazai doesn’t look fine, the wariness still ever-present. The last time Chuuya’s seen that much skittishness was when Dazai hasn’t mastered the art of doing whatever is asked of him to the best of his ability, bruises and failures waiting for him at every turn. It’s painful, to see it now. “If you want to get the chance to date yours truly, just ask~~~”

“I didn’t say I want to date you though?”

Almost instantaneously, Dazai’s lips form a sneer that’s reminiscent of the ones he used when he was being cornered by the older Executives who didn’t know how to be terrified of him yet. “That kind of tsundere shit is fucking annoying, even if it’s you.”

“I just asked if you were on the list,” Chuuya says as mildly as he can, feeling the bathwater cool too rapidly.

“I’m not.”

“You didn’t place yourself there.”

“I didn’t think I needed to,” Dazai bites out eventually, annoyance radiating from him. He’s still standing maybe three steps away, opting not to storm off from the tension inside the bathroom.

Chuuya tries to understand this, the way his heart doesn’t hammer in his chest like a jackrabbit even as every single one of Dazai’s expressions practically scream out danger. He used to feel the call of adrenaline each time it happened before, ready to punch the other in the face, kick the other in the stomach to put a stop to the other’s bastardly actions.
Now, he’s just—inexplicably sad, sorrow tainting everything even if it used to be so warm and safe until a few minutes prior.

“I won’t force you if you don’t want to.” Chuuya tastes the words and they feel cheap, misplaced. He tries again: “But it should make for an interesting experience, right?”

“We’ll go tomorrow morning,” Dazai cuts in decisively, the wariness sliding away—and oh. Chuuya tries to avert his eyes, but Dazai’s stepping closer, hands reaching into the water to hold onto his, and Dazai’s shirt sleeves and bandages are getting wet, and he’s half-leaning over him, and his hands—

“W-Where would even go,” Chuuya manages to ask after a few seconds, his entire body shivering from how cold the water is now, Dazai’s grip unrelenting on his hands. “We’ve… we’ve already gone through the entire Yokohama, before.”

“But not on a date.”

The wariness is entirely gone but it’s replaced by this quiet determination, and Chuuya’s not sure why it feels even heavier, more painful now. This is the look Dazai has before he launches a batshit crazy plan that sounds insane in theory but works out perfectly in practice. It should comfort him, because this is the look Dazai has before he gives Chuuya a heart attack but ultimately ensuring that he stays alive through hellfire. It should relieve him, because this means that whatever happens, everything will end up fine.

Instead, he just feels like—

“Why do you even want to go on a date with me?”

He shifts so that he’s kneeling on the tub, forcing the two of them at eye-level. Dazai moves with him, but doesn’t let his hands go.

Slowly, like the drag of a snake’s skin leaving its old body, Dazai tugs his hands closer so he can whisper the words against his fingers bruised black and blue and red and purple from the burst veins of Corruption: “…Ask me again after our date tomorrow.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes and snatches his hands away, but not before slapping Dazai lightly on the face. “Stupid secretive asshole. Get the hell out.”

Dazai laughs, the tension in him gone. “Keep that attitude up and I won’t give you your clothes~~~”

Chuuya doesn’t sink back to the cold bathwater until Dazai leaves and half-closes the bathroom door, letting in colder air to the room in order to spite him. He doesn’t yell about that though, because he’s too bewildered at the fact that possibly for the first time since he’s had to stay with Dazai ever since their Abilities were taken from them… his heart is actually beating fast enough for him to become dizzy with the sensation.

Chapter End Notes

• now, before you all become happy for dazai, let me just direct you to: (a) the long list of people to date chuuya still lol; (b) the fact that chuuya doesn't necessarily
equates dates with romance. but then again, it's a start!!! oh wait, and (c) yosano's date IS next chapter, so that should tell us something about the soukoku date lol

• in case you missed ch6/dazai's pov, the scene chuuya's flashbacks to re: vulnerable!dazai is when he drunkenly tells dazai that he feels at home with him (well, not that clearly, but that's the gist)

• oh, and if you're not up to date w/the manga, the 'bondage play' is when port mafia tied tanizaki up lol

• see you next water time ♪
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

• dazai finally gets to go on a date with chuuya!
• also features: chuuya's date with The Queen, yosano~♪
• as always, thank you for reading! i hope you all enjoy this chapter too :]

Chapter Notes

• all the venues below are real! Motomachi is a shopping street with pricey European brands; Mutekiro is a well-known French restaurant; Suzaku Gate is at the entrance of the Yokohama Chinatown; Ma Zhu is the Taoist goddess of the sea, Yue Xia Lao Ren is a matchmaking deity – both are on the same building; Kirin Beer Factory does offer tours and beer samples!; Minato Mirai is that iconic place where the Port Mafia buildings are nearby; Intercontinental Yokohama Hotel is a sail-shaped popular hotel inside the Minato Mirai area;

• travel times are lifted from the Yokohama Visitors’ Guides all over the internet 8D

• Yosano’s character profile lists her dislikes as (a) chauvinistic men AND (b) weak men. Her likes are: (a) flowers, (b) eels, (c) sake, and (d) wagashi/Japanese sweets

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ ☆ ☆

“You look—”

Chuuya blinks once, twice, thrice, foregoes rubbing at his eyes. Instead, he then looks at Dazai up and down, the other’s clothes not giving him the answer he needs. He then transfers his gaze down at his own forest green sweater layered over a plain white long-sleeved button-up and simple black slacks.

He tries again, after clearing his throat. “…am I underdressed?”

Dazai’s black shirt looks a bit shimmery from his angle, his blood-red necktie forming a sharp contrast. He has a charcoal vest, with a black overcoat lined in crimson. He looks like he’s about to attend the opera’s first night to show off an engagement, not walking around Yokohama with an ex-partner he’s tormented for years.

“You look great as always, shrimp.”

“…Right.”
Chuuuya’s still bewildered though – on top of the already mystifying morning.

A quick recap: (1) he’s woken up by the smell of pancakes and the warm waft of coffee, because Dazai apparently thought that it was a great time to try a ‘breakfast in bed’; (2) Dazai then admits that he doesn’t have a plan for their day, telling him that he’s planning to just ‘wing it’, causing Chuuya’s brain to go offline for nearly thirty minutes because Dazai not having a plan?!; (3) Dazai requests that he doesn’t use his own coat and borrow the grey peacoat instead—a bit strange, but the most disconcerting part is when Dazai actually uses polite words and requests it with a please.

(Oh, and (4) when some of the maple syrup trickled past his lips, Dazai is very eager to save the comforter from being stained by wiping the syrup away with his thumb, though it takes him some time in rubbing at the stickiness.)

It’s a very strange morning.

“You look surprised.”

No shit.

He keeps quiet, unsure of what he can say to that. Should he change clothes? He’s already comfortable—and he’s fairly sure that he’s not the one with the incorrect dress code.

“…did you not get enough sleep?” There’s something that sounds too much like concern on Dazai’s voice. It’s very, very strange. “I told you to wake me up when you have nightmares.”

“You always wake up before me when I…” He trails off, the word ‘nightmare’ heavy on his tongue. Hallucinations of Corruption whispering to him doesn’t sound any better.

Fact is, even before his eyes fly open from his fever-pitch dreams, Dazai’s already wide-awake and prepared with a glass of water and soothing murmurs to calm him down, with bandages on his body less about maintaining aesthetics, less about hiding bruises from a lifetime of clumsiness and nonchalance towards injuries. Even before Chuuya can regain his senses and ascertain that he’s not drowning in the madness of the power inside of him, Dazai’s already prepared the first aid kit within grabbing distance should Chuuya scratch and kick with more fervor than expected.

“Hm. Do you want to cancel our date today?” The concern hasn’t fully receded, but there’s something akin to resignation there instead. It’s all so uncharacteristically Dazai that it itches, aches, to hear it.

“No – we might as well go.” He goes for flippant, but probably overshoots, given Dazai’s slight wince. “I’m not dying or anything – just… spacing out a bit.”

Him dying would be terribly inconvenient. Him dying would probably cause Dazai to birth kittens from jealousy. Him spacing out sounds pretty safe, all things considered.

“Going on a date absent-mindedly?” Because Dazai is nothing if not astute when it comes to reading the atmosphere (not that he’s decent enough to acknowledge it most of the time), he teases him instead, recovering from the odd, tense moment. “What would your other dates say?”

Chuuuya sighs as he slips his wallet into his pants. He considers – and concludes that it’s fine to be sloppier today, to not be the sophisticated gentleman he’s been working towards. It’s just Dazai after all. They’ve known each other for roughly twenty years now and god it’s been a long twenty years. They’ve seen each other with crust on their eyes, snot on their faces, with blood on their teeth, with internal organs hanging out of their guts. A little sloppiness is nothing.
“It’s fine. It’s you.”

Dazai doesn’t reply, but he does open the door for him, holding out a hand for him to grasp as they step out of his apartment.

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Dazai’s fairly well-behaved as they walk around in Motomachi once Chuuya’s car has been parked safely.

Chuuya buys new ties – fine, there’s something for Dazai there too, another blood-colored one, because there’s something to be said about how blood looks wonderful surrounding the jerk’s neck.

Unashamedly, Dazai buys a pair of slacks for Chuuya (it’s not worth his blood pressure to know why the fuck Dazai knows his exact measurements) and some sapphire-crusted cufflinks for himself – both using Chuuya’s card.

A little bit before the lunchtime rush, they settle to the very traditional tatami room of Mutekirou, escargot appetizers served to them within five minutes of seating.

“I thought you didn’t have plans,” Chuuya manages off-handedly, knowing how difficult it is to get a table here especially given how popular it is for weddings and proposals.

Dazai smiles charmingly at the waitress that comes in and brings them the rest of their entrees, traditional French food cooked with fresh Yokohama produce. “I know the manager.”

“Probably flirted a lot with her then, huh?”

“Ha, no. She knows I’m here for a date.”

“That didn’t stop you before,” Chuuya points out with only the lightest hint of bitterness, recollection of Dazai’s entanglements during their Port Mafia days lightened by the fulfilling perfection of their lobster.

Dazai delicately takes a bite from his baked oyster, before lifting his eyes to catch Chuuya’s as he speaks. “Let me amend that – she knows I’m here with you for this date.”

It’s the same thing, but Chuuya foregoes arguing because Dazai did do the decent thing and reserve them for the best French restaurant in Yokohama, knowing how much he loves the French cuisine and culture.

Dazai pays for their meal – not using his credit card, to his utter shock – and they slowly walk towards the nearby Chinatown. They gather a bit of curious looks, Chuuya’s fingers tingling inside his gloves as they walk hand-in-hand. He’s used to gathering attention when he’s out and about, but that’s mostly because people are looking at him.

Now though, they’re mostly snapping pictures of Dazai, still in that ridiculously formal suit of his. He cleans up nicely, he’ll give him that, because it’s not exactly a hardship to admit something everyone else knows to be true.
Once they pass the bright red Suzaku Gate of Chinatown, Chuuya frowns a bit, because why the fuck are they going for the Heavenly Empress Shrine?

“Why the fuck are we going for the Heavenly Empress Shrine?” He makes sure to use English, because he knows how important the shrine is to the locals and tourists, he’s not about to get into a brawl because he’s disrespecting it.

“We’ll pray for safety.”

“I’m not exactly about to… go out into the sea?”

“Ma Zhu isn’t only a goddess of the sea. She can also protect people from natural disasters and diseases.”

“Are you foreshadowing causing harm to me?”

“You’re about to become the Port Mafia Boss, aren’t you?”

“So you want me… to become safe?”

“Don’t sound so shocked,” Dazai chides him with a laugh, tugging him further inside the shrine. “Don’t think too much, it’s not good for your underused brain.”

“Stupid fuck.”

The man praying beside them gives them a horrified look.

Shit, that was a pretty recognizable English swearword.

“Maybe you should curse in French instead,” Dazai suggests lightly, still laughing at him.

Just for that, Chuuya uses Italian when he says: “I’ll curse however I want to, bastard.”

“Mm, let’s drop by Yue Xia Lao Ren next.”

“You’re going to pray for matchmaking when you’re with me?”

Dazai huffs another laugh as he tangles his fingers with Chuuya’s, the gloves insufficient in blocking the other’s almost feverish warmth. “It’s supposed to improve relationships.”

“If you just asked me, I could give you multitudes of advice about how to improve our relationship.”

“Hmm – I’m asking now.”

“Stop using my credit card, for starters?”

Dazai makes a considering noise, before shrugging. “Let’s just get the matchmaking deity’s help.”

“Stupid bastard fuck.”

☆ ☆ ☆
“We’re really going to the Sankeien Garden?”

“Why the protest, Chuuya? You came here with Kyouka-chan, right?”

Chuuya rolls his eyes at the petulant voice. “You’re a bigger pain on the ass than Kyouka-chan.”

“I would be surprised if she manages to cause pain to your ass.”

Ignoring that jibe, Chuuya parks his car again and rolls his eyes again when Dazai practically flies out of his seat so he can do his mock-gentleman thing again of opening his door for him.

“If you really want to be a gentleman, why don’t you volunteer to drive instead?”

“You trust me to drive your car?”

“Geh, nevermind.”

“Thought so~~~♫”

“So why are we here?”

“It’s supposed to be a very romantic place!” Dazai huffs and puffs until Chuuya holds his hand as they make rounds on the garden. He has this distinct feeling that Dazai’s never been here, despite having had girlfriends – multiple ones, simultaneously – and a string of admirers before.

“We’re at another matchmaking place – this time it comes with a legendary love story too.”

Dazai speaks slowly, like he’s dealing with someone impossibly dense. “We are on a date, after all.”

They walk around some more, bypassing the Tea Ceremony Room and the Memorial Hall.

Chuuya’s a bit bewildered – so they just, what, strolled around?

Dazai doesn’t look dissatisfied with the lack of purchases from the gift shop, or the general lack of excitement.

Huh.

He’s never really spent a lot of time thinking about Dazai and dating – hmm, not really, not anymore – but he didn’t think that Dazai would prefer boring dates.

And maybe he should stop jinxing himself, because a few meters away from his parking spot, a familiar face approaches them.

“There you two are!”

Dazai doesn’t let go of his hand and Chuuya has to pry his fingers away so he can offer a handshake to the slightly-panting woman.

“Yosano Akiko-san, right? I’m Nakahara Chuuya.”

Yosano doesn’t look happy, but she does look slightly impressed and shakes his hand briefly. Even as she says: “I know who you are, Port Mafia Boss.”

“Not yet,” he allows and hates Dazai for staying quiet when dealing with his colleague. “I’m afraid
Mori-san still hasn’t completed the transition.”

“And speaking of… that guy,” she looks positively ill at the thought of the current Boss, “he made a move on the President. It’s downright chaos at the Agency.”

“He didn’t—”

“He did.” Yosano confirms grimly. She turns to glare at Dazai. “And you’d know about it if you answered our calls.”

Dazai’s voice is half-petulant and half-murderous. Chuuya understands, he wants to murder Mori-san too for being fucking stupid. “I’m on a date with Chuuya.”

“Everyone knows,” Yosano says with a flip of her hand, clearly unhappy with the fact that she has to track them down. “You’re needed for damage control.”

Chuuya frowns, because Port Mafia needs to clean up its own messes. Even if it’s left and started by their current Boss to begin with. “I can—”

“I’ll do it,” Dazai cuts in, “I just need to incapacitate Mori-san, right?”

“I’m stronger—”

“You don’t have the balls to kidnap Elise-chan and threaten her safety if he doesn’t calm down.”

“Don’t kidnap her, she didn’t do anything wrong!”

“Exactly my point.”

Yosano offers a very helpful bit: “I don’t really care who goes there, as long as everyone settles down.”

Chuuya tunes out the rest of the conversation, because he’s busy bemoaning the fact that his Boss’s outright thirst is causing this embarrassment. Yosano’s describing the details of what exactly Mori-san did, but he’d rather not hear about them. He already has enough nightmares.

Dazai gets briefed about the situation after a few minutes, which is when Chuuya tunes back in to the program.

“Use my car so you can get there faster.”

Dazai looks more shocked by that offer than the news that Mori-san ended up wrestling with the Agency’s President. Naked wrestling. Urgh.

To counteract the wordless gaping, Chuuya continues: “It’s a mess caused by the Port Mafia. I’d help as much as I can.”

Yosano hums in approval. “Such a strong sense of duty. Replace that dirty old man as a boss soon, would you? You look easier to bully.”

“…right.”

Before Chuuya can try to say anything more, Dazai steps closer, his right hand rummaging inside Chuuya’s pocket for his car keys. The clinking sound of the keys are drowned by the fact that Chuuya’s blood roars in his ears as Dazai draws impossibly closer still, his lips pressing against his cheek in the process.
He’s the one doing the wordless gaping now, but there’s truly no words for that. His vision swims for a moment, blurring Yosano’s unimpressed face as she watches them. Unfairly, Dazai’s smirk remains starkly clear as he takes a small step back, his hands heavy on his shoulders now, and oh. It’s the damn coat.

He doesn’t speak still, because if he opens his mouth, he’d probably say something damning. Like how the coat looks better on Dazai than him. Like how he’d rather go back to the Agency and face a probably-naked Mori-san, rather than be left here. Like how he has this urge to give Higuchi a gift for her inadvertantly valuable advice about kissing at the end of a date.

“Will you return to the Agency, Yosano-san?”

“If you want… that guy to be castrated, sure.”

“Let’s not go for drastic measures so quickly. Blood is hard to clean and we just got a new carpet.”

Yosano hums again, then flaps a hand towards Chuuya’s general direction. “I can go on a date with Mr. Gentleman here instead.”

“Oh, he’s such a gentleman indeed. Please don’t devour him, Yosano-san.”

“I’m not going to castrate him if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I’d rather there be no touching his bare skin whatsoever.”

“He is pretty much covered up.”

“It’s a fairly cold autumn.”

“I’ll take care of pretty-boy here for you.”

Chuuya doesn’t open his mouth, because he’s not sure what he should protest to. Dazai turns to him, speaking to Yosano but their eyes remain locked. “He’s a lightweight, so please don’t let him have more than half a glass.”

“I thought he’s the guy who has an extensive wine collection.”

“He is.”

“I like the irony.”

“I don’t,” Chuuya ends up blurtling out, miffed that he’s unable to get a word edgewise.

Yosano moves close to him as Dazai makes his way to the car’s driver seat.

With a pat to his arm, she says: “Say your prayers about your car already.”

Chuuya sighs as he excuses himself to dial the number of his insurance company, watching Dazai speed out of the parking lot.

☆ ☆ ☆
“You’re an elitist snob.”

“I’m not,” Chuuya protests even as he’s still shuddering from the train ride experience. This is why he’s in love with his cars – they keep him safe from such horrors.

“Though it’s pretty interesting that I’m the one who needs to protect your virtue.”

“Urgh.” He shudders again as he remembers the press of the crowd all around him. It’s a relief that it’s only a few minutes to Namamugi Station.

“You get plus points for not acting all chivalrous and presuming to protect me instead.”

“…thank you?”

He’s had a couple of encounters with her, but they were mostly in the context of combat. He knows that he’s slated to have a date with her in the future, but given the mess in the schedules now… He remembers Dazai commenting about how she hates chauvinistic pigs (but then again, shouldn’t everyone?) and how she likes drinking.

“We’ll go to this tour, drink beer, eat a lot, then go home!”

“Hopelessly the mess is all cleaned up by that time.” Chuuya’s not pessimistic, per se, but he knows how terribly stubborn Mori-san can be. He’s bound to cause havoc until the President accepted him.

“We can get drunk from inhaling all the beer being brewed,” Yosano supposes, as they make their way to the front gate of Kirin’s Beer Village.

“Sounds like a good plan, Yosano-san.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Did you do research on me?”

“…unfortunately, I haven’t had the chance to.” Chuuya supposes that honesty remains to be the best policy and all that. He orders another serving of eel sushi for her. “I planned to do it two days before our supposed date.”

“Such a gentleman,” she mutters instead, as she gulps down another bottle of Kirin. “No wonder Kyouka-chan and Lucy-chan were so enamored.”

“I’m happy to hear that they were happy with our date.”

“I can at least tease Ranpo-kun about being able to try you first.”

“I hope to be able to make sure Ranpo-san’s date with me becomes enjoyable too.”

“Ho-hum, maybe first make sure that I am having a good time.”

“Of course. Would you like to drop by a seafood restaurant? There should be more choices for eel-based dishes there.”
“Yeah, let’s do that. I’ll just grab another bottle.”

“Of course. Let me get our bill – I would like to pay for it entirely, but it would be remiss of me not to check with you if that’s alright.”

“You’re really different from what Dazai-kun says.”

“That asshole is a lying liar who lies.”

“Nah, that was my mistake.”

“I see – about the bill?”

“Knock yourself out, gentleman bocchan.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“…you really didn’t do research on me?”

Chuuya looks down at his order, wagashi arranged into a flat rendition of a bouquet. “I’m glad that you like it.”

“Is that your intuition as a serial-dater?”

He almost protests about being called that, but it’s better than pretty-boy, if only because it feels strange to accept compliments when there’s Dazai’s overcoat pressed around his shoulders.

His phone remains silent, no updates from Dazai.

“I just ordered the loveliest thing from the menu – not that it could hope to match your loveliness.”

Yosano glares at him, but only for a moment. “I’ll let it go because you actually sound sincere.”

“Would you prefer less compliments from me?”

“You can continue to be honest.”

“Then the sweets I had ordered failed to match your beauty, despite the lovely arrangement.”

“Atta boy.”

☆ ☆ ☆

They end up hopping between the more expensive, quieter, exclusive bars (not because he’s an elitist snob, but because Yosano-san didn’t seem like the type to enjoy bars bustling with men eager to hit on her) and sweets shops near Minato Mirai.

Her bluntness and attitude reminds him of Akutagawa with less coughing and less drama, actually. It’s great to spend time with her, discussing politics as they knock back another serving of matcha
mochi, arguing about different fabrics and their tendency to absorb blood as he buys her different clothes, conversing about how the feminist movement hasn’t fully spread to their country despite it being a common theme in the West.

The long discussions become longer because he’s not drinking more than a few sips, to the point that it’s nearly midnight and they’re still walking around Yokohama. She doesn’t appear tipsy at all, despite nearly drinking half her body weight in alcohol. Though she looks a bit tired, tired lines on the edge of her eyes.

He knows better than to point it out so bluntly though.

“Would you – would you like me to book a room for you?”

He’s not sure where she lives, though he thinks everyone from the Agency lives at the dorms? Given that the last train has already gone its merry way, it’s either he gets her a cab or walks her back. He looks at her heels and thinks about buying her something for calluses.

She’s smirking as she asks: “Not gonna invite me to your place?”

“I don’t think you’d appreciate that kind of inappropriate invitation.”

“Inappropriate – because Dazai’s there?”

“He shouldn’t be,” Chuuya bites out, though he sighs at her raised eyebrow. Concedes. “He probably is.”

“I can get a cab home, but I won’t stop you if you want me to be pampered at a five-star hotel.”

Chuuya smiles and adjusts his grip on her shopping bags. “I should be able to get you a room from The Intercontinental.”

Yosano whistles in appreciation, accepting his elbow as they walk towards the waterfront building.

☆ ☆ ☆

Once Chuuya steps out of the Intercontinental Yokohama Hotel, with his date happily ensconced at the top floor suite, he’s tired enough to not even be surprised to see his car waiting for him at the pick-up point.

His car’s temperature is moderate enough that he can forego the outer coat, leather seats warmed. Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto smoothly flows from his car’s speakers, a still-warm cup of decaf balanced on the dashboard.

“…you didn’t have to pick me up.”

“And what, have you walk all the way back?”

“I could just book my own room. Or get a cab.”

“You hate public transportation.”

“I’m not an elitist snob.”
“I’m kicking you out of this car if lightning strikes us because of your lies.”

“I’d be kicking you out first, because this is my goddamn car. And you lie more than me, fucker.”

“I had bonded with your car and named her Moby Dick.”

Chuuya debates internally about throwing the decaf over Dazai’s face. It’s really good coffee though. Damn it. “I’m not riding a Dick, you absolute ass.”

“You actually managed to control your drinking habits. Great job for Yosano-san.”

“Why do you assume that she has to stop me?! I managed to do that on my own, damn it.”

“Careful about lightning~~~♪”

“Shut the fuck up.” Chuuya leans back against the heated seat as soon as he finishes off his coffee, feeling clear-headed despite the late hour. He looks at Dazai from the corner of his eye, and catches a spot of blood on the corner of his collar. “I don’t want details if it involves Mori-san being naked – but what the fuck happened?!”

“I reserve my right to silence as I don’t wish to remember.”

“You have blood on your collar. And your chin, what the hell.”

“Huh. I thought I got it all off.”

Chuuya raises a gloved hand to wipe off the stubborn spot on Dazai’s chin. If he rubs with more effort than needed, well.

“Is Mori-san still alive?”

“…disappointingly, yes.”

“Pffft, you and your issues.”

Dazai doesn’t reply – doesn’t say anything about how they’re not mere issues because Mori-san, despite being a better Boss than his predecessor, still fucked their lives up. Instead, he takes one hand off the steering wheel and traps Chuuya’s against his chin, pressing his hand there for the entire duration of their ride.

_Yue Xia Lao Ren_ – improving relationships, huh.

Chapter End Notes

• thank you for reading! any and all feedback is much appreciated ♥

• so some of you might have seen the spoiler for the future chapters from tumblr - we’re getting there, i’m just getting the overly fluffy parts out of the way first LOL

• if you say: this is the first time chuuya actually pays attention to dazai’s clothing, you’re right. if you say, this is the first time chuuya has acknowledged to someone else that dazai is living with him, you’re also right.
next chapter should have: tanizaki / ranpo / poe / motojiro, covering October to November in the timeline. pretty cold months needing lots of cuddles, hmmmmmm
October brings an even harsher bite to the air, so Chuuya’s glad for the respite from the coldest autumn in recent history when he ducks inside the coffee shop two blocks away from his apartment.

There’s a picnic of sorts a few hours from now – members from both the Port Mafia and the Armed Detective Agency attending in a show of camaraderie – and he’s not entirely sure how he got volunteered to help make the food, and more importantly, how he only got informed just an hour before.

(“No need to make anything fancy, I’ll gladly eat your sandwiches!”, Dazai had said as soon as he
had dressed him in a warm bundle of coats.

“You’ll eat anything,” Chuuya had replied then, too sleepy for even the easiest perfunctory objection to being manhandled out of his own apartment so they could complete some last-minute grocery shopping for picnic-friendly food.)

And now Dazai’s somewhere out there, trailing after him, lugging the bags of groceries around with his stupidly skinny arms because it’s his fault he forgot to tell Chuuya that he’s signed them up for food duty.

Serves him right.

“Oh, you’re – Chuuya-san, right?” The cashier smiles sunnily at him, too cheerful for the cold Saturday morning. He looks down at his clothes – nope, no nametags on his person – then pats at his head – nope, no post-its on his face. She reads his panic about her knowing him by name and laughs cheerily. “No, I’m sorry, that was too forward of me. It’s just that – when your partner orders coffee for you, he always talks about you, you know? And he’s shown us your pictures too. He’s very proud of you.”

Her smile brightens even more, like she hasn’t just destroyed a few of his brain cells in just a few words.

“Oh.”

“I didn’t mean to scare you,” she says very sincerely. “Did you want to try our newest blend? We’ve received some great beans from Indonesia yesterday.”

He has a feeling that she – and the entire staff – knows about his favorite blends already, but she’s trying to be polite and not admit that she knows that bastard’s order by heart.

Still – it’s not her fault that Dazai’s mouth is the exact opposite of unflappable. “Right. That sounds great. And do you still have some of your Guatemalan beans?”

“Dazai-san always reserves an order for those, it’s fairly popular.” The café is cozy chic, but the expensive prices and exotic blends make them appealing to a certain set of clientele only. It’s not a wildly popular store with a noisy bustling crowd – and he’s usually thankful of such an environment, but he’s almost hoping for a commotion to distract him from this conversation. “He mentioned about you favoring it over all our other beans.”

“It’s great. Delicious.”

“We’re glad to hear that, thank you. Here you go, Chuuya-san.” She hands him his order, along with another paper bag of something he definitely didn’t order. “There are some bagels there for you too – you like the one with cream cheese, right? And some of the scones Dazai-san always orders.”

It’s just because of the months of repeat orders.

It’s just because Dazai probably charmed the hell out of everyone here.

It’s just because of that, because there’s no other reason for her to smile knowingly at him, almost forgiving that he forgot buying their usual breakfast.

He ducks his head and leaves her with a 10,000-yen tip, because she seems like a nice, hardworking girl who deserves it from being inflicted with Dazai’s blubbering. And because he
won’t have a chance to give her another tip ever, because he’s going to die of embarrassment. After he guts that bastard, that is.

And because he’s got amazing luck (‘great misfortune’, proclaimed during his New Year’s shrine visit) – the moment he escapes from the too-warm café, he nearly bowls against Dazai. For a moment, he’s annoyed at himself for having incredible balance, because the only way this morning could be salvaged is if he not-so-accidentally poured piping hot coffee right into the jerk’s face.

Dazai waves at the café, the clear windows ensuring that his greeting isn’t missed by the staff inside. “I see you met Yuri-chan. Did you have a nice chat? She’s probably the only other person aside from you who actually likes hats.”

“We didn’t manage to discuss that, I was too busy being horrified.”

“Eh? Did something happen?” Somehow, Dazai managed to negotiate the nearly-overflowing groceries into manageable bags. There’s a strain on his shoulders as he carries them, but it’s virtually unnoticeable. He can almost pretend that his arms aren’t too scrawny.

“You happened, damn it.” Chuuya walks briskly ahead, but Dazai’s longer legs make it easier for him to catch up.

“Ah, then it’s a good development.”

Stupid, narcissistic, self-absorbed bastard.

“It isn’t. I can’t show my face there ever again.”

“Hm. If that’s the case – I’d make sure to show them more recent photos of you so they won’t be deprived of their Chuuya experience.”

“Urgh. Please don’t. What do you even tell them about me?”

“That you’re a shorty who’s definitely not a morning person,” Dazai says with a laugh, easily dodging the kick that Chuuya attempts to connect against his shin. “Hair sticking up in all directions and with a stupid morning breath, too.”

“There’s no such thing as a stupid morning breath, what the hell.”

“I get to experience it first-hand so I get to have a say on it.”

“Stop experiencing it then, asshole.” Chuuya huffs and decides to pity the idiot’s arms. Because it’s what normal people do. Plus, there are eggs there and he’s not about to make the trip back to the grocery store because Dazai wasted them. “Give me one of the bags.”

“You went drinking with Yosano-san the past three nights, I didn’t get the chance!”

“Or sent me a message?!” Chuuya glares at the other’s shrug. “I was planning to doodle it on your face…”

“You couldn’t have left me a note?!”

“Don’t leave me a note ever, urgh.”
“Come on, I was going to use a washable marker.”

“Somehow I don’t trust that,” Chuuya remarks dryly, but helps keep the door open as they arrive at his apartment. Again, he’d rather slam the door on the bastard’s face, but groceries.

“I’m so hurt, Chuuya.” Dazai makes a mock-hurt expression that looks so fake Chuuya rolls his eyes in derision. “And so proud of you, you’re right, I’d have used a permanent marker. And probably doodled unflattering designs too.”

“I’m starting to think you’d rather not reach the picnic alive, Dazai Osamu.”

“Ooh, dark and serious.” Dazai makes a show of fanning himself after he sets the groceries down on the kitchen counter. “How would you try to take me down then, Nakahara Chuuya?”

“I’d bash your head in on my kitchen sink.”

“Eh, I prepared some trout there last night. It feels a bit unsanitary.”

“I’m going to kill you, not ask for your preferred murder scenario.” Chuuya frowns at the other’s complaint though. “Also, clean my sink up properly, damn it.”

“Maybe you can push me off the window? I bet the air feels nice flying down.”

“And what, give you a free skyboarding trip?” Chuuya adjusts his gloves then rolls his sleeves up. Dazai’s adjusting the room thermostat, fiddling with his own apron tie. “Also, my window’s now certifiably bulletproof.”

“I’m sure you can find a way.”

“You’d just drag me down with you, no thanks.”

“Don’t you think it’s a nice way to go? I’d make sure to hold on to you real tight.”

“I’d rather you don’t, you jerk.” The annoying thing is that it’s something that they’ve both tried before – Chuuya bashing Dazai’s head against his previous four-by-four tatami mat room’s wobbly sink; Dazai getting kicked out of a window and him subsequently dragging Chuuya with him on the way down, before shoving him to the ground first, Corruption activating in the nick of time. “Why are we even talking about this?”

“You were going to stop me from showing up on the picnic.”

“Urgh. We only have a few hours – start molding the meatballs, will you?” He’s already preparing to boil water for the pasta. Some pasta, some grilled fingerfood, some sandwiches. Maybe a few pitchers of detox water, because subsisting on soda is gross. “Would your colleagues prefer wine or beer?”

“You’ve dated most of them, you should know by now, right?”

“Yeah, I shouldn’t have counted on you providing an actual answer. You got the meatballs?”

“Uh-huh. I’ll make them small enough so your tiny hands can hold them properly.”

“My hands aren’t tiny, fucker.” Chuuya pokes Dazai’s neck with one uncooked spaghetti strand. “Watch the pasta, I’ll set up the travel cooler for the drinks.”

“Pack your Glenfiddich for me?”
“I’m—I’m not going to bring a 40-year old Scotch for you! On a—on a picnic!”

Dazai hums, unimpressed. “You’re fine with letting your colleagues have your Boerl & Kroff Brut.”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have quit the Port Mafia then, huh?”

—Ah, shit.

He shouldn’t have. He really shouldn’t have.

“I’ll even trade you – I bought you the bottle of Egon Muller-Scharzhof Scharzhofberger Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese you requested, after all.”

—so Dazai’s ignoring his slip. Fine, he can work with that.

“I didn’t see any unfamiliar charges on my card. How did you manage to hide it from me?”

“I used my own, duh.”

“If you have a card – why don’t you ever use it then?!”

“Silly Chuuya, are you deaf? I said I used it already.”

“Why don’t you use it to buy the rest of your shit?!”

“Mm, it’s fun to see your reaction!” Dazai’s hands are a bit red from the mix of ground meat, tomatoes and some other spices. “Plus, you use them anyway, right?”

“Because you bought them using my money already!”

“Chuuya, your pasta – did you not want to cook them al dente?”

“Fuck—!” Chuuya hastily stores the bottles of wine inside the cooler, because proper temperatures and all are important in shaping how the wine will taste once opened. “Also, if that’s the case, then how much was the suit from last week? I’ll pay you back.”

“I forgot already.”

“It’s Alexander Amosu – it’s at least $90,000!”

“I threw away the receipts~~~♫”

“Urgh.”

“It’s a gift, midget. Don’t be rude about it.”

“URGH.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Great job on securing the venue.”
“Ah, thank you, Chuuya-san!” Higuchi’s enthusiastic acceptance of his words effectively drowns out the reactions of both Gin and Kyouka. The trio had been assigned with finding an open space big enough to handle the attendees and any fallouts that might happen, far enough from police stations so that everyone’s safe from an untimely arrest, quiet enough that there won’t be a gaggle of people gawking at the sight of notorious Yokohama citizens gathering in one place.

Most of the folding tables have already been set-up, cliché checkered tablecloth fitted over them. There’s an open grill, a pile of grilled pork chops and some yakitori already done. Because they’ve survived this long by not being entirely stupid, during the picnic planning, it’s been decided that there’s only a few people allowed to man the grill (Hirotsu-san, Ane-san, Yosano, Lucy, himself). There’s also a couple of people explicitly banned from approaching the grill’s five-meter radius (Dazai, Elise, Mori-san, Motojirou, Atsushi). Atsushi’s pretty well-behaved compared to the rest of the people in the ban list, but his klutzy tendencies don’t inspire trust, especially now that he has no supernatural healing abilities anymore.

Chuuya’s planned back-and-forth trips to his car has been cut in half, since a lightly-bouncing Atsushi is eager to volunteer in helping him out with carrying the multitudes of Tupperware containing food (though he has this very huge inkling that Atsushi’s offer is less about altruism and more about smelling the food ahead of everyone else).

Atsushi’s antics, of course, prompts Akutagawa to offer assistance as well (he’s trained well, so very whipped), though the man’s unfortunate enough to inherit his mentor’s useless, skinny arms; without Rashomon, he’s hardly any help when it comes to lifting. Lucy smirks at the coughing man, smugly carrying two big boxes at once with her.

Because Dazai is Dazai, the man only assists with taking care of the drinks cooler by emptying it bottle by bottle, already distributing the drinks between himself, Hirotsu-san and Yosano. In the next moment, Dazai’s pouring some of his less-aged wine to something that looks like a punchbowl manned by Kunikida.

He tries to catch the other’s attention to alert him of Dazai’s nefarious plans, but he isn’t getting the message across. Nevertheless, despite the potential for future chaos, for now, things are more-or-less peaceful, as peaceful as things could be with such a mix of personalities. It helps a lot that both Mori-san and Fukuzawa haven’t arrived yet.

“Don’t think about what they’re doing to be late~♫” Dazai singsongs against his ear as soon as he puts down the last of the food containers. “Don’t think about them being cuddly and—”

Chuuya slams his left hand against Dazai’s stupid mouth, spouting off disgusting things and now, good god, he’s starting to imagine Mori-san removing his tie and—guh. He flicks the man’s nose off after he feels Dazai try to lick his gloves. “I hate you so fucking much.”

“You’re not alone in worrying about why they’re late,” Hirotsu-san says mildly as he drinks straight from the bottle. He’s still in his usual outfit and he looks so very done with the world—or in Mori-san, in general. Same, really. “Kouyou-kun went back to make sure that they weren’t being inappropriate.”

“Or dead.”

Hirotsu-san lifts his bottle in half-acknowledgement, half-cheers towards Yosano and her words. “Or dead.”

“I am not dressed for a funeral,” Chuuya remarks flatly, looking down at his button-down shirt and soft slacks. “Or a police interrogation, for that matter.”
“The Port Mafia Boss should always be ready for extenuating circumstances,” Yosano teases him as she gently swats his hand away from trying to reach for the drinks cooler.

Dazai catches his wayward hand and traps it in his own to prevent him from drinking his own wine. What a fucking bastard, really.

“Then it’s great that I’m not the Boss right now,” Chuuya teases right back, ignoring the way Dazai’s fingers interlace with his own, tight enough to ground him, loose enough that he can pull away anytime he pleased.

“Chuuya-san, I think there’s something that looks… funny on the pasta.”

“I think we should inspect it,” Dazai chimes in to support Atsushi, tugging Chuuya away from the congregation of heavy drinkers. “It sounds serious.”

Chuuya sighs heavily, but it’s coated in fondness, because really. “You both know that I do know that you just want to eat it ahead of everyone, right.”

“Are you accusing me of lying?” Dazai’s exaggerated affronted look is all wide eyes, stretched-out gasp, one hand over his lips. “Me?”

“Yes.”

“Without hesitation whatsoever!” Dazai continues to showcase exaggerated indignation over being (rightly) accused of being a liar. “And here I thought we had a connection, a partnership—”

Atsushi interrupts the man’s dramas with both hands raised in a seemingly-placating gesture. “—you are kind of a liar, Dazai-san.”

“And even Atsushi too! I’ve been betrayed by my comrade! Alas—”

Chuuya rolls his eyes and just marches ahead towards the food, untangling his hand from Dazai’s. Atsushi follows him closely, food a clear priority to the younger man.

“Is it okay to leave him like that, Chuuya-san?”

“He’s too dramatic, it’s causing me a headache.”

Atsushi winces in sympathy. “And he’s like that with you every day?”

“Urgh, don’t remind me.”

“But you do manage to stay together without killing each other…”

Chuuya perks up at the wistful tone, focuses his attention on Atsushi. After squinting a bit, he grabs Atsushi’s arm to stop the man from reaching the table. He leans in closer, so he can hiss his words next to the other’s face: “Are you planning on moving in with Akutagawa?!”

“I—I’m, not, well, it’s, he spent the night, and—the morning after—breakfast—so domestic, I just, forever, I kind of want—every single day?”

“You make no fucking sense,” Chuuya declares with a frown, slapping Atsushi’s arm. “Get your head together, Atsushi. You can’t just make a decision like that under duress! At least make a decision while he’s not within ogling distance!”

“He—apron—domestic, he was—so I want to see—I want to see him in apron every day!”
“Then take a picture of him wearing an apron and make it your lock screen?”

“Also—duress—ah, maybe, but—so cute, help me.”

“Did you hit your head or have you always been like this?”

“He did it again this morning.”

Chuuuya blanches, letting the other’s arm go. “I did not want to know that.”

“No—uh—not that—well, yes, but apron! Cooking! Good morning kiss!”

“Stop yelling!”

Dazai cuts in smoothly, having recovered from his drama outtake. “You two do realize that I can hear you both?”

“It doesn’t matter if you know,” Chuuya says the same time Atsushi half-complains with a, “It’s not like Chuuya-san can keep it a secret from you later anyway.”

“Hey! I do know how to keep a secret!”

“I know,” Atsushi replies just-as-harried, “but Dazai-san.”

Damn, he’s right. Annoying bastard manages to scent secrets so easily. “Urgh. Dazai.”

“I’m right here, you know!”

“We know,” Chuuya puts up a long-suffering sigh. And then, once Dazai leans so much closer, nearly collapsing against him, elbow resting on his shoulder—“Don’t make me into your arm-rest, asshole!”

Dazai simpers, keeping his arm in place. “But you’re so short!”

“Fuck off and die.”

“You’re shortness is perfect for me, don’t worry about it.”

“I DON’T WORRY ABOUT IT!”

Atsushi watches their bickering with a discerning eye. “Hmm, well at least, I do know that my house with Akutagawa would be much more peaceful…”

“Akutagawa-kun could be rowdy in his own way!”

“Somehow, I don’t see that kid being rowdy at all,” Chuuya defends the man loyally. Also, because Dazai likes lies and dramatics too much to not lie every other sentence.

“Do you think he’ll dance with me if he’s drunk?!”

Chuuuya laughs as he remembers Akutagawa avoiding beer like his life depends on it. “I think it’s more likely that you’ll get drunk first.”

“Mmm, we can enjoy some wild drunken dancing together then…”

“Snap him out of this delusion,” Chuuya jabs his own elbow against Dazai’s liver, but because the bastard is an annoying bastard, he doesn’t even flinch from his attack.
“Eh, why not let him enjoy his young love fantasies…”

“Akutagawa would probably murder him in cold blood if he learns of this drinking plan.” Chuuya subtly shifts the covers on the food once he notices Atsushi’s drool trickling down again. Of course, it could be because he’s imagining the drunken dancing, but Chuuya’s confident that his food trumps imaginary Akutagawa’s uncoordinated flailing. “And then we won’t have a wedding to go to. Your shiny new tux will collect dust.”

“There’s still The Guild’s…”

“For the record: John only invited me.”

“But you can bring a plus-one, right??”

“I can, but I won’t.”

“Stingy!”

“You don’t even know them!”

(John had mentioned, during their Skype chat the other afternoon – that they wanted to ask him to play Violin Sonata in G minor, B.g5 during the reception.

He tried his best to not inquire about John’s sleeping habits – it was nearly dawn then, on John’s timezone; there was a deep purple bruise on John’s chin then and he really didn’t ask.

Unfortunately, Dazai had then passed by his bedside desk, peered into the camera perched atop his computer screen. Dazai had then superficially-politely offered a brand of concealer to help cover the hickey really well. He drifted off towards the bathroom, but the damage had been done.

After the chat, Dazai had commented as to how playing the Devil’s Trill during a wedding reception didn’t seem like a great soundtrack to celebrate a happy couple. Unless maybe it was Fitzgerald’s way of announcing that he was the Devil? Chuuya didn’t ask text John about that, despite Dazai’s persistent whining.)

“I kicked their ass!”

“That doesn’t count,” Chuuya argues, then backtracks. He shoves Dazai away so he can glare at the smug asshole’s face. “Plus – I did the ass-kicking. I fucking kicked his face!”

“Fitzgerald must have been blinded during the attack of our dear Atsushi and Akutagawa…”

“I didn’t destroy his face, what the fuck.”

Plus the only thing that happened to John’s face then was mature into sadness, but it made him more handsome, to be honest. And his fiancé noticed him after that transformation, so.

“Mm, that’s true, because that would mean that your puny, little feet packed that much strength…”

“Oh, I’ll let you taste this feet—”

“Please don’t do it in front of me…” Atsushi starts off mournfully, making a face like he’s been transported back to his orphanage. The expression clears though as he considers his words a little more. “…Actually, I might get some tips? So you can go ahead?”

“Please don’t,” Akutagawa interrupts, coughing his way to their little party. “I haven’t eaten
anything yet and wouldn’t want to ruin my appetite.”

“Implying that you wouldn’t throw up after you see Chuuya’s puny, little feet?” Dazai’s smirking as he regards his ex-subordinate, who’s not-very-subtly escaping from the excitement happening one table away.

But then again, Ranpo and Motojirou simultaneously arguing about recent scientific breakthroughs and vowing to test them right at that very moment… That’s bound to be stressful.

Miyazawa Kenji’s volunteering himself for any experiments – and Elise, who’s there already, early and safely away from Mori-san, is busy braiding the tips of the blond’s wayward bangs, so she goes along for the ride. Kunikida’s on his second cup of (unknown-to-him) spiked punch, so he’s rowdier and louder than usual when it comes to lecturing them all about propriety and common sense and order. Higuchi’s fluctuating between being scandalized by Motojirou’s behavior and being interested in the crazy shit happening; Gin’s just watching the spectacle from a safe distance away, though she’s also keeping an eye out on her brother’s skulking. Tachihara’s hovering near Gin – hmm, is he…? probably best not to have Akutagawa notice that then – staring at his direction, so he waves a little, smiles a bit in encouragement. Tachihara seems to get the message, because he blushes hard enough for it to be obvious.

Poe’s beside them earlier—but now, he’s been apparently dragged by Yosano towards the drinking corner so he can be grilled about his intentions about their Agency’s ‘Dearly Beloved Innocent Fluffball’. Chuuya doesn’t believe it one bit, but it looks like Poe does believe that Edogawa Ranpo is hiding a fluffy innocence underneath the snarky exterior. To be that gullible… he doesn’t envy the guy one bit.

The Tanizaki Siblings are supposedly helping set up some of the activities for later (wow, they’re really aiming for a teambuilding vibe here) – but they’re suspiciously absent and he resolutely blocks any memories of singsong words from Naomi about her plans for her brother.

Chuuya then spots and waves at Lucy and Kyouka standing guard near his car, presumably so they can catch Ane-san before she makes her way to the picnic. She’s bound to be in a bad mood from her errand, so she’ll definitely need to fawn over Kyouka and her newest best friend to regain her cheer.

All in all, it’s pretty peaceful.

So of course, he’s jinxed himself. Akutagawa’s next words are of course bound to give him a headache: “Chuuya-san’s feet are fine.”

Dazai’s smug smirk falls off so quickly that Chuuya gets a whiplash just watching him. “—you’ve seen them when, where, why, how?”

“…in the Port Mafia?” Akutagawa says very slowly, similar to the way Dazai lengthens the syllables when he’s thinking Chuuya’s being particularly obtuse (for the record: he isn’t, he just doesn’t have the same train of thought as a batshit asshat).

“Akutagawa-kun~♪” Dazai says it with such a light-hearted singsong that it rings alarm bells in Chuuya’s mind. He sounds exactly like when he’s about to lock the door so he can have some so-called quality time with prisoners about to be tortured.

Chuuya cuts in before Dazai tries to antagonize Akutagawa even more (because that means that Atsushi will jump into the fray, and once Atsushi joins, both Kyouka and Lucy will definitely help out, and if those two are involved, there’s the wrath of Ane-san to be faced—).
“I know you’ve betrayed the Port Mafia, but you could at least have the decency to remember that we do have shower rooms. And infirmary. And lockers there.” Chuuya doesn’t hear everyone in the picnic collectively hold their breath as they hear him broach the subject of Dazai’s betrayal in public. “…Or are you exhibiting signs of aging, oldie?”

“…you’re older than me, shortstuff.”

“Fuck you, at least I have a babyface.”

“Pffft, I’ve never heard anyone be proud of that.”

Dazai chuckles – he’s not giggling, is he? that’s disturbing, too much for what he’s hoping to be a lovely day – while clutching at his stomach with one hand and draping an arm over Chuuya’s shoulders with another.

Akutagawa looks spooked – everyone else has similar reactions, but Chuuya doesn’t notice them and Akutagawa’s look so extreme, all wide, round eyes and he looks like he’s stopped breathing. He sort of gets it – Dazai rarely laughs like this, all mirth and zero untoward intentions. Dazai laughing probably looks like the coming of the Devil or something equally horrifying.

Curling his arm tighter around Chuuya’s shoulders, Dazai continues: “And I won’t let you distract me. Why the hell are you showing off your feet to Akutagawa?”

“What the fuck is your deal with my feet?!”

Akutagawa’s horror softens a little bit, before it sharpens to unimpressed disdain. He doesn’t say anything, simply snorts. Then coughs.

Dazai whines so very loudly the entire picnic can hear them. “They’re puny, little feet that are so cute and petite!”

“How can feet be cute?” Chuuya looks at his feet, but no answers come. His shoes are so-so today, because he didn’t want to use any of his new purchases, not when there’s a chance someone (either Kunikida or Akutagawa) will throw up on his shoes. He wriggles his toes inside his shoes and no answer still. “Also, stop calling me small!”

“I said you’re puny and petite, you deaf old bat.”

“I’m not old and I’m not deaf!”

“Mm, but you have cute feet.”

“Again, how?!”

“Why are you asking me?” Dazai asks with too-round eyes. “They’re your feet.”

“How should I know?! You’re the only one who calls them cute!”

Dazai’s voice turns steely again, mood swings at full force. Chuuya jabs his elbow over the other’s kidney this time, but it doesn’t dislodge the leech-octopus-demon-hybrid. “Akutagawa-kun doesn’t find your feet cute?”

Akutagawa’s quick to respond, much quicker than how Rashomon used to activate. “I have no opinions, positive, negative or neutral, regarding Chuuya-san’s feet.”

“You said they were fine earlier.”
“I was lying, Dazai-san.” Akutagawa replies quickly again, then adds: “I learned from the best, after all.”

Atsushi laughs and joins their arms together (with only a bit of awkwardness and coughing, he’s so proud of them—well, not about the cough, though—he makes a mental note to check on stronger antibiotic treatment therapies for Akutagawa, maybe Yosano has some contacts?) in solidarity in calling Dazai a fucking liar who lies. Chuuya’s tempted to cross the distance and go with the two as well, because an anti-Dazai coalition is in the works and that’s one checkmark on his personal goals for this picnic. Rather unfortunately, Dazai’s hold on him is stickier than a slug’s.

Dazai claps his hands in glee though—because, figures. “I knew you’d admit I was the best!”

“At lying,” Chuuya reminds the man, but it’s buried underneath Kunikida’s sudden, undignified screaming.

He feels a chill run up his spine and freeze his mind.

Mori-san’s here.

With Fukuzawa.

Fuck.

☆ ☆ ☆

Ideally—

So it’s not exactly a surprise.

There’s no age limit on love (or so they say in TV Shows, but he’s never seen a romance show or a movie, for that matter, that focuses on love between older people, so maybe there is an age limit).

There are no more Abilities now, no more Big Bad that needs to be sealed away, no more enemy factions eager to spill blood across fiercely-protected borders.

There shouldn’t be anything stopping a romance from blossoming.

Also ideally—Chuuya’s not frozen due to his mind quitting on him (smart thing, his mind, running for the hills ahead of the rest of his consciousness), because.

Because ideally—Chuuya’s not gaping at the sight of Mori-san and Fukuzawa approaching their picnic, with arms linked together, wearing matching garish oversized Hawaiian shirts (that neon pink with sunflower-yellow print burns his eyes) and cargo shorts, flipflops on their feet.

“Did nobody fucking tell them they weren’t going to the beach,” Chuuya ends up managing to say, though it isn’t too loud—because not a lot has reacted—or maybe it’s too loud and everybody else just has been abandoned by higher brain functions. Same, really.

“Why were these beasts unleashed to the wild,” Dazai whines in commiseration. “Plus it’s damn cold, why the hell is that guy showing off his hairy legs.”

Ane-san’s speed-walking towards them, not because she misses them, but because she looks like
she needs a drink. Or ten. Her hand is already stretched out when she’s about five steps away; Hirotsu-san’s ready for her, with a glass tumbler that has four fingers of whisky. It disappears quickly—and Mori-san and Fukuzawa hasn’t moved more than five steps forward, not for lack of trying. But Mori-san’s attempting to link their fingers together too, while the Agency’s President is smart enough to avoid giving Mori-san too much at once. The result is a glacial pace interspersed by two old men squabbling over holding hands.

How is this his life, twenty-five years, really.

“Hey there Chuu-nii,” Kyusaku (don’t-call-me-Q-for-now) greets him with a demure smile that he knows hides daggers. He’s apparently with Ane-san today. He doesn’t mind, mostly because moving on, he’s moving on, he doesn’t need to discuss anything with Q, it’s not like he had full control of his Ability then. The faces and names and lives of his subordinates don’t flash as painfully now, on the blue-moon-rare occasions he crosses paths with the young teen. He also doesn’t mind, despite the annoying nickname, because Q’s hostility towards Dazai now manifests in magnificent cold shoulders.

“How’s it going?”

“Hey,” he returns with a smile. It comes out as a grimace, because Mori-san is still within the periphery. “I haven’t chased my home tutor out yet.”

It should be normal for most people, but for Q, that’s a milestone. So Chuuya tries for another smile, a proud one, as he pats Q’s head. “Such a mom, Chuuya~~~♫”

“Well, you’re definitely not my dad, u-zai,” Q counters, sticking his tongue out childishly.

“You are annoying,” Chuuya rolls his eyes, but he turns to Q and tells him to mind his manners and not stoop so low as Dazai.

“You’re the one who’s literally lower,” Dazai mutters petulantly, but Chuuya silences him with a kick to the shin.

The picnic more-or-less goes well – the guests have more-or-less collectively decided to huddle close together on one side, which is not-so-coincidentally the furthest they could be from their organizations’ respective leaders. Mori-san doesn’t seem to mind, delighting in being able to publicly display his manipulative ways of getting Fukuzawa to relax with him. For the most part, Fukuzawa seems pacified by the kitten half on his lap (the other half is on Mori-san’s, because that’s apparently their compromise for Mori-san taming the animal for him), a tiny fuchsia-colored scarf on the kitten.

Right now, there’s an ongoing game of charades, words to be guessed coming from each of the guests, written on small patches of paper folded the exact same way to appease Kunikida’s sense of order. Each one who makes a wrong guess or takes more than the expected time is eliminated from the game. Atsushi’s the first to go, which is probably his plan all along, because he gets to
hang around the food and eat without anyone else disturbing him.

Though to call it a game now isn’t exactly right – there are three participants left and they’re all able to guess the words within ten seconds. Chuuya acquiesces to providing more obscure words to Naomi – names of some French poem, brands of couture gowns, cities that have not yet become mainstream vacation destinations – because now everyone else is getting apprehensive of the way Dazai and Mori-san are sniping at each other murderously after each correct guess. Edogawa Ranpo’s complaining about how this is too easy for him.

Chuuuya excuses himself to go to the public bathroom – and once he’s back, Ranpo’s apparently won and Dazai’s sulking in one corner.

He really shouldn’t, but Chuuya sighs and drags a chair beside Dazai’s and lets the other whine at the question’s unfairness and how he got eliminated before Mori-san.

He doesn’t kick him in the shin or jab him on his kidneys, this time.

☆ ☆ ☆

As they’re all pitching in on cleaning up – thankfully, there’s not a lot of blood (not-so-thankfully, Motojirou’s all energy despite the nasty cut on his arm, but only because Yosano’s patching him up and he’s practically vibrating in his seat) – from the picnic, Chuuya manages to decline a tentative invitation from Atsushi to have lunch with Akutagawa and Dazai.

He doesn’t turn down an invitation to drink with Ane-san, Hirotsu-san and Yosano next Friday. He doesn’t turn down an invitation from Lucy and Kyouka for a foodtrip; Higuchi hears about it and Higuchi invites herself for a shopping expedition after. He promises to help Kunikida look for an antique book of poems on Tuesday; on Wednesday, he’s going to accompany Atsushi to a pet grooming salon for his cat. Thursday is for Akutagawa to be brought for a new round of check-ups — the man doesn’t know it yet, but Gin does, so he can count on her to make sure Akutagawa doesn’t make too much of a fuss.

“You’ve got a busy week,” Dazai remarks as Chuuya marks his appointments, old-fashioned enough to actually write them down, on an opera-cream planner. Dazai then snaps a picture of his appointments, cheekily saying: “You might be senile enough to forget them, so this is for back-up~”

“Hmph – don’t mess around with my appointments.”

It’s a futile call, because he doesn’t control what Dazai does. All he can do is make his kick extra-painful once the time comes.

Chuuuya drives them back to his apartment; Dazai slips a handful of yen to the guards in the lobby to help bring the empty food containers up.

“You’re so fucking lazy.”

“Mm, it’s your money anyway~~”

“Urgh, you’re such an ass.”
Chuuya tugs at his clothes, some streaks of crimson on them. They’re on a lump by his bathroom floor once he’s done stripping them away from his body, but before he can google a way to effectively remove the bloodstains, Dazai’s already picking them up, bundling them in his hands. He’s only slightly irritated that Dazai’s just waltzing into his bathroom while he’s stark naked, but he can’t be too annoyed given that Dazai will be handling his laundry.

It’s a fairly tiring day.

Chuuya’s thinking about today’s events – his mind skipping over scenes that involve Mori-san and Fukuzawa for the sake of his sanity – as he settles inside his bathtub, eyes half-lidded as the warm water fills his space comfortably.

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Once Chuuya opens his eyes, he’s neatly tucked in, blanket and comforter pulled up to his neck. It’s warm, like he’s floating in a toasty oven.

The curtains are drawn; his view of his bedside table’s clock is blocked by Dazai reclining against the headboard with a book in hand. The brown hair looks soft and mildly wet from a shower, the scent of apples and the warmth making him think of apple pies. With the way the blanket is drawn over Dazai’s body – oh, they’re sharing a blanket – he’s able to see the navy blue robe loose around Dazai’s chest, no bandages peeking out from the space above the topmost button. Long, oversized sleeves nearly cover Dazai’s fingers as he flips to the next page.

He looks comfortable and sleepy. Looking at Dazai, surrounded by Chuuya’s things, by the dim glow of his bedside lamp, makes him feel boneless, sated.

Chuuya’s sure that he doesn’t make any sort of noise, but Dazai’s attention swings to him anyway. There’s a smirk on Dazai’s face as he tilts the book’s cover towards him, but it looks unbearably soft, like it will melt if Chuuya touches it.

It’s probably the tiredness. Or the apple-cinnamon smell. Or the way the yellowish glow from his lamp pushes back all the shadows in this room except for Dazai.

He reaches out with one hand, the sleeves on his own oversized robe sliding back the jut of his wrist, touches the edge of Dazai’s lips. It does melt, the smirk dissolving into the hazy glow, replaced by a tentative smile that Chuuya doesn’t know how to handle. He hasn’t seen it on Dazai’s face before.

“Didn’t they tell you to always update your passwords and locks?” Dazai asks with a tone that tries to be teasing, but only ends up hushed.

He breathes against Chuuya’s fingers, the warmth hitting his fingertips directly without his gloves to intercept. He doesn’t remember getting out of the bathtub and he definitely doesn’t remember changing to his sleeping robe. It’s strange, to see Dazai’s preference for him to walk around gloveless inside his apartment, to see the ugly burst of black-red veins instead of smooth black leather.

“Stop messing around with my poems,” he replies with the same hushed quality. He hasn’t published his poems for this month yet. He hasn’t started on it yet, to be honest, but he thinks about the company earlier, the easy banter, the blanket of crisp, dead leaves.
He presses his fingertips harder against Dazai’s face – if Dazai’s face was made of glass, his fingerprints could be smudged there forever. The thought makes him press even harder. Dazai doesn’t even flinch.

It’s entirely possible that Dazai has located his diary as well – it’s in the same safe as his book of poems – but he supposes that there’s no thrill to reading it. Dazai’s been there for every single memory transcribed in those pages, after all.

Dazai’s leaning sideways, Chuuya’s hand falling from his face and dropping into the diminishing space between them, right on top the bunched pile of blanket and comforter. The room’s warmth is so very different from the coldness outside, the gentle softness on Dazai’s face so very different from the expressions Chuuya has memorized and analyzed before, when he was trying to do his best for their partnership.

The tentative smile is gone, but there’s an expression in Dazai’s eyes that Chuuya’s familiar with. He’s seen it while he’s at a bar with Dazai, drinking together like buddies as part of their cover, while Dazai pretends to be a third-rate gentleman who sidles close to the prettiest woman in the vicinity, moments before he kisses her.

“…you’re planning to kiss me?”

Chuuya’s whisper-thin question escapes him in slow increments, reins slipping out from his hands. His hands are motionless, one underneath the blankets and one trapped between the bed and Dazai’s chest.

Dazai’s looming over him, his body weight distributed over Chuuya’s arm and his own elbow. Dazai’s face is pressed against his, their foreheads and noses knocked together, close enough that Chuuya closes his eyes eventually so he doesn’t get crossed-eyed.

“I plan to do a lot of things to you, Chuuya,” Dazai responds in an equally-slow drawl, the words vibrating in-between the air they breathe. With how close their lips are, Chuuya’s surprised that Dazai doesn’t just murmur his words as a kiss and be done with it.

But he knows Dazai is Dazai.

Chuuya doesn’t reply and Dazai stills for a minute, before sighing, moving, brushing his lips against the tip of Chuuya’s nose, moving, brushing a feather-light kiss on the space between his eyes, moving, brushing a hard press of lips on the dead center of his forehead, moving, brushing Chuuya’s hair with a kiss that threatens to pin his soul down like needles on a butterfly.

Chuuya doesn’t speak still, even as Dazai’s hand settles over his arm and against his back, even as Dazai scents his hair in steady breaths, even as Dazai moves impossibly closer to trap both of his hands between them.

Chuuya keeps his eyes closed the entire time, sleep already beckoning to him.

Traitorously, he thinks about how good it would be if they could just exist like this forever.

Chapter End Notes

• feedback is always lovely ♥♥♥
• next chapter should cover the months of november to december, plus halloween!
Attending a Halloween party with Motojirou isn’t exactly how he’d envisioned this date, but he supposes that it’s much better than hanging out in the man’s labs and helping him mix some chemicals. Especially since Motojirou’s current obsession is making lemon-flavored beer that acts as a low-grade aphrodisiac, in order to catch Yosano’s eye.

(Multiple times, Chuuya had tried—and failed—to knock some sense to the scientist, quite literally, because Yosano’s an actual doctor who wouldn’t hesitate to crush his balls if he tries to drug her into accepting a date with him.)

(Plus, she dislikes men weak enough to resort to bribes and drugs and outside influence to showcase their appeal. What Motojirou’s planning will surely get him rejected faster than a bullet...
“We could do trick-or-treat after—if they don’t give us candy, we’d throw a lemon bomb at them! It’s genius!”

“It’s not,” Chuuya says as calmly as he can. It’s standard fare for Motojirou anyway. “If you want candy, I’ll buy them for you. If you want to throw bombs instead, let’s go back to your lab. Pick one.”

Motojirou sniffs at his fun being reined in, but recovers quickly as soon as he spots some very realistic monster costume. Chuuya allows himself to be tugged along, smoothing over any sparks in the conversation that appears whenever Motojirou’s grabby hands land too close to the cosplayer.

The costume inspection ends with a stinging slap on Chuuya’s face, because he did the right thing and shoved Motojirou away when the cosplayer had had enough of the other’s fumbling with her costume. Motojirou’s half-apologizing, half-complaining about overly-sensitive people, as they walk with as much dignity they can muster out of the party.

The apologies and complaints taper off to stuttered mumbling—and Chuuya, who’s walking half-a-step behind Motojirou, busy nursing his cheek, crashes into the man when Motojirou stops walking abruptly.

“What—”

Motojirou’s sudden high-pitched exclamation stops Chuuya from completing his question. “You see, ahaha, I can explain, Dazai-san—!!”

“What the fuck are you doing here,” Chuuya asks the man wearing a matching vampire costume with him. Chuuya’s suit is altered to hug his body tightly enough to hint at the muscle definition of his legs, but the all-black suit coupled with a blood-red tie (he has great taste in gifts, if he may so himself) looks unfairly better on Dazai. It’s not because he’s taller, okay?! It’s just the fit and Dazai looks skanky and shady enough to pass as a vampire even without a costume.

(“I don’t need your permission~♫,” Dazai from three years ago would have said, Chuuya could hear the phantom voice, somehow, faint and almost-disappearing.)

Instead, now—

Dazai is smiling, razor-sharp, made even sharper with a fake fang on the edge of his lips.

“Motojirou-kun~~♫”

Motojirou has two hands raised in frantic surrender: “I have the name and picture of the girl who slapped Chuuya-san!”

Dazai doesn’t reply, but he brisk-walks towards where Chuuya is, one black-gloved hand turning Chuuya’s face by the chin, inspecting the faint flush on his cheek from the slap supposedly for Motojirou. Chuuya huffs and swats Dazai’s grabby hands away, holding the other’s wrist to stop him from storming inside to harass the other partygoers.

“I don’t need a goddamn bodyguard to go on a date with Motojirou.”

“Ew, I’m not your bodyguard,” Dazai quickly says, and it almost sounds genuine, disgust layered over his face. Chuuya knows that expression though, it’s Dazai’s I’m-lying-and-don’t-care-enough-to-disguise-it-because-I-know-you’ll-figure-it-out-anyway face. It’s annoying as hell.
“You’re here for this Halloween party, then.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I see.” Chuuya knows Dazai’s lying, can smell it off his skin, can spot it on the twitch of his eyes, really. There’s no point wasting time arguing though. Motojirou might be pining for someone else at the moment, but it’s still right to make their time together as nice as possible. Dazai isn’t going to help with that (it’s the opposite, he thinks). He takes a step away from the idiot stalker, links arms with the gaping Motojirou. “Then enjoy the party, bastard. We still have a date to continue, Motojirou.”

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“Is this really a date, Chuuya-san?”

“I’ll buy more food,” Chuuya promises, already clicking on his phone for another delivery restaurant nearby.

Motojirou’s still wearing his Hobo Albert Einstein costume (in short: just his usual clothes), as he pours something that smells like bleach, something that looks like lye, something that hisses like muriatic acid to a beaker. Chuuya takes a subtle step away from the table where Motojirou’s mixing his strange concoction – his suit is rather nice, he’d rather not have it torn into scraps because of yet another explosion.

“I mean, Dazai-san—”

“Stalking me is part of his entertainment,” Chuuya says with a flip of his hand, takes another step away when he hears the beaker vibrate when Motojirou adds another element to his mixture.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I think it’s something that you should worry about.”

“It’s fine. And I ordered some two boxes of pizza. That good?”

“It’s gourmet pizza?”

“Yeah – they deliver 24/7.” Chuuya doesn’t mention that he’s become a fairly regular customer to the pizza place – or rather, his credit card is familiar to them, no thanks to Dazai ordering from them every week, trying out new flavors each time.

“So it’s fine if you stalk someone, huh?”

“Don’t stalk Yosano, she’ll kill you…” Chuuya grimaces when Motojirou starts getting a far-away look in his eyes. And it’s obvious despite the goggles and it’s not making him feel any confident about this new acid thing he’s making. “…And not in a fun way, stop being a weird pervert.”

“But Dazai-san does it!”

Chuuya huffs in annoyance, his arms on his hips as soon as he pockets his phone. “Since when is Dazai a great role model?”

“Hmm… you make sense, Chuuya-san.”
“You don’t have to sound so surprised.”

“But isn’t it a waste?”

“Hm?”

“You got matching costumes and all. We could have scheduled our date to some other day. To be honest, I’m not sure why we’re even going out on a ‘date’…?”

“It’s not a matching costume,” Chuuya denies even though it totally is. But then again, all that’s needed for a vampire costume is a nice suit, some fake blood, some fake fangs. It’s not that difficult to match. “Yeah, I know. You’d prefer to go out with Yosano. Tough luck.”

“That’s true, but that’s not really what I meant…?”

Chuuya frowns at that, thinks whether he should warn Yosano about possible stalkers starting tomorrow. But then his nose catches a whiff of something that smells like it’s going to explode in the next ten seconds—

“Goddamn it, Motojirou!”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Do you think there’s an open arcade at this time…?”

Chuuya’s wary at the question – because it’s pretty late and there’s some soot clinging to his suit still. He can already imagine the bitching Dazai will passive-aggressively do once he comes back.

But then again, maybe he can send it for dry-cleaning before Dazai arrives…?

He’s wearing a skanky vampire costume in a party filled with drunk partygoers, it’d be easy for him to convince someone to a double suicide, before ultimately getting slapped. He’s probably dancing some slow-dance with some monster-girl with cat-ears right now, right after he sends a picture of the costume and sends it to his protégé who’ll undoubtedly be traumatized by it. He’s probably leaning in closer and murmuring nonsense about subjectivity and leaps of faith—god, when would he ever understand that not everyone’s into philosophical discussions about Kierkegaard and matters of life and death? He’s probably whispering it directly to her ear, about how sickness unto death makes it urgent for a double suicide now, there’s a nice bridge just a few blocks away. He’s probably sealing the deal by placing his hands on her hips, his mouth barely-grazing her non-cat-ear—

“—you see, Chuuya-san, I know you don’t have your Ability anymore, but you kinda like when you’re under Corruption…?”

Chuuya blinks and realizes that there’s a pulverized card in his hands. It’s a call-card given by the oh-so-helpful fireman from Motojirou’s ‘scientific emergency’, who had asked if Chuuya had wanted some special lessons about fire safety. He had accepted because Dazai nearly burnt down his kitchen the other day when he had attempted some clay roast thing. Chuuya thinks the fireman probably has other intentions with his invitation as subtle as a sledgehammer to the face, but now it doesn’t matter anymore, because Chuuya has shredded the card unknowingly.
Stupid fucking Dazai, invading his thoughts, making him want to murder people instead.

So Chuuya instead sighs and cups his hands together so he can throw the pitiful remains of the call-card on the next trashcan they can find. “I thought you were a genius, Motojirou.”

“Hmm, you really believe that, Chuuya-san?! You’re too nice to me! Of course, it’s true, but it’s still good of you to agree! Do you think Yosano-san will—?”

“Maybe don’t blow anything up first,” Chuuya says mildly, already mentally listing an order for more bandages in the headquarters’ infirmary. He supposes that it will take at least ten date attempts for Yosano to tone down her use of scalpels against Motojirou for daring to encroach in her personal space with a ten-meter radius.

“Hmm – do you think there are still some stationery stores open?”

“What do you plan to do?” Chuuya asks warily, stepping away slightly because he’s spotted a roadside trashcan.

“I was thinking, I could leave a bomb in the front entrance—”

“No.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Maybe we should prank Dazai-san!”

It’s in bad form, but Chuuya somehow wishes this night to end already. He managed to keep Motojirou to two explosions in four hours and that’s frankly a great improvement already. He can persevere, really.

Though if he wishes to keep Motojirou in one piece – he’s a fine asset for the Port Mafia, eccentricities aside, really, and everyone has their own quirks, right? – he needs to put a lid on this insanity. “He’ll find a way to turn the prank on you and then you’d wish you were dead instead.”

“You think that highly of him!”

Motojirou’s lucky to not have crossed paths with Dazai while in the Port Mafia; he hasn’t witnessed the Dazai Osamu Greatest Hits when it comes to torturing his opponents into seeking deaths by their own hands just to escape from his personal brand of cruelty. Or silly entertainment, as the Dazai back then used to say.

“Well, if you really wish to experience suffering…”

That’s what he says, though inside, he’s thinking about ways to knock Motojirou out. It’d be better to endure his whining tomorrow than have to deal with a mutilated, humiliated body tonight. The Port Mafia is made up of individuals who are cutthroat when it comes to protecting their turf, the space they’ve carved out for themselves, but it will not last if the individuals don’t last either. He has to protect Motojirou somehow.

(Yosano doesn’t count, because she won’t truly kill him or harm him irreparably. Dazai, on the other hand…)
“Please make it my epitaph, Chuuya-san, if it becomes like that.”

“What, ‘here lies Motojirou Kajii, who didn’t fucking listen to Chuuya’?”

“Eh, that will do.”

“So you wish to do what, exactly?”

“I’ll pretend to make-out with someone to make Dazai-san jealous!”

“That won’t work,” Chuuya feels the need to correct the path Motojirou’s on, because if he’s going to die anyway from dealing with Dazai, it’d be better to not go for something so stupid. The two of them make their way back to the party they were kicked out from, hoping to catch Dazai there. (Well, he actually doesn’t hope for that, it’d be much better if Dazai’s drinking sake somewhere instead, everyone’s happier that way.)

“Is Dazai-san that confident?”

“That guy doesn’t feel jealousy,” Chuuya explains with a shrug, adjusting the cuffs on his suit. Because why would Dazai be jealous? Despite his douchebaggery being well-known, he still manages to snag beautiful women here and there with just a few well-placed touches, with just a few drops of his voice. Though he hasn’t been asked to help stop some lady from having a mental breakdown after being dumped by Dazai recently, has he? Maybe the Dazai charm has faded already? A bit unlikely, but… “If what he has gets taken, it’s because he planned for it. And he’ll just get another one.”

“Are you talking about a particular… um, incident?”

“It’s how he works.” It’s how he’s always worked when he was still a mission partner to Chuuya. “He can’t feel jealous because he doesn’t even care anyway.”

“That… does sound like the legendary Mafia Executive.”

“It does, because he’s like that.”

“Though he’s not like that now, I think?”

And that’s the problem, Chuuya doesn’t say.

Because the guy who promised to never change has now changed so wildly that Chuuya finds it easier to just ignore everything, finds it much easier to cling to the things he know with certainty, even though he hates relying on his past.

But then again, isn’t that just like Dazai?

Changing alone, without telling Chuuya, without giving Chuuya a chance to catch up.

But he’s changed too, hasn’t he? He’s already changed a lot—

(And it’s a respite, since Corruption’s voice isn’t here anymore. Because that voice would surely hiss and cackle about him being stuck, as always.)

“Erm, Chuuya-san, you’re spacing out weirdly again…”

“Ah, maybe we should have just gone for the opera.” Chuuya knows that a lot of the Port Mafia members get surprised when they find out that Motojirou enjoys bombing the hell out of buildings
the same way he enjoys a particularly good *Faust*. “I’m sorry I’m not a very good date right now.”

“You really take this seriously, huh?”

“Maybe we can go on another date, to the opera and then drinks after?” And maybe he can control his spacing out by then.

“Nah, you’re great, so it’s fun, but Dazai-san will kill me.”

“We don’t need to follow his stupid schedule for my dates.”

“There’s *that*, but there’s also—ooooh, there’s Dazai-san!”

Chuuya doesn’t immediately look up, busy as he is with patting his suit to get all of the smoky smell and the soot off. They’ve walked all over Yokohama because Motojirou has very strong feelings about traffic (and his definition of traffic is any red stoplight) and maybe they should have walked a bit more because he hasn’t decided on how to best knock Motojirou out.

Dazai’s looking at them, from a few meters away. Chuuya’s line of sight to him becomes cut-off when Motojirou’s chest blocks the view, and then there are arms on his shoulders, pulling him closer – okay, he can work with this, he can headbutt Motojirou instead – so he leans in close as well, stands on his tiptoes, and—

*Oh.*

For someone with such skinny arms, Dazai was able to throw that fake plastic fang of his *really* hard. He kneels down at the fallen form of his date, a nasty lump at the back of his head already. It doesn’t look life-threatening, but—

“You couldn’t have, I don’t know, made sure he’s not concussed?”

“He’s trying to make me jealous, Chuuya.”

“You don’t feel jealous,” Chuuya says as he busies with laying Motojirou down on his folded suit jacket. He then takes out his phone and texts Yosano if she can help check if an associate of his is going to die within the next few hours. If Motojirou’s going to die by Dazai’s hands, because Chuuya’s not competent (or tall, or quick) enough to headbutt him, the least he can do is grant him a favor – a favor he’s too out of it to appreciate, but a favor nevertheless.

“…I don’t?”

Maybe this is a good chance to confirm that Dazai hasn’t changed and left him behind again.

“There’s no need, right?”

There’s heavy silence from Dazai’s end, the distant sounds of the party just a faint murmur to them. Chuuya’s phone beeps with Yosano’s agreement and her request for a good bottle of whisky in return for this favor.

“…I’ll help you take pictures of your favor to him.”

Dazai’s ignoring his questions – which is standard fare for Dazai. So that’s enough of an answer.

Right?
…Right.

“So I only have Naomi’s brother, Ranpo-san and Tachihara left?”

“Uh-huh. That should round up the year nicely, don’t you think?”

“Make sure that Tachihara’s date doesn’t coincide with Christmas. Or New Year.”

Dazai hums as he plays his newest game, cross-seated on a new warm sheepskin rug on the living room floor. “You’re unexpectedly cruel.”

“I’m not!” Chuuya protests hotly from his position on the couch, kicking the back of Dazai’s head, though admittedly with not as much force as he wanted. (It’s not because his legs are short, goddamnit. It’s because he’s going easy… no, not that either. Urgh.) “It’s just that… if it doesn’t work out, I don’t want to ruin his holidays!”

“…unexpectedly cruel, indeed.”

“Urgh, I hope you fucking lose.”

Dazai chuckles with unholy glee, adjusting backwards so that Chuuya’s outstretched foot can rest on his left shoulder. “Can’t you see my name on the high score list, Chuuya? Do you need glasses already?”

Chuuya replies by stabbing his right toe on the bastard’s ear, but Dazai merely chuckles again, as though he’s amused by Chuuya’s attempts at bodily harming him.

“I’ll look great in glasses.”

“You look great in anything.”

Chuuya stabs his ear again with his toe – or at least, attempts to, but Dazai plays the game one-handedly so he can tickle his foot with the other hand. Reflexively, Chuuya tries to pull his foot away, but Dazai leans in, trapping his calf between his shoulder and cheek.

“I’m not ticklish,” Chuuya resolutely says, even as his entire leg tingles from the intentional brush of Dazai’s fingers all over his feet. “And it’s weird to have you agree with me.”

“Unlike you, oldie, I’m not blind.”

“I’m not old, fuck you.”

“Compared to the lovely youngster, such as myself, you’re old, oldie~~~♫”

“Hmph. Plus the only reason you’re in the high score is because you’re the only one playing this game.”

“Oho, is that a challenge, shrimp?” Dazai pauses the game and turns to him, but the motion only drags his face against Chuuya’s leg. He’s not ticklish, damn it. Dazai’s next words rumble against his calf. “Want me to connect the game to the net and see the world record?”

“Whatever. And I’ll kick your ass.”
“Just because you’re good at martial arts doesn’t mean that you’re gonna be good at a fighting game too, you know~”

“Urgh, why are you complimenting me and insulting me at once?! It’s creepy! And annoying!”

“Mm, you’ve got such a nice calf, Chuuya.”

“That wasn’t an invitation to be creepier!”

“Ahh, I thought you wanted me to just compliment you without an insult.”

“Can’t you stop both?”

“I can, but why would I?”

“Just for that, I’m so kicking your ass.”

“You already kicked my face.”

“I’ll do so much more than that,” Chuuya promises as he snatches the second console from Dazai, the extremely wide TV screen showing the entry of P2 and the loading screen.

Dazai smirks at him, before blowing a raspberry against his skin. “…Please do.”

☆ ☆ ☆

Dazai’s slow-dancing with some monster-girl with cat-ears, no why should he do that when he can be slow-dancing with a flawless person, with a person who can see a few seconds to the future, to a person who managed to remain pure and noble and bright despite being in the Port Mafia, who has that much power but doesn’t get overwhelmed by it, doesn’t get out of control, doesn’t kill anyone but manages to remain pure and noble and bright, and it’s someone flawless like that, that Dazai seeks friendship with, that Dazai seeks equality with, that Dazai seeks—

Unlike everyone else who just kills and kills and kills, who rises from the ashes of people that’s been killed, killed, killed—

Compared to someone so flawless, he’s a disgrace, which is why Dazai didn’t seek friendship with him then, which is why Dazai treated him like a sheepdog despite being partners in name, which is why Dazai left him all alone—

But he’s not that anymore, he isn’t a disgrace anymore, not anymore, he’s tainted, but he’s not—

But his body is disintegrating, because all tainted things must eventually corrode away—

—!!!

Chuuya gasps and heaves and startles out of his nightmares of black-red spider-veins rising up from his foot and corroding his body. He looks down at his hands, vision unsteady from his sudden motion and from nausea and from unshed tears. He blinks and it’s still blurry and he can’t see his
hands, did he finally—

“—you’re here.” Chuuya swings his head, sweat making his hair stick to his skin, making his robe stick to his skin, making everything so sticky and sickly. “You’re here, with me.”

Chuuya’s gaze focuses, bit by bit, to the sight of Dazai cupping his face with one hand, another hand pressing a cool glass of water against his lips. He doesn’t need assistance to drink, he’s managed to survive with less, but his limbs are all frozen, still stuck in their corrosion. He opens his mouth a bit, feeling his face tilted slightly by the back of his neck so the water comes down more smoothly.

Once the glass is empty, Dazai’s hand produces a hand-towel, pressing it over his forehead, wiping at the sweat there, moving the cloth over his face, to his neck, to his hands, in small, soothing motions, all while keeping one hand pressed against his cheek, as though to anchor him to reality.

It’s been more than three years and he still hears Corruption’s whisper. He knows it’s because such a tainted human being to begin with, even if he tries his best to be normal. He can’t remember how he’s woken up before Dazai’s re-entry to his life (did he really leave, to begin with, yes, yes, yes).

“You’re Nakahara Chuuya.” The hand-towel disappears and now there are two hands framing his cheeks. Dazai’s breath is warm against his face, too warm and too intense, so he closes his eyes, sees the play of black-red recede from his body, much like how No Longer Human used to make them crawl back to his insides. “You’re a shorty who’s definitely not a morning person.”

Taking advantage of his long fingers, Dazai shifts so that his hold enables him to hold Chuuya forehead-to-forehead against him, all while the tips of his fingers are able to massage some parts of his scalp, messing and combing his hair in equal measures. “Your hair sticks up in all directions and you have stupid morning breath, too.”

Dazai shifts them again so that Chuuya’s stiff-limbed straddling his lap, so that Dazai’s next words are murmured right against his forehead.

“You’re here with me.”

Chuuya trembles slightly, feels feeling start to return to his limbs. He doesn’t push himself off from Dazai—he sinks lower, letting his head rest on the other’s shoulder.

— a disgrace, despite—no, even as he covers himself in an armor of bespoke, expensive suits; even as he fortifies his mind with different cultural and intellectual pursuits; even as he scavenges aspects of himself from different operas, movies and music; even as he builds towers of wealth; even as he drowns himself in the presence of different people; even as he kills people and eradicates organizations in the name of his job—in the end, he’s just himself, an orphaned disgrace—

—the black-red spider veins starts to crawl back in—even with No Longer Human, it only just manages to push it back inside him, but it’s back, they’re back and he’s—

—why is he even bothering with trying to be normal—he knows, he knows, he knows—he remembers the reason even though he tries not to, day by day by day—it’s hard not to because Dazai is here—it’s easy to, because Dazai is here—but history repeats and Dazai was there too, for years and years until the day he wasn’t—he knows better now, he knows how tainted he is and he can’t blame it on Corruption anymore, because it’s gone and he’s still here, even though he’s fading away—
“Chuuya.”

He doesn’t look up immediately, but when he does, Dazai’s mouth is upon his closed eye, kissing the tears away before they even fall, so that he won’t even have the chance to cry.

It’s such a Dazai way to stop someone from crying and it just—

“A leap of faith is how someone in love acts. Faith doesn’t need evidence that a person is worthy of love. There wouldn’t be evidence enough to justify a commitment to love. There would never be evidence, but faith means that you make the commitment anyway. One has to doubt the available evidence, then choose to believe it, despite it being not enough.”

Chuuya’s able to make his throat work, just enough to say: “I keep telling you to stop lecturing on Kierkegaard.”

“Do you doubt me, Chuuya?”

It doesn’t need thinking. “Always.”

“…do you believe in me, anyway?”

Chuuya feels Dazai’s lips go to his other eye, warmth keeping the tears at bay. “I shouldn’t.”

“…believe me when I say that—”

Chuuya feels Dazai’s heartbeat speed-up, for a moment, for a minute, for an eternity. He opens his eyes slowly, when no continuation is forthcoming. His vision is now startlingly crystal-clear—he can see Dazai’s face, can see Dazai’s eyes dark under the shadows of the night.

“Believe me when I say that you’re here with me,” Dazai says eventually. Chuuya can sense that he’s lying—that he didn’t say the words he was originally planning to. But it’s been an exhausting night and he doesn’t want to argue with the person capable of keeping the cruel whispers of his nightmares at bay.

Plus, it’s not like he doesn’t know that Dazai lies a lot, anyway.

(But even without any evidence that can justify anything, he still believes—)

Chapter End Notes

• again, feedback is always welcome ♥ i love to hear your thoughts about this fic :3

• i would like to share my rambling goals for the fic – which I hope to achieve!: (a) for Chuuya to realize that, despite everything, he wants to be with Dazai, not because he’s someone familiar to him for his entire life, not because he can’t live without him, but because he actually wants to stay with him; (b) for this to be a journey for Chuuya (and the readers?) to realize that he’s an actual angel and the best Boss Port Mafia could have; (c) for Chuuya and Dazai to face what has happened in their past in the
Port Mafia properly so they can have a nice, happy wedding already GDI

- **some references for the chapter!**: as per Chuuya’s character song (Dazai supposedly sees eye-to-eye with *Kierkegaard*) // lemon bomb in a stationery store is from IRL! Motojiro’s *Lemon* // the *bleach, lye, acid* is from a list of things that can dissolve a body, Motojiro NO // Motojiro’s likes are lemons, bombs, science, opera & alcohol + dislikes are traffic & jazz // the repetitions of *disgrace* is of course due to the ‘O Grantors of Dark Disgrace’ line // same vein, *flawless* is because of OdaSaku’s Ability // *leap of faith* spiel from Dazai is paraphrased from Kierkegaard //
You observe him for a couple of days first.

You’re still recovering from your injuries and you have no doubt that he is recovering from something much worse than that. You make plans that take advantage of your Ability, but you did not become a fearsome strategist by resting on your laurels and being a one-trick pony. You enjoy the advantages given to you by No Longer Human but you also live your life thinking that anything and everything will leave you eventually.

You used to think that it would be better to not want anything. Abandonment requires expectation, so there’s no point in prolonging your suffering by wanting something—someone. You pushed away everyone and everything so that nothing can make a half-hearted play at filling the void inside you.

You know better now.

You are still a strategist at heart though, because some things you just can’t leave behind.

So you bide your time, you exchange small talk with your colleagues all cooped up in the hospital, you passive-aggressively snipe at how Ango won’t ever change even without his Ability. You flirt with the nurses until they fondly hit the fading bruises underneath your bandages. You ask pointed questions about Akutagawa and Atsushi fiercely protecting each other’s backs during the final fight, without regard for the collateral damage to their surroundings. You tease Kunikida about his anxiety regarding possibly succeeding the President’s role.
You know how excitable he can get, despite how he charmingly plays his reliable Executive role.

Once your body is physically healed, marks all faded unless you count the very faint lines of fine scalpel cuts on your pulse points, you visit every single one of his properties. You know he buys a lot of safehouses, collects them like it’s going out of style. You know it’s because he’s lost his home so many times over the course of his life. You know how he likes to overcompensate so he can bury the things that he doesn’t want to face.

You find it easy to figure out his passwords and security codes. You are not surprised that you don’t find *that one apartment* amongst his properties. You have a plan brimming inside of you—you don’t make any impulsive actions. You buy *that place* under a false name. You think it’s because it’s nostalgic. You probably just want to burn the place down yourself.

You give him time, idly following his activities from a safe distance. You’re becoming more and more familiar to chilly nights spent on rooftops. You’re becoming more and more familiar to seeing his face from the scope of a rifle you ordered from Hirotsu. You tell yourself you’re keeping an eye on him, because he might not know it yet, but he’s the candidate for the next Port Mafia Boss.

You think it’s the best move Mori can ever do in his life. You think that everyone else who wants Port Mafia to disappear knows that too. You think it’s not really that different from the surveillance you did on him way back then.

You tell yourself you’re fine with passing time, with simply looking, with peppering random appearances every month for an actual interaction.

You spend nearly three years just watching him, biding your time to ingratiate yourself back to his life.

You tell yourself it’s fine if it takes a long time, because it has to be perfect, because it has to be permanent, because you’re playing for keeps.

You’re a strategist, but even you couldn’t predict yourself when you end up focusing the rifle on the bedroom of his penthouse suite. You see him drenched in sweat and tears, you see the whispers of Corruption affecting him even now.

The very next day, you flirt with the receptionist and then crush her hopes by waxing poetic about him as soon as she clears you to go up the building. You pick his lock easily, because he’s utterly predictable when it comes to this. You like it, how you can easily understand him sometimes. You like how comforting that feels, even if comfort is alien to both of you.

You breathe in the room of his suite—you don’t smell his perfume or anything that indicates that this is a home. You see modern ritzy lines and furniture, but you also see a gaping space here. You think it’s because he’s trying to do a 180 from his previous life—gone are the crowded desks filled with hundred-yen knickknacks. You see glamor and wealth, but you also see loneliness. You see yourself in this apartment.

You don’t think he’s ready to forgive and forget—you don’t think he’ll ever be able to forget. But you can work on forgiveness, work on making him comfortable with your presence, work on drowning him in yourself so that he’ll never be able to leave you the way you left him.

You see your plan spinning out of your heart and you see a future that spans endlessly and this time, you don’t fear it.
You smash the supposedly-bulletproof glass of his windows—you shake your head at how easily he trusts building contractors. You think about what you can do today to welcome him to this suite. You think about his credit card information and how you can make him blush so prettily in anger.

You set out to shop, but before you leave the building, you stop by the receptionist’s desk. You ask for an envelope, you smile sweetly and you flutter your eyelashes when the receptionist hesitates in cooperating. You think about how it wouldn’t work on him and you love him all the more for it.

You take your old phone out of your pocket—its contents copied to your new one and its number replaced, because you’ll always have the same number, for his sake. You remove your pendant from your neck—its contents seven-years old and still ultimately beautiful. You remove these reminders and seal them inside the envelope.

You can part with them now, because you’re going to be with him.

You give strict and clear instructions to the receptionist as to when she’ll have it delivered to his apartment. You compensate her in advance for her trouble with a wad of cash.

You thought about the timing for a while, but you figure that you don’t want his birthday to bear both the tragedy of you leaving him and his gift of himself to you. That’s why your instruction is to have the proof of your devotion be delivered on your birthday instead, more than a year from now, more than enough time for you to convince him to stay with you for the rest of your lives.

You can imagine his face as he realizes that you’ve always kept him close to your heart, even when you were trying to push him away.

You tell yourself you’ll only kiss him then, once he tells you that he doesn’t want to let you go.

You smile, because this is the last, grand design Dazai Osamu will ever plan.

You can taste victory - it tastes of Nakahara Chuuya's love.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

• chuuya accidentally dates poe
• ranpo finds out & makes it a trio-date
• dazai stalks them and makes it a double date
• also friendly reminder that japanese place the wedding ring on the left ring finger~♪

Chapter Notes

• we’re now back again to our regular programming! 8D thank you as always for tuning in! i always enjoy receiving feedback, so i hope to hear from you!

• for this chapter, i enjoyed browsing through the pictures of Yokohama Cosmo World! though since this is Chuuya’s POV, he isn’t too interested in describing the rides LOL all the rides mentioned are real – you can check out blogs (there’s a lot of them) with pictures of the park :D

• i really tried to squeeze in tanizaki’s date with chuuya & make chuuya get a one-on-one date with ranpo, but the double date........

• ALSO!!!! bRUH have you seen BONES’ belated Valentines gifts to the soukoku fandom?! A movie poster (~~~sunset + soukoku, man, the sunset is even the same shade as Chuuya’s hair LOL) & that 20k followers art (Chuuya being the perfect height to rest his head on Dazai’s chest con-fucking-firmed)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Chuuya wakes up and stretches—tries to, anyway. He only manages to open his eyes and wriggle his toes, but further movement is arrested by the sight that greets him: Dazai smiling softly at him—like he’s precious, like he’s a gem that will only be mined once in a thousand years, like he’s going to disappear any moment. He recognizes alertness burning inside those eyes, despite the fluttery-soft glow in them, so Dazai’s been awake for some time. He’s too… not surprised, but rather shaken, to notice that there are arms around him, that he’s nearly nestled into the other’s body, like he’s a child that needs comfort.

“Good morning, Chuuya.”

Dazai says it so simply, like it’s normal for the two of them to wake up cuddling in bed, after yet another night of Chuuya’s nighttime terrors, like it’s normal for him to spend god-knows-how-
many minutes watching him sleep.

Then Dazai leans down slowly, as though to give him a chance to flinch (a chance he can’t take, because it’s taking his everything to just breathe), and rubs their noses together, before shoving Chuuya’s head gently away from his chest and towards the pillow-filled bed.

“I’ll go make breakfast—stay put, okay?”

Dazai doesn’t wait for his response before leaving, the bedroom door left slightly ajar. Soon enough the sounds of motion from the kitchen reaches his ears, but he’s too… bewildered to do anything other than blink up at his ceiling—now covered with a wallpaper that’s supposed to represent a map of all known constellations.

“…what the fuck just happened?”

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya’s aptly-titled ‘Autumn Poem’ is already sealed in an envelope and mailed to his editor—well, not really his, because this editor doesn’t know him, hasn’t met him face-to-face, hasn’t communicated with him aside from mailing back a postcard each month after his poems are published, addressed to a false name and mailed to one of his many safehouses.

It’s better this way – no pressure to meet deadlines or make appearances to meet critics and literature professors who’d like to dissect the flow of syllables in his writings, who’d like to interview him about the influences (definitely foreign, they’d say, because it’s so different from what’s published by local poets). His identity is fairly well-known – it’s not a stretch for any of them to find out that he works for an underground organization. He thinks about discarding his veil of anonymity if only to see the terror and disgust on their faces, of someone so tainted writing things enjoyed by normal people.

He thinks about it—humming idly as he enters a dusty bookshop tucked inside a sepia-bricked building—and would have continued to ponder about the balance of the momentary satisfaction of being proven right and ultimately causing himself grief, if not for him bumping into a bulky black lump standing beside the bookshelf containing yellowed paperback versions of *A Study in Scarlet*.

The black lump groans and flails. “Ah—”

Chuuya instinctively reaches out to steady the lump – is that a blanket or just a really oversized jacket on top of his head? – and he endures the almost-seizure that it induces on the other man. “I got you—”

“K-Karl—!”

Oh.

Chuuya sees a raccoon jump away from the black lump, skittering towards the bookshelf and running across other yellowed mystery books.

“I’m sorry I spooked your pet,” Chuuya says as soon as he manages to turn the guy around. He didn’t immediately recognize the man, but it must be Edgar Allan Poe. He’s not that familiar with the man himself, though Yosano’s complained about Karl’s fur clogging up the Agency’s furnace
whenever it’s Edogawa Ranpo’s turn to babysit the office.

“Y-You’re that Nakahara Chuuya.”

“Yes, I’m that Chuuya,” he confirms with a half-laugh, because it’s not like there’s anyone else out there sharing his name. He remembers seeing Poe in the background of the picnic a few weeks ago, but they haven’t really exchanged any words together. “I don’t believe we’ve formally been introduced. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Poe-san.”

Poe’s hand trembles as they shake hands, before Chuuya takes a step away from the man and towards where Karl is rubbing his tail against the spine of a hardcopy of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. It takes a few seconds of his gloved right hand stretched out invitingly towards the raccoon before it lightly nips at the edge of leather, before finally acquiescing to be petted by him.

“K-Karl rarely allows people to pet him,” Poe makes an aborted gesture, choosing at the last second continue hugging a sealed newspaper-wrapped package close to his chest. “You have a wonderful ability.”

Chuuya hums as he considers this, his right hand rubbing at the raccoon’s chin. He remembers Yosano’s complaints about the raccoon’s indiscriminate scratching of her heels when she accompanies Ranpo and Poe. He allows a: “I don’t think it can be considered an ability.”

“Still…”

“Are you sending out a manuscript too?”

“A-Ah, yes, but how…?”

“I send anonymous manuscripts to the same publisher,” Chuuya confides to the man with a stage-whisper, because finally! There’s someone out there who understands the beauty of anonymity!

(When they had attended school as part of the Port Mafia’s commitment to not have completely-stupid members, as well as a convenient cover for their day-to-day activities – Dazai used to make copies of his poems and sent them to the school newspaper, used to print them on garishly-colored papers and pinned them on notice boards, his name on them so that people knew who to point and laugh at, who to bug for help for literature-related homework, who to blame for the littering and vandalism.

It was enough to put him off publishing anything with his name attached to it—because it invited unwanted criticism about the things that he put to paper, things that he couldn’t say out loud, things that he found special.

The only good thing from that experience was that it made him strive harder to learn deeper metaphors and more complex literary techniques so he could disguise the real subject of those poems.

He had a feeling that Dazai knew anyway.)

Poe mumbles his words, but since the bookshop is empty save for them and the sleepy cashier snoring on the counter, it’s easy to hear him. “You wrote *For The Tainted Sorrow*.”

It’s not a difficult deduction, because the publisher using the logo on Poe’s package has only published two types of anonymous contributions—one writing purely in poetry-form, while another focusing on the mystery genre.
“And you wrote last month’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’,” Chuuya returns with a tinge of admiration. “I enjoyed how you wove the contrast between rationality and insanity—and the end! I think I read it three times, at least.”

And just like that—Poe brightens (well, now he could actually see one of his eyes underneath the messy bangs) and relaxes his hold on his package.

“I was inspired by the insanity defense—as well as—”

☆ ☆ ☆

November’s first two weeks prove to be teeth-clatteringly cold, almost as though all of the wintery air has been siphoned towards Yokohama, even though it’s technically still autumn. Good thing is that Chuuya knows a lot of coffee shops that have very small client-base, so his need for privacy when discussing his poetry, as well as Poe’s general dislike for crowds, are both satisfied.

Of course, the nearest such coffee shop to his apartment is that one, and when he comes inside the warm and cozy café, he’s greeted by a small wave from Poe already huddled in the corner farthest from the door, along with the still-cheery smile of the cashier (he should really know her name; he hopes she enjoyed his tip from last time).

“Would you like to try a new blend today, Chuuya-san?” She doesn’t disguise the fact that she openly looks behind him to see if Dazai is with him. “We’ve got a new batch of excellent Ethiopian beans from our supplier!”

Chuuya only sees piles of papers on Poe’s table so he makes a hand gesture towards the table, along with: “Make that for two, plus your brunch recommendation? Thank you.”

“Dazai-san isn’t with you today?”

“You make it sound like I’m always with that bastard.”

“Well, every time I see him, he’s either with you or talking about you!” She doesn’t seem fazed by his grumpy reply—he really should take a look into this café’s staff – they’re all too cheery despite the gloomy weather, what the hell is their secret?! Ane-san and Hirotsu-san are both worrying about how most of the Port Mafia staff are feeling lethargic recently.

Chuuya opens his mouth to deny it—but urgh. She’s probably right. She senses her victory, but doesn’t gloat, simply smiles at him as she hands the completed order atop a polished wood tray.

“Thank you…” Chuuya squints at her name-tag. “…Haruno-san.”

“You’re welcome, Chuuya-san!”

That interaction completed, Chuuya makes his way towards the table—the shop is empty save for the two of them and Haruno-san at the counter—but when the door to the café opens with a resounding bang, surprise and general need to be on guard makes him almost drop the tray filled with mugs of steaming coffee and an assortment of breakfast items.

A very familiar guy comes in, marches towards him with purpose and glinting glasses. Chuuya feels a headache approaching.
How he’s ended up being on a ‘date’ with two guys at the same time, he’s not quite sure. He doesn’t text Dazai to confirm—he’s got his planner with him, but who knows if Dazai changed the arrangements on his own? Plus, he can just feel that the bastard will let him stew in his annoyance for a couple of hours, instead of replying, anyway—but he’s fairly certain that he’s not supposed to be on a date with Edogawa Ranpo until the last day of the month.

But then again, there’s no way he could have stopped himself from extending an invitation to Poe (who looked like he saw God come in) and Ranpo (who looked like he’s childishly jealous that he’s not the one getting free food AND he’s not the one in the middle of Poe’s attention) to relocate to Yokohama Cosmo World.

It’s just a couple of minutes’ walk—he remembers Yosano’s fond-and-exasperated sigh about how public transport is a concept that their Agency’s genius hasn’t grasped—and he tries his best to bridge the strange gap between the two.

From his previous coffee dates with Poe, he knows that the other writes all the short stories for Ranpo to decipher, because it’s their Thing. Poe strings up mysteries and red herrings from a rhythmic lull of words, while Ranpo dissects and demolishes them with a flick of his fingers (to put on his glasses dramatically, he’s been told).

From his ongoing drinking sessions with Yosano (sometimes joined by Kunikida; oftentimes crashed by Hirotsu-san and Motojirou; always ended, at least recently, with Dazai sliding next to his bar stool and paying for his tab and helping him with his coat before they make their way back…) – he knows that Ranpo seesaws between throwing tantrums when Poe’s not paying attention to him, and ignoring Poe when the man’s there, waiting for an interaction to happen.

He’s not quite sure why he’s prone to ending up on these situations, acting as a bridge between couples so obviously in love, but are too blind to see it.

There’s Atsushi and Akutagawa—who are, thankfully, still living separately, because Gin hasn’t completed her household chores training for her brother and because Atsushi’s a Mess whenever he tries to think about logistics when it comes to moving in together.

(Chuuya’s half-tempted to just help the two poor souls out and gift them a semi-furnished apartment that has two bedrooms so that there’s a back-up room in case either of them becomes too enthusiastic in their bedroom activities. He doesn’t think the two bedrooms will be utilized because of an argument, because Akutagawa’s a softy deep-inside even if he wouldn’t admit it—and this is a direct quote from a drunk-but-he-doesn’t-know-it-Akutagawa: apparently, he’d rather burn the first and only gift that Dazai has given him, rather than make Atsushi sad for even one second. But then again, said gift is a stupid cookbook about different ways of making chazuke and it’s from Dazai, so it’s probably not that big of a deal.

Chuuya’s been told, multiple times, by Dazai that it’s too much motherhenning on his side, though he could probably gift them a vacation suite instead, as part of their wedding gift once Atsushi stops flailing about. The discussion ends there, multiple times, because why is he the one paying for a joint gift?!)
There’s John and Fitz—set for a spring wedding, because they’re apparently being *true equals* now, so they chose a month that’s in-between their birthdays (yeah, he doesn’t know either). He’s still steadfastly refusing Dazai’s stealthy ways of getting him to agree to make him the plus-one to an all-expense-paid trip for the wedding.

There’s Kyouka and Lucy—who, okay, fine, so he hasn’t exactly asked permission from Ane-san to matchmake the two, but they complement each other so well and they are becoming close friends now, since they’re united in their cause to embarrass Akutagawa in front of Atsushi (the result is Chuuya gets secondhand embarrassment from Atsushi’s unfiltered reactions delivered either via an enthusiastic phone call or a typo-ridden text—all yelled gibberish about adorable and cute and some other things he’d never use regarding the mafia’s rabid dog).

He’s not involved in setting up Mori-san with Fukuzawa—*thank god*—and he *refuses* responsibility and gratitude from Motojirou when he successfully bridged him with Yosano during their drinking sessions. He especially *refuses* any involvement with Motojirou’s teary-eyed joy at being verbally abused by Yosano when he had *presumed* to pay for her drink.

And now… he’s here.

He buys ice cream first—three different cones; only Ranpo’s has more than one scoop—because he hasn’t exactly enjoyed himself in this amusement park before and he needs a minute to reorient himself. Also, he’d like to get smaller bills so that it’s easier to pay for the rides (it’s 2100 yen per ride if all three of them will go).

He pats his pockets and sighs slightly at the lack of his purse for his smaller bills. He hopes that the leather is able to withstand the thicker content; he’d also rather not ruin the line of his suit because of a bulging wallet. Going here is unexpected; he has a couple of 10,000 yen bills and his cards with him, because his plan was just to meet with Poe and discuss their upcoming manuscripts, then return to his warm apartment.

It’s not a bad kind of unexpected though. It’s good to get used to this—when Dazai was his partner, he relied on the sense that everything that happened to him was within Dazai’s expectations, there’s no such thing as *surprises*—unless he counts that time Dazai left. (And he counts that every fucking time.) When he became a full-fledged Executive under the Boss, he heard vast amounts of quotes regarding game theories and strategies that he also relied on that sense that everything that happened to him was also within the Boss’ machinations.

This kind of unexpected things happening should be a sign of being normal, right?

Nevertheless, he texts Yosano about this (a friendly reminder for her that his last will is final and if he dies from this date, she’s only going to get 25% of his wine cellar) and asks whether Ranpo has any known allergies. (Yosano replies before Chuuya’s even done carefully arranging his change from the ice cream. It’s a mixture of a good-luck message and an ominous warning about sugar-highs and getting dragged to the Kids Carnival Zone.)

“I want to try everything right now!!!”

Poe sounds a little too breathless – either from lack of walking practice, fear of crowds, or from being actually addressed by his idol. “Yes, Ranpo-kun, we’ll try everything.”

“We’ll try them one at a time.” Chuuya tries to be the voice of reason, because there’s no way they’re going to the Diving Coaster or the Cliff Drop on a full stomach. “Let’s walk around first so that nobody throws up on the rollercoasters.”
“Che, you’re boring.” Ranpo tilts his head to peer at him, his glasses glinting. “If Dazai is here, he’d surely agree to try the rides right away. Does this mean that you’re boring compared to him?”

Chuuya snorts in-between large licks of his espresso ice cream. “If Dazai is here, I wouldn’t be chaperoning your date.”

Ranpo doesn’t bat an eyelash, but his triple-scoop is starting to drip down the cone; he doesn’t notice. “Oho, so you two are going to run off together?”

“This isn’t—a date—is this—really—date—a date?!”

“Be honored—don’t you forget that this is the first time I’ve allowed myself to be taken out on a date.”

“Ranpo-kun, I—”

Chuuya interrupts before Poe can burst into tears. “Should I leave you two here?”

“No, because you need to pay for our rides.”

“Can I just give you money and leave?” Chuuya thinks fifty thousand should be enough? He doesn’t mind chaperoning this two’s date, really, but from Poe’s googly-eyed expression and Ranpo’s declaration that this is his first date, being a third-wheel doesn’t seem very nice.

After all, according to Yosano (and Dazai and Naomi and Atsushi and Kyouka and Lucy—it’s a wonder how the Agency members managed to make trouble for the Port Mafia when it’s filled with gossipmongers), the two’s flirting stage has been going on for quite some time and it’s not even the cute type with flowers and banter, but mostly people accidentally getting trapped inside Poe’s Ability (before Abilities have been sealed, at least) or people being roped into helping Poe complete Ranpo’s more outrageous whims.

If these two have waited for so long, it doesn’t seem right to ruin their first date by being here…?

“Are you running away with Dazai? Is he finally here? Are you two going on a date of your own?”

“No, no and no?” Chuuya doesn’t think Dazai is the amusement park type of person—unless it’s to jump off from Cosmo Clock 21’s peak. “Plus, if he’s here, he’ll be the one paying for your rides instead.”

“Nah, he wouldn’t do that. He’s saving up, right?”

“Dazai, saving up? Don’t make me laugh.” Chuuya bites the edge of his cone. “Are you sure you didn’t knock your head somewhere, oh-so-great-detective?”

“How could you not know? You’re really stupider than Dazai.”

“I resent the word ‘stupid’!”

Poe’s quiet mumbling manages to be heard, despite Ranpo’s huffing and puffing. Poe’s fingers are clinging on to the tail end of Ranpo’s parka as he speaks. “…He’s saving up for you, right?”

“Is that bastard finally going to pay all of his debts?!”

Their trio is approaching the entrance to Ice World and Chuuya sneezes at the sudden cold draft. Ranpo’s about to reply—from his expression, it’s to burst Chuuya’s bubble of hope that the bastard’s enormous debt is finally going to be paid—but he closes his mouth after a second.
Chuuya makes to rub at his nose with his free hand, but there’s already a handkerchief dabbed over his nose, the smell of apples and sandalwood overpowering the espresso still heavy on his tongue.

“I didn’t reply to your text,” Ranpo addresses the newcomer petulantly, but almost as though he’s expecting to be praised as well.

“Mm, that’s fine,” Dazai murmurs against the back of Chuuya’s left ear, just before an arm goes around Chuuya’s shoulders, aiming for the remaining bite-sized portion of his ice cream. The arm tightens and Chuuya’s near-forcibly turned around so that he’s face-to-chest with Dazai, but he digs his heels on the ground to resist the motion. It’s not a particularly smart move, because it only makes Dazai shift his arm so that he’s securely wrapped around Chuuya’s neck and shoulders, Dazai leaning down so that their cheeks are pressed together as he steals the ice cream.

Chuuya’s thankful that he’s wearing gloves because he can just feel Dazai’s intention to lick his fingers along with the cone.

Even when Dazai’s finished eating the ice cream, he doesn’t relax the hold, even when Chuuya jabs his elbow against the other’s spleen.

“So are we going or not?” Ranpo’s bouncing on his feet, already bored with posing near the penguins holding entrance signs. Poe continues to take pictures. Both of them are waiting for Chuuya to fork over the entrance fee. “If you want to mess around outside, then that’s fine too, I’d rather not see anyway, my memory’s photographic after all.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes and passes three thousand to the clerk, Dazai half-draped over him. They move like some strange three-legged creature, but they manage. Dazai grabs the change and bops Chuuya’s forehead with his coin purse—apparently Dazai’s intuitive enough to know that he’s been looking for it.

“Will you be fine, though? I think your coat is a bit thin.”

“It’s fine, Poe-kun will give me his coat.”

“Y-Yes, I will!”

“Then it’s Poe-san who will catch a cold, are you actually supposed to be smart, detective?” To Poe who looks torn between loyally declaring that he’ll brave subzero temperatures for Ranpo’s sake, and staring at the ice formed around the entrance, Chuuya says: “I’ll lend you a coat.”

“Then it’s you who’s going to get a cold, stupid Chuuya.”

“I’m not stupid, you vagabond.”

“Right,” Dazai says as he throws an overcoat towards Ranpo’s face. “Yosano-san said she’ll make you wish you’re dead if you get the sniffles, Ranpo-san.”

“Geniuses don’t get sniffles!”

“It’s ‘idiots don’t get colds’,” Chuuya and Poe simultaneously corrects the genius.

Dazai huffs against Chuuya’s ear. “Urgh, why do you two have a catchphrase already?! Chuuya, let’s rehearse a line too!”

“Sure. Let’s go with ‘Go to hell, Dazai’—ready, one, two—urgh, don’t pinch me!”
“Why is Poe-san not using the chance to hold Ranpo-san’s hand?!"

Dazai laughs and squeezes Chuuya for a moment. Chuuya allows it, because the coat that Dazai is wearing (new, black wool with some thermal lining inside, too large a size, it can fit both of them, though Chuuya’s left half is smushed against Dazai’s chest) is very warm and comfortable.

“Why are you so invested in their date, Chuuya?”

“Because it’s freaking cold and it’s a waste if they don’t use it as a chance to be closer!”

“You mean, like what we’re doing?”

“Yes, exactly.” Chuuya perks up as he realizes something. “Stupid Dazai, let’s exchange coats with them, if they can huddle together under one coat—”

“WE CAN HEAR YOU TWO, YOU KNOW!”

“Let’s go to the Cycle Monorail next!”

“Ranpo-kun is right, let’s try that…”

“You have no idea what’s that, do you, Poe-san?”

“Yeah, let’s go, Chuuya’s height is perfect for the kiddy rides—ow, ow, stop kicking me, Chuuya.”

“That’s it?! I want to ride it again!”

“Your date is still looking green, great detective.”

“I don’t date boring people who can’t handle water roller coasters!”

“Stop bullying Poe-san—plus, you’re all shaky too.”

“Am not!” Ranpo crosses his arms over his slightly damp polo. “Poe-kun, come on, let’s gooooo.”

Ranpo drags Poe back to the Diving Coaster: Vanish!, but not before holding out a hand for their ticket fare.
Still at ground level because he’s not interested in trying rides twice, Chuuya sneezes again; this time, he gets his nose pinched by Dazai’s handkerchief.

“If you get the sniffles, Chuuya, I’ll play nurse, don’t worry.”

“You do know that we’re not yet in the haunted house, right? No need to do horrifying things yet.”

“So you’re afraid of me, Chuuya?”

“You, playing as a nurse? The patient would definitely die.”

“I’ll have you know I have wonderful bedside manners.”

“Character references provided under duress don’t count, shitty Dazai.”

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“Stop clinging—stupid Dazai!”

“But I’m scared!”

“You sound so fucking fake, quit it, I want to win the prize!”

“You keep on pointing your wand at the wall like some weird magical girl, Chuuya.”

“Why am I a magical girl?!” Chuuya jabs his elbow somewhere hopefully-life-threatening. It doesn’t work. “I’m pointing the wand because it’s the attraction’s mechanics! Not because I want to!”

“Would you prefer rich-ojou-sama?”

“And again, why am I a girl?!”

“Pffft, is that really a great question to ask in public?”

(Needless to say, Chuuya doesn’t win the prize for surviving The Judge Horror House, because he’s not able to get points with how Dazai’s clinging to him like a slimy octopus.)

(Ranpo and Poe have apparently cleared the attraction for a minutes already, both of them unimpressed by Chuuya’s haggard state from fending Dazai off.)

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“Do we really have to?”

“But, Ranpo-kun, it’s the main attraction in Cosmo World!”

“Hmm, is the great detective scared of heights?”
“I’m scared of heights,” Poe admits easily, but he’s more-or-less relaxed now with holding onto the sleeves of Ranpo’s polo. It’s not yet holding-hands, but Chuuya knows how to appreciate small victories.

Chuuya says as reassuringly as he can: “I’m sure Ranpo-san will be able to distract you.”

“Excuse you—I’m not a distraction, I’m the main attraction.”

Chuuya stifles a laugh as the sunset’s blood-orange starts tainting the sky as Yokohama’s buildings start to light up. “Come on, let’s get this over with. Should we get one carriage—”

“Separate,” Dazai and Ranpo simultaneously stresses out. Ranpo continues: “Again, I’ll remind you that I have eidetic memory, so I wish to spare myself of any… sights.”

Chuuya pays for two carriages, smiling at the cashier even as he snarks, “If you want to miss seeing the sight of my beautiful face in the sunset, be my guest, great detective.”

Poe and Ranpo go first, Poe looking back and bowing down in gratitude. Chuuya just hopes that Poe manages at least a pinky-touch.

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“…Huh. Nice view. Yokohama has grown a lot.”

“Chuuya sounds like an old man reminiscing,” Dazai teases as the two of them gaze at the stretch of Yokohama Bay, of Yokohama’s little kingdom, now peaceful and twinkling under the purple-red-orange hues of sunset.

“I’m not old,” Chuuya retorts, but it lacks the bite it normally has. Maybe he is getting old.

“Mm, I’ll keep saying that until you’re actually old enough for it to be true.”

Chuuya’s kneeling on the seat (fine, he’s short, so he gets a better view if he’s kneeling on his seat rather than remain sitting down like Dazai, fine) and he shifts so that he’s staring at the top of Dazai’s stupid messy hair. Dazai’s face, moments ago gazing at the glass beside him, slowly turns so that they’re staring at each other.

“…so you plan to be a plague on my side until, what, I’m thirty?”

Dazai hums, shoulders lax, but not because he’s actually relaxed. There’s tension on the stupid jerk’s face—like he thinks he can hide it from him—but he’s acting like this isn’t something to be tense about.

Acting.

Fine. Chuuya can do that too. He un-reminds himself of the diagnosis by the Boss—when he was purely Doctor Mori back then—that he’ll most likely die by thirty because of the Port Mafia lifestyle and if that doesn’t kill him, Corruption surely will.

(But then again, Corruption is gone now.)

“Not just until we’re thirty,” Dazai murmurs, the blood-orange hues making his eyes appear red
from his angle. Chuuya’s left knee practically burns against Dazai’s right thigh, from this position. He can’t move.

Chuuya exhales, feels the carriage grow warm despite the record-cold temperatures. Yokohama’s night sweeps the land and sea surrounding them—even before that, all Chuuya can see is the blood-red twinkle on the other’s eyes. “What a pain in the ass.”

“I’ll take care of you—”

“—don’t.” Chuuya shudders as he remembers Dazai’s infamous brand of ‘caring’—it always ends up with their prisoners’ minds damaged from the torture. “I don’t need a caretaker.”

“…I’m not your caretaker, though, am I?”

“You’re not my partner anymore too.” Chuuya’s mouth trembles at the word—and he shouldn’t be like this, because it’s been seven years since that day. Normal people should have moved on, right? Is he destined to not be normal, even at this? “So what, you’ll just remain as a pain in my ass then?”

Dazai’s cheeks are awash with red, but that’s just because of the sunset, he’s sure. The alternative is too dangerous to consider.

It takes a few seconds for Dazai to recover, but when he does, he reaches for Chuuya’s left hand. To his credit, Chuuya doesn’t punch Dazai for the sudden movement, even as his fingers suddenly feel very stiff and numb. It’s just because it’s cold, he’s sure. There’s no possible alternative for him.

Dazai takes off his gloves, slowly, tugging at the leather finger by finger, so that they’re right at the top when Chuuya’s left hand is bared.

Chuuya doesn’t blink, doesn’t break eye contact when Dazai tugs his hand closer.

“I’ll be…” Dazai starts to say, imprinting his words against Chuuya’s palm first, before moving on to kiss each of his fingers, “…for as long as you want me to be…”

Dazai murmurs the rest of his words against his fourth left finger—it’s not his ring finger, he can’t think of it as his ring finger, because—

“I’ll be whoever you want me to be.”

Chuuya doesn’t have a reply—doesn’t know what to reply—doesn’t know if he’s required to reply, really, because Dazai says a lot of shit meaningfully but it’s not like he needs input from Chuuya, even if it affects Chuuya directly. That’s how they’ve always operated—before, and even now, even if now is a lot gentler than before.

Chuuya doesn’t have a reply that isn’t I’ve wanted you forever but I can’t break again if I lose you again now.

Chuuya knows that he’ll lose Dazai again—isn’t that how it works, for him? He always loses because a tainted person like him doesn’t deserve any of this.

He’s still learning how to be normal. He doesn’t have a reply for Dazai, but Dazai’s still staring at him, like he’s the one gutted like a damn fish, like a damn dead-eyed mackerel.

“You don’t have to tell me anything now,” Dazai murmurs, still against his finger, apparently
taking pity on him and his failure to come up with a succinct reply that won’t finish him off.

“…okay.”

“Just—stay still.”

Chuuya hates how instinctively his body stills at those words, at how immediately he responds to Dazai’s words. He’s his own person and he’s going to be the next Port Mafia Boss and he’s not normal enough to not instantly follow someone else’s orders.

Dazai lets go of his left hand. Now, Dazai kneels on the seat as well, their knees bumping, as he uses both of his hands to cup Chuuya’s cheeks, keeping him at an arm’s distance, as though framing him against the glass paneling of their windows and the disappearing sunset.

“This is the best view,” Dazai declares with a cheeky grin, thumbs at edges of Chuuya’s lips. “Definitely worth more than a ten-billion masterpiece.”

Chuuya sighs deeply, but his mouth twitches. “You shitty jerk, find your own description.”

“Fine, a twenty-billion masterpiece.”

“My worth is just twenty-billion?!”

“Twenty-billion…cents.”

“Did you just downgrade me?!” Though Chuuya figures that his complaint will be more effective if Dazai’s not squishing his face.

“I thought your beauty’s supposed to be priceless?”

“That, or twenty-billion dollars.”

“That’s a big difference, are you sure you know math?”

“Shut the fuck and let me enjoy the rest of the ride, asshole.”

Dazai hums in reply and tugs Chuuya by the face, bringing their foreheads together in one smooth motion. Chuuya doesn’t close his eyes, despite the danger of going cross-eyed.

“Didn’t Higuchi-chan teach you to end your dates with kisses?”

“This date isn’t over,” Chuuya quips back, sliding backward until his back is against the window on his side of the car. “Plus, she said that’s supposed to thank someone for a good date.”

“Hmm, so you’re telling me this isn’t a good date?” Dazai then claps his hands together. “Ah! I get it, you want me to be the one to kiss you.”

Dazai moves like lightning, half on his lap in just a split-second and Chuuya wishes he’d just fall off the seat.

“No—wait—!”

Chuuya tries to keep Dazai at bay, but his hands are trapped by his own motionlessness, by the Chuuya from before who wanted nothing else but Dazai.

Chuuya keeps his eyes open, so he sees the chilling expression in Dazai’s eyes just moments before...
their lips can touch.

Before their lips can touch, the carriage they’re on comes to a stop, another half-second, before the door is yanked open by an enthusiastic Ranpo, who yells about PDA and about wanting to go eat now.

Dazai’s eyes go one shade darker at the interruption, but he smoothly slides off Chuuya’s lap like it’s nothing. *Acting.*

Fine, Chuuya can do it too.

He stands up without too much difficulty despite how numb his entire body is.

He returns Poe’s smile, as their strange foursome start to walk to find someplace to eat—Ranpo and Dazai ahead of them by a couple of steps.

Chuuya catches only snippets of the conversation, but he decides that it doesn’t matter.

(Even if Dazai’s saying coldly, in a manner reminiscent of the Dazai from *before:* “I cannot believe this is how you repay me, Ranpo-san.”)

☆ ☆ ☆

“Earlier—”

“Hmm?” Dazai’s freshly-showered, the tips of his hair still wet despite the use of a blowdryer, because he’s apparently an idiot who doesn’t know how to use technology properly.

Chuuya—with his completely-dried hair, thank you very much—kneels on his side of the bed, tugs at the lapels of Dazai’s robe before he can even spout off more shitty lines. “Here you go,” he whispers moments before he presses a kiss to Dazai’s cheek.

Only, Dazai shifts and Chuuya misjudged the distance, so he ends up pressing his lips on the bare patch of skin exposed by the collar of the robe, too close to the man’s jugular. He can smell the apples and sandalwood, much stronger this time. He can feel the drumbeat march of Dazai’s pulse.

He’s frozen in that position—no, it’s because Dazai’s arms come up to secure him by his waist.

“I had a great time too, Chuuya,” is whispered against his hair.

“Let me go, I’m sleepy, idiot Dazai.”

“Then *sleep* already, slug.”

“You’re chest isn’t comfy, for your information.”

“And yet I don’t see you moving away…”

“Because you’re *crushing* me, asshole!”

“Aha, is the great-martial-artist Chuuya admitting to be weaker than me?”
“Fuck no.” Chuuya accompanies that statement with a powerful shove that doesn’t manage to dislodge himself from Dazai’s stupid octopus-skinny-arms. “Goddamn octopus.”

“I thought I was your mackerel?”

“Also a damned octopus.”

“Gotcha. Good night, Chuuya.”

“Urgh.”

(Despite his complaints, Chuuya manages to sleep that night without nightmares. Thankfully, Dazai doesn’t mention it the next morning.)

Chapter End Notes

• (yes, dazai texted ranpo that chuuya & poe were on a date, causing ranpo to crash their lunch date)
• (remember dazai’s supposed plan? shot to all hell, because he’s thirsty af)

• references! [A] IRL chuuya’s style of poetry is considered to be very innovative (his style is ‘experimental poetry’, attributed to mainly European influence) (one of his poems is titled Autumn Poem /// [B] IRL poe’s The Tell-Tale Heart has the following elements: (1) an unreliable narrator; (2) written in medias res; (3) very detailed/rational planning; (4) ‘hypersensitivity’; IRL poe also wrote The Murders in the Rue Morgue /// [C] ‘worth more than a ten-billion masterpiece’ is a reference to chuuya’s description of the view of dazai in bondage LOL /// [D] steinbeck's bday is feb, while fitz's is on sep /// [E] poe's likes are raccoons & mysteries, while dislikes are noisy crowds & heights

• i’ve mentioned this to my replies in the previous chapter(s), but chuuya’s showing/acknowledging/feeling the insecurities more now—because. everything’s going so well, so perfectly, so fluffy—can he really trust things to remain as perfect as this? now that he should have zero cause for worry, the things that he’s hiding/running away from are surfacing…

• again, thank you so much if you’ve reached till this part lololol can you believe this fic is at 48k already?? (it’s 51k at my word doc, but that includes some future scenes already…) i said this was a oneshot ahhhhhh wow i’m really shit at predicting chapter length haha;;;

• feedback is always very lovely ♥ ♥ ♥
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

• naomi asks chuuya a v.v.v. important question: “are you not dazai's boyfriend?”
• chuuya realizes a couple of (probably wrong) things
• nothing says romance more than conversations while stuck in the rain

Chapter Notes

• to my twitter followers, slight change of plans – no umbrella sharing this chapter, but we get to keep the rain 8D
• this is a bridging chapter which is why it’s short (is 3.2k considered short haha) – though there are some reveals here!
• chapter is deliberately written with a… hmm, desolate? distant? atmosphere to reflect chuuya’s mood and internal struggle D:
• thank you so much for the wonderful response last chapter!!! all the comments make me cry asdsdsasbsfasfl i’d like to dedicate all of my love to all of you ♥♥♥♥♥
• that said, this chapter breaks the 50k word mark and we're finally seeing more plot/conflict lol buckle up – it’s the start of the storm :D *hides*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ ☆ ☆

The last couple of days of November continues to be freezing-cold, so Chuuya punctuates his visits to different business offices connected to the Port Mafia by ducking into different shops and cafés to seek warmth in-between. He supposes he should have brought a car, but most of the offices are just separated by less than six blocks and it seems terribly lazy to drive the short spurts of distances. Whether or not Mori-san decides to go through his decision to make Chuuya become the next Boss, it’s doesn’t seem right to show off opulence and laziness to businesses that they’re relying on. Even if he doesn’t become the next Boss—and there’s always the possibility that Mori-san will change his mind, maybe manage to convince someone who’s a better fit—he’s still an Executive and it’s still part of his job to be a role model to his subordinates and their ‘business partners’.

“Chuuya-san, wait up!”

He slows down his pace—he has one more office he plans to visit before he calls it a day—and
allows Naomi and her brother to catch up. They’re holding hands, though Chuuya’s more than willing to bet his entire month’s salary that it’s more like Naomi’s dragging her brother by the hand.

Once the two of them catch up, Chuuya wordlessly takes a bottle of water from his briefcase and passes it over to her panting brother. Tanizaki Junichirou accepts it gratefully with his left hand, since Naomi’s not letting his hand go.

“How are you, Naomi-san? It’s been a while.”

“I wanted to thank you, actually. Want to grab coffee?”

“I appreciate the invitation – though what for?” He waves off her brother’s concern that he’s finished off his water. He has an extra bottle, plus it’s not particularly difficult to replace, especially if they’re going to a coffee shop anyway. Maybe he can get an apple-flavored sparkling water instead?

As their trio make the trek over sidewalks littered with yellow-red leaves, Naomi starts updating Chuuya about the recent happenings in the Agency. Given that Dazai is such a gossipmonger though, most of the things she tells him are old news. He lets her talk though, because he has a feeling that her brother isn’t a very enthusiastic audience about this.

“—and so I want to thank you because you’ve made Ranpo-san less insufferable!”

“I don’t believe I did anything in particular though.” He’s been paying attention to her, but he’s sure he’s missed the logic jump there.

“Um, he got laid so the stick up his ass has been replaced?”

“Naomi!”

“Nii-san, it’s not like these people know him,” Naomi flippantly gestures towards the pedestrians who are now giving them wide berth.

“That’s not the point!”

Chuuya takes pity on her brother’s blood pressure, that shade of red on his face doesn’t look particularly healthy. “Maybe let’s continue our conversation in a more private setting?”

“Aww, Chuuya-san, how are you still such a prude? Ranpo-san told me that you were on a double date!”

“I just don’t think it’s appropriate to discuss… Ranpo-san’s… proclivities in public.”

“In short, you’re a prude,” Naomi declares with hands on her hips, running ahead of them, then stopping, turning around so that she’s glaring at him as she walks backwards. “How are you still so shy about these things when you have such a shameless boyfriend?”

…Huh.

He doesn’t have a boyfriend, does he?! He’d remember if someone actually asked him out, right?!

He’s… he’s single. His relationship status on Facebook remains single. His will isn’t updated to include anyone new. The books—the movies—the dramas—they—they told him that clear communication, bouquets of roses, candlelit dinners, love confessions herald the start of relationships. Characters always wait for the right moment and they say I love you and then they
ask—and nobody’s done that to him and he hasn’t done that to anyone, so he does not have a boyfriend, what is Naomi talking about?!

“What,” he says out loud, his feet frozen in place despite the lack of snow. “…I don’t have a boyfriend.”

Naomi’s look seems enough to flatten steel. “Are you fucking shitting me.”

“Naomi, language!”

“Are you fucking kidding me, Chuuya-san?!”

“Naomi.”

“Hush, niisan, I need to set this straight.” Naomi marches back to where Chuuya’s rooted in place. “Are you not Dazai-san’s boyfriend?”

Ah.

So she’s talking about Dazai.

Chuuya lets out a sigh. “I’m not his boyfriend. He’s not my boyfriend either.”

“Really?”

“Naomi—don’t—”

“Niisan, I have a duty to idiots.” To Chuuya, she asks again if he’s really sure.

“If we are, it’s news to me.” Chuuya’s glad he has a briefcase with him. He focuses on his hand wrapped around the handle, strangling the leather. It has important papers so he can’t drop it. He has to focus. “He hasn’t asked me out.”

Naomi’s eyes look terribly sharp at this distance. “Have you asked any of your previous dates to be your lover?”

“…not really?” He’s not sure why he’s providing details, but Naomi doesn’t seem impressed. He tries again. “The timing didn’t seem right.”

“Uh-huh. So you plan on finding your one true love by dating around and then waiting to be formally asked to be their lover?”

“…not really?” He’s not sure why he’s providing details, but Naomi doesn’t seem impressed. He tries again. “The timing didn’t seem right.”

“Uh-huh. So you plan on finding your one true love by dating around and then waiting to be formally asked to be their lover?”

Chuuya bristles—it’s not like he’s expecting anything, but for him to make the first move beyond the dates seem just not right. He’s done his part to give his dates a chance to get a glimpse of what he is—and it’s not that he would accept just about anyone—but it doesn’t feel right to be the one to extend the question to be something more. He needs to know that they’d be willing to bear with him, he needs to get a confirmation from them that it’s okay to proceed. He can’t be the one to ask.

If he asks, then it will not come true, just like before, just like always.

“It doesn’t have to be ‘one true love’, don’t listen to Dazai.”

“I see.” It doesn’t look like she understands, but if it makes her back off on this strange topic, then — “Will you be my boyfriend then, Chuuya-san?”

Her brother briskly walks towards her, hands on her shoulders as though it would deter her words.
He considers her for a few seconds—not tainted by any Abilities of her own, confident, beautiful, stable in life. “If you’re fine with me, I’d be honored to be your boyfriend.”

“I cannot believe you’re that easy, Chuuya-san.”

“Should I spend a few more days deliberating?”

“I don’t like how easy you agreed to me. We’re done.”

Chuuya shrugs, half-relieved that she didn’t push, because it’s one thing to bring her out shopping and listening to her gossip, but it’s another thing entirely to be responsible for her happiness. And maybe that’s the problem? He’s looking for a normal, happy life, but he’s not able to accomplish something as pure as that, is he?

His head hurts, though maybe it’s just the cold. They’ve stopped in the middle of the road after all and winter’s just a week away.

“If that’s what you want, Naomi-san.”

The movies he’s seen has lines like it’s not you, it’s me, but Chuuya thinks that it’s too obvious to warrant the need to be stated out loud.

“Why don’t you become my brother’s boyfriend instead?”

“Naomi—um, Chuuya-san, it’s not that I think you’re not, uh, accomplished, and I’ve heard really great things about you, but, uh—Naomi, I thought you want—”

Chuuya cuts him off, before his face becomes even more of a tomato. “I’d be honored, though Naomi-san, it’s not nice to tease your brother like that.”

“Hmph, you’re both hopeless,” Naomi says as she cuddles against her brother. The older Tanizaki makes soft noises of protest about his sister’s wandering hands, but he doesn’t pull away. Chuuya averts his eyes from them, makes his legs work so that he can take a couple of steps away from the duo. He’s not about to be included in their arrest for public indecency.

“Would you still like coffee?” He asks as politely as he can, but Naomi’s murmuring about the things she’d do to show her appreciation of her brother’s reluctance to be parted from her, so Chuuya flees from the scene as soon as possible.

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya’s watching the swirl of wine as he flicks his wrist in gentle figure-eight motions. He’s not so terrible at recognizing his environment though, especially since he’s been nursing his drink while only taking two sips for the past hour.

“How the fuck did you find me here,” he asks without any inflection, leaning back against the armchair of the private club-cum-bar he’s at.

There’s a fire burning inside an earthen brick fireplace, casting a reddish-amber glow across all the antique wooden furniture, high-backed armchairs, mahogany-finish low tables. It’s his first time in this private club, having only receiving his approved membership yesterday. He’s only texted Ane-
san and Yosano about finding a new drinking place—he hasn’t even mentioned any details like the name of the club or its general location. It’s at the outskirts of Yokohama’s border – it took him more than an hour’s worth of commute and walk. This isn’t an easy place to find.

“I bugged your phone,” Dazai says with a shrug, settling into the armchair opposite Chuuya’s, his wine-glass filled with thick red Merlot settling on the coaster on top of the end table beside his seat.

Chuuya doesn’t need to study Dazai’s face to know he’s lying. He keeps his eyes on his own glass of wine. “I know you did and I know it wouldn’t have helped.” He shut off his phone and disabled its GPS right after fleeing from Naomi and her brother, after all.

Dazai chuckles at that, shrugging again. “Fine. Naomi-chan told Yosano-san that she’s traumatized you. When you didn’t answer your phone, Yosano-san told me that you’ve found a new drinking place.”

“I didn’t tell her details about this place.” He thinks back on what could have given this place away. “And my membership card was delivered to my office.”

“Silly Chuuya, why do you think I only arrived now?” Dazai gestures to his slightly damp hair. “It took some time to cross-reference new private clubs, after all.”

“Cross-reference?”

“Mm, but I got it right on my first choice. When I saw the place’s website, I knew you’d go here.”

Chuuya looks around the room—all Old World aesthetic, like the ones in the French movies he favors. He sighs as he allows that—his main reason for applying for membership here is because he finds their painting collections and polished décor pleasant to look at.

“So why did you only arrive now?” Chuuya’s not expecting Dazai to come and fetch him—he’s come to not expect anything at all from him, at this point. “It’s been hours since I’ve been here.”

“It was raining a bit and I grabbed dinner before going here.”

“I see.”

Dazai looks like he’s considering taking Chuuya’s temperature. “Did Naomi-chan really traumatize you?”

“…she just made me realize some things.”

Like—

Waiting for people to ask him to be with them isn’t going to work. Nobody’s going to do so, ever, if he just waits.

He’s—he’s done his best, he’s studied ways to grow the money he’s got, he’s devoured all the magazines and movies and books that he’s got, he’s studied the behavior of someone who gets what he wants, he’s made sure to be able to buy clothes that make him stand out, he’s made sure to be able to talk about a variety of topics depending on the person he’s with, he’s made sure to be cultured, he’s made sure to be strong.

But he’s—it’s not enough, is it?
He needs to ask someone to belong to him.

(He can’t do it—he’s done it before and look where it got him—it got him here, to this point. That experience opened his eyes—but he can’t risk that, not again.)

He needs to ask someone who wouldn’t mock him, who wouldn’t leave him readily. He needs to ask someone he’s got power over, so that he can control the situation. He needs to ask someone—Tachihara’s the next person on his list—the last person on his list—and he’s hardworking and he’s seen Chuuya fight before even though Corruption’s not involved then and he’s someone who looks nice enough to agree.

He’ll ask him—he doesn’t think he’ll agree, really, but he needs to make sure—he needs to know if this will work. Will he be able to start moving on if he tries to be the one to make the first move (again)? Will people actually respond to what he wants if he asks?

He doesn’t think so, but he needs to know for certain.

He needs to—

“—she really did traumatize you,” Dazai murmurs from a few centimeters away, too close to Chuuya’s face.

“Why the hell are you kneeling on the floor,” Chuuya croaks out as he finally makes his throat work. Dazai’s kneeling on the chandelier rug, both of his hands resting on Chuuya’s forearms. Chuuya’s glass of wine is on the table even though he doesn’t remember putting it down.

“I wanted to get your attention.”

“Then?”

“I think we should go back.”

Chuuya allows it, but only because he’s too tired to resist.

☆ ☆ ☆

“When you said it was ‘raining a bit’—!”

“I may have downplayed it!” Dazai yells as the two of them run in-between shops with awnings or roofs big enough to shelter them from the heavy pelt of rain. There’s at least three inches of water on the streets, making the insides of Chuuya’s shoes feel disgusting. Chuuya thanks his past self for deciding to leave his briefcase behind in the headquarters after the last of his rounds earlier today.

Nothing in the weather forecasts have predicted rains or storms—certainly nothing like this. The private club they came from is tucked away remotely enough that no cabs are nearby and the nearest train station is more than a couple of blocks away.

It’s an annoying situation all around. Chuuya looks at his phone’s ‘no signal’ as soon as they manage to squeeze together in front of a closed antique shop, with a small roof over the door for its guests. He’s not looking forward to running in the rain all the way until the train station—or at
least until he gets a signal so he can call for a cab company or for one of his subordinates to bring a car.

It’s such an annoying end to a rather dismal day and it’s not helped by the fact that Dazai looks like he’s about to say something stupid. He’s fidgeting a lot.

“Haaa, what is it, shitty Dazai?”

Dazai looks surprised that he’s asking—though he hides it quickly. He turns and shuffles them about so that he’s holding on to his face.

With an expression that definitely foreshadows stupidity, Dazai asks softly, gently, loudly enough that he can over the drumming of his heartbeat and the pounding of the raindrops against concrete streets:

“…can I kiss you?”

Chuuya blinks—it must be some sort of sorcery, because despite the fact that the heavy rain is making the entire street appear covered in thick mist, despite the fact that there’s droplets of rain dripping from his hair to his eyes—and he still sees Dazai’s expression clearly. It has to be some sort of trick, because Dazai’s hands are wet from the rain but they feel terribly, fever-warm against his cheeks right now.

He considers Dazai’s uncharacteristic question. He studies the way Dazai’s eyes look shuttered, the way those eyebrows are furrowed, the way the other’s messy hair flops down to his forehead.

“…you’re actually asking—me—for permission?”

Dazai closes his eyes briefly, as though pained. “You make it sound like I go around kissing people against their will.”

Chuuya almost retorts that it’s not technically against their will, but Dazai enjoys parading himself under false advertisement. But then, he realizes something. “But you only ask me if I don’t have a choice, right?”

Dazai stiffens further, but his hands remain warm on his face.

“So you… you’re just asking me, for the hell of it, but you’re not planning to actually kiss me,” Chuuya concludes—he knows it’s true, judging from the frown on Dazai’s face. It should delight him, because that’s one less complication to think about. It should, but it doesn’t, because he’s really stupid sometimes.

Instead, Dazai says, softly still. “I plan to do a lot of things to you, Chuuya.”

Chuuya knows he’ll try to resist, but he’ll end up allowing it. Just like always.

“…we need to get moving,” Chuuya tries to steer them back to more pressing topics, like avoiding hypothermia.

“Promise me one thing first,” Dazai says—no, commands. His grip tightens around his cheeks. “Make sure that I can always find you, whenever you run away.”

A tough request—Chuuya almost wants to spit at Dazai’s face. “You mean like the way I was always able to find you when you left?”
“…Chuuya.”

It’s—annoying, almost, how Dazai’s able to say his name and make it sound like it’s a plea. It’s—
annoying, almost, how Dazai looks like a child about to cry right now. It’s just the rain, because
the alternative is too painful to think about.

“Fine, whatever,” he eventually acquiesces to the irrational request—because the only reason he’ll
run away is because of Dazai. There’s no point if the reason for leaving follows him. But it’s cold
and he’s not looking forward to having a cold in December and it’s too much to deny Dazai when
he looks like that.

“Thank you, Chuuya,” whispers against his ear, before Dazai shifts them again so that Dazai’s chin
is resting on his shoulder.

Dazai is hugging him, tightly, arms around his back, raindrops splashing against his hair. It’s cold
and warm at the same time. There’s probably an incoming storm that’s puzzling the weather
stations right now—there’s a hurricane stirring his insides right now.

It’s the first time Dazai has actually thanked him and meant it.

It’s a strange feeling—because Dazai arranges things so that everyone moves to his tune. He has no
reason to thank them for doing their handwritten parts. But here and now—Dazai thanked him.

He’s not quite sure how many minutes have they stayed there, clinging to each other in their wet
clothes and rain-sluiced limbs. Eventually, Dazai takes a step back, the kicked dog expression
gone.

“Let’s go home, Chuuya.”

Chuuya hesitates for a second before accepting the hand held out to him.

The last time Chuuya called something home—

Ah.

So he’s really right. Dazai asked him, even though he had no plans of going through it.

It should delight him, that Dazai didn’t kiss him. It’s one less thing to think about it.

It didn’t, because it’s a reminder that Dazai chose not to kiss him.

Just like back then.

☆ ☆ ☆

The morning after, Dazai’s snoring in bed and Chuuya’s in the living room, waiting for his call to
connect. The moment it does:

“Good morning, Tachihara-kun. I know Dazai scheduled our date for next week, but would you
like to do it later tonight instead? And… I was thinking, if our first date goes well, would you like
to consider being my boyfriend?”
*starts prayer circle for Tachihara’s safety from Dazai’s jealousy*

- Chuuya’s insecurities rage on—and before you hate on him for being so unaccepting of Dazai, please keep in mind that he’s lived for 25 years thinking (and having his thinking reinforced/validated by Dazai/Mori/Port Mafia) that he’s not normal and that his main worth is his monstrous Corruption. He himself doesn’t know what’s normal—he’s basing them on what he learns/hears from the media/people surrounding him (e.g. see how gullible he is about the thank you kisses c/o Higuchi).

- also, Chuuya’s been in love with Dazai during the Port Mafia days. Something on top of Dazai leaving happened and we’re very near the chapter that reveals that. I hope you all stick around the ride! Here’s a brief outline of what you can expect next:
  - Tachihara having his dream come true of dating Chuuya
  - two interludes about soukoku during the time they were partners, which should hopefully shed light as to why does chuuya believe that he’s a monster so strongly, as well as why he’s SO SURE that dazai doesn’t like him back
  - Dazai confessing to Chuuya during Chuuya’s birthday
  - John/Fitz wedding
  - Ango
  - Fyodor

- in other news, if you’d like to help translate maybe five lines of conversation from English to French (it’s for chuuya’s childhood interlude), please let me know! I’d use Google Translate but I’m not too confident about its accuracy LOL wOW a lot of response on this, thank you!!! i did receive a couple of offers to help tysm ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

- and as always - your support is very much appreciated! feel free to yell at me here or at my tumblr (guys, thank you for sending me asks about this fic ahhhhh i’d be happy to answer your questions anytime!!!) ♥ ♥ ♥ comments, long/short, happy/sad, yelling/sobbing, any kind really, are always lovely ♥ thank you for reading and tuning in! :D
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

• dazai solves his "how to remain the waifu when your husband has a boyfriend" dilemma
• taking care of drunk!chuuya, pair skating, mistletoes, first sunrise of the new year
• oh, & dazai finally confesses
• chapter has big spaces between some scenes for ~drama, so please scroll with caution :))
• (it's 12.6k, so i def won't advise reading it when you need to sleep, stay lovely, everyone ♥)

Chapter Notes

• my apologies for the delay – i've been going through some RL shenanigans – and i've reached a point where i've been second-guessing my plan for the rest of the story, in a very, hm, ‘do i really want to proceed with this route?? can i write something less… emotionally taxing instead & not destroy the plot completely??’… but then i realize that (1) it’s already far too late to change the plot, and (2) i actually like the route i planned, despite the… pain 8D also, i know that y’all are lowkey masochists anyway LOL

• chapter arrangement is a bit… hm, different than usual, because it’s reflecting chuuya's frame of mind more and more. i have a feeling this isn’t what most of you are expecting to happen, but i do hope that you read on still and that you enjoy (um)! :D but no, more seriously, please be on the lookout for innocently-insensitive chuuya + arguably emotional infidelity + tension-filled/emotionally-taxing last scene. i would advise reading this with either tissues or alcohol nearby (or why not both) & definitely not when you need to wake up early the next day. i leave my tumblr & twitter & of course, the comments section, open for yelling ^_^;;; (and feedback, as always!)

• ooh and much thanks to those who answered my polls/questions on twitter :)))))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ ☆ ☆

Questa storia che senso non ha
Svanira' questa notte assieme alle stelle
“Good morning, Tachihara-kun.”

There’s a loud yawn from the other end that sputters into breathless gasps and—a rather ungainly thud. He almost asks if the other’s safe—did he call at a bad time?, it’s sufficiently early for someone like Dazai, but for a hardworking guy like Tachihara, it should be fine, right?, is he on a mission?, but he shouldn’t be because there are no assignments for the Black Lizard this week…—but Tachihara manages to weave his syllables to form an enthusiastic greeting.

So he proceeds: “I know Dazai scheduled our date for next week, but would you like to do it later tonight instead?”

There’s more sputtering from the other end, interspersed with some mumblings about ‘dreams’ and ‘god’. Chuuya patiently waits for a more solid reply. He makes a mental note that Tachihara’s phone (or is it his location?) has terrible reception, given the strange interference on the line.

Once Tachihara’s able to respond with something that sounds like an effusive affirmation, Chuuya continues with the real reason for his call. Dazai’s snoring is starting to taper off—he’s only got a few minutes of privacy left. Not that he thinks he can hide this from the clingy asshole, but he’d rather speak to Tachihara without interruptions or—more likely, unsolicited inputs.

“And… I was thinking, if our first date goes well, would you like to consider being my boyfriend?”

“CHUUWA-SAN!!!”

Chuuya winces slightly at the volume of the reply.

“…I could hear the number of exclamation points on that. Is that not acceptable?” He pauses for a second, before adding, “Don’t feel that you have to agree with me, because of our difference in rank. I will not dole out punishments of any sort if you reject me, I promise.”

Tachihara’s side sounds chaotic, like there’s a tableful of knickknacks that’s knocked off to the floor. “No-no-no-no! Not like that!”

“…I see?”

Tachihara goes to a rant not unlike Atsushi’s when he’s gushing about Akutagawa—which is, really, the only reason why Chuuya’s able to understand it despite the pauses and gasps. (He’s rather floored that he’s actually picked up a life skill from Atsushi.)

“Even if our d-d-d-date doesn’t go well—no, I’m sure our date will be amazing because you are amazing, Chuuya-san—you’re always so great and wonderful, and plain amazing and I can’t believe you would—because you’re so amazing—but even if it’s not, which will not happen—EVEN IF. I’d still want to be. To be—um.”
Tachihara’s really such a nice guy, a great kouhai. It almost makes him feel guilty for asking, because he can already see the future, even if he doesn’t have Flawless.

And really, there’s just one response to that.

“Thank you, that’s kind of you, Tachihara-kun. I’ll pick you up tonight – send me your address?”

There’s a rather audible gulp, before: “A-Actually, Chuuya-san, I’d be honored if I can pick you up instead!”

Chuuya instinctively grips his phone harder. His gaze immediately goes toward the bedroom door, shut close, barely visible from his angle that it doesn’t appear like he’s keeping an eye on it during his call – to anyone but Dazai, that is. He looks at the colorful kitchen towels hanging from an overhead rack, patterns of strawberries and apples brilliant red against the monochrome furnishing and tiles. He looks at the dining table’s centerpiece for the week, flowers mid-bloom amidst some broken tainted glass. He looks at the expensive wall-mounted television, the spread of gaming consoles underneath, the towers of game discs beside it.

“Don’t.” He thinks about the force in that response, amends it, softer. “There’s no need for you to go through the trouble. I’ll pick you up at seven?”

It almost makes him feel guilty, the way he wrangles the acceptance, because he’s sure that Tachihara’s nice enough, unlike some people he knows.

The call ends with polite goodbyes and a carefully-blank stare from Dazai in front of a now-open bedroom door, clad in an oversized nightshirt, big enough that most of his thighs are covered if he stands still, that his boxers don’t peek out, but that mostly because Chuuya doesn’t look there. The red silk looks flattering against his skin, but that’s nothing new, because Dazai makes most things look and sound flattering, when he puts his mind to it. It doesn’t help that he’s bleeding into Chuuya’s eyesight in the same frame as the kitchen towels of strawberries and apples, moving closer to the dining table with red roses mid-bloom.

“Eavesdropping really isn’t beneath you, is it?”

Dazai’s stare remains carefully-blank, but his tone is almost effortlessly sincere. “Mm, I only heard the part where you very kindly avoided telling him that you’re the one with the fancy cars, so you get to decide the pick-up locations.”

“That’s not it,” he says, but doesn’t continue. Of course it’s not the reason, Dazai knows it, he knows it. He looks at the vibrant colors and chaos splattered like an arterial spray all over his apartment and knows that it’s something that he doesn’t want anyone else to taint.

“Hmm.”

Chuuya folds his legs so Dazai can sit on the vacated space on the couch; once Dazai sits down, he coaxes Chuuya to unfold and rest his legs over the other’s lap. He needs to take a shower soon, because he still needs to complete a report about his recent visits. Instead, he slides further down the arm of the couch so that he’s mostly horizontal, Dazai cradling the arch of his left foot all the while.

“So you want to be Tachihara-kun’s boyfriend, Chuuya?”

“I want to try,” he corrects, glaring at Dazai when the grip on his foot becomes too—tight. He wriggles a bit to get the other to loosen up. “…You disapprove.”
“Disapprove is such a light word to describe how I feel right now.”

Chuuya squints at Dazai who’s glaring at his foot like it’s done something to personally offend him — maybe outlaw everyone from talking about double suicides or something equally inane. “I don’t need your approval to get a boyfriend.”

“I know.”

“So there’s no point to feeling like that.”

“I know.”

“Urgh, hearing you agree with me is kinda gross.”

“Your foot’s gross,” Dazai says childishly, even as he continues to rub his hands all over it.

“Then let it the fuck go?”

Dazai snaps his gaze towards him then, before he brings the foot closer to his face, rubs it against his cheek, then his mouth. His breath tingles—Chuuya squirms at the sensation, especially once Dazai murmurs his words against his skin, the sound vibrating against his toes. “I’m hungry and this is my meal though.”

“Why the fuck is cannibalism your first answer?!”

“You’re tasty.”

“You just said my foot’s gross, urgh.” Now that he mentions it though, he is kind of hungry.

“Still tasty,” Dazai says as he literally sucks on his big toe.

Chuuya responds by kicking the bastard on the face.

☆ ☆ ☆

Their date goes well—it’s dinner at the newly-opened Spanish restaurant three blocks away from the Port Mafia Headquarters, striking bullfighter red being the main theme, paella negro overflowing with toppings for Tachihara to gingerly pick at.

There’s a spot of black ink on the corner of Tachihara’s mouth; Chuuya grabs a napkin and dabs it on his date’s face.

“C-Chuuya-san!”

“You have something on your face,” Chuuya explains, continues rubbing at the stubborn spot. He can feel the other’s face grow hot under his touch—even through the layers of cloth and gloves. “There, now it’s gone.”

The waitress refilling his sparkling water makes an odd cooing sound. He smiles mildly at her, because it’s good that she’s approving of his actions—that means he did something normal, right? As he sips at his apple-flavored water, he remembers Dazai’s insistence at smacking his face without any heads-up whatsoever whenever he claims to see flecks of sauce or food on Chuuya’s
face.

Tachihara’s face looks unhealthily red.

“…Are you okay? Did I rub too hard?”

“N-No, it’s not that, I just.” Tachihara swallows, the bob of his Adam’s apple clearly visible. He looks very red and very pained. “I wasn’t expecting. I got surprised, is all.”

_Dazai does it all the time, without preamble_, Chuuya doesn’t say. It’s gauche to talk about someone else during a first date—unless that someone is their date. Plus, there’s no point starting a comparison between Dazai and Tachihara, it’s a difference between a human and a demon. It just wouldn’t work.

“I’ll make sure to let you know in advance, next time.” He’s nothing if not adaptable.

“N-No, the surprise is good.”

_But you look like you’re about to die_, Chuuya doesn’t say, especially because most people don’t like to talk about realism or death during dates. Even the shows where the main characters are police or detectives—whenever they date, they don’t talk about cases. Actually, no, they just go straight to the bedroom for most of them, don’t they? Urgh, he needs new shows to watch.

“…If you say so.”

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya doesn’t bring up the boyfriend label when he drops Tachihara off—for some reason, he’s requested to be dropped off at the headquarters, where Hirotsu-san and Motojirou are lounging by the front desk, bottles of convenience-store beer lined up like target practice. There’s Higuchi and Gin whispering furiously behind the desk; Higuchi’s phone is surreptitiously focused on the front doors.

It’s still fairly early, but Tachihara’s cheeks have been red for two hours already and he looks like he needs time to recover. He doesn’t bring up the boyfriend label not because it looks like there are Port Mafia gossipmongers ready to get Tachihara drunk to spill details about their date. He doesn’t mind them knowing.

But he’s already asked him and he doesn’t want to appear too pushy. He’s fine if it takes some time.

“Thank you for agreeing to go out with me,” Chuuya says as he closes the distance between him and Tachihara, pressing a kiss against the other’s still-hot cheek. (Higuchi makes a weird dying seal sound—oh, that’s her regular squealing sound.)

“I, I—give you everything.”

“…uh, thanks?” Chuuya watches how the all-suffering look takes hold of Hirotsu-san’s face as he herds Tachihara to sit behind the desk, beside Higuchi’s dying seal sounds and Gin’s judging silence. “I’d rather be the one buying you things?”
He knows the salary of the Black Lizard folks, after all, and even if Tachihara’s nasty enough to smuggle at least half of the drugs they shuttle around Yokohama, it’s still not enough to be a quarter of his monthly income. Tachihara has two brothers he’s putting through school, according to him during dinner, so he’s not about to allow Tachihara to give him anything too expensive, much less everything.

“Pardon the stupid,” Hirotsu-san says gravely as he not-so-subtly steers Chuuya away from the front desk and towards the doors.

“You’re leaving me out of a drinking party,” Chuuya comments not without a pout at being left-out. But then, he considers the beer cans and bottles arranged, and nah. He’d rather go for the wine in his apartment—he thinks they still have some Krug Clos d’Ambonnay left.

“We’re going to embarrass Tachihara-kun and make him rethink his life choices.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes at the too-serious tone, even though, deep-down, he’s kind of worried. But then again, that’s within his expectations, right? “You make it sound like I’m a plague to his life.”

Hirotsu-san’s brand of diplomacy means avoiding uncomfortable topics, so he parries with: “Dazai-kun has tickets to a late-night Hitchcock marathon at the theater.”

It’s an obvious distraction, but come on, it’s Hitchcock. “Wait—that’s tonight—no, now, right?”

“I’m afraid I’m not a Hitchcock fan.”

“But you know about the tickets,” Chuuya’s muttering, even as he’s dialing the bandage bastard’s phone. Dazai rejects the call, but before Chuuya can rage and throw his phone towards the glass front doors, a text message from M A C K E R E L chimes in.

run as fast as your little legs can, already got bbq popcorn & diet coke

“I hate barbeque-flavored popcorn,” Chuuya breathes out even as he’s distractedly waving goodbye with one hand at his colleagues, sprinting towards where his car is parked in front of the headquarters.

you get the diet coke, so don’t bitch about the bbq

show’s about to start in 15, i’m near the drinks stand

Chuuya doesn’t waste time replying to the messages, choosing to flirt with the maximum speed limit as he drives instead.

☆ ☆ ☆

“Would you like to go to Salome with me on the 23rd?”

Tachihara’s eating is much faster now, since they’re at Motomachi and they provide chopsticks upon request. (He’s offered to teach Tachihara how to be more handy with Western cutlery, but Tachihara declined it. It could be because when asked, Chuuya admitted that the reason he was familiar with forks and knives was due to the fact that, forks and knives made for better emergency weapons.)
“…as a date, Chuuya-san?”

“Of course.” *Boyfriends always go on dates, right?*

“Not like… today?”

Huh?

“We’re on a date.” Chuuya wonders if he should have asked it as a question, because Tachihara’s looking at him strangely.

“Why is Dazai-san here then?”

“Because he’s a pest,” Chuuya replies automatically—eyes immediately going to a point somewhere behind Tachihara, the restroom where Dazai’s disappeared to. Not that he’d listen, but — “I can tell him to leave.”

Tachihara looks like he’s about to say something else, but instead he goes with: “Is it another French restaurant?”

“Oh. No, it’s an opera. Their opening night is on the 23rd, I can book us a hotel near the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall so we can take our time.”

“Opera.”

“Have you been?” Chuuya thanks their waitress when she tops up his coffee. It’s lunch and he’s not about to get wasted in front of his date, even though *Motomachi*’s wine selection is wonderful. Tachihara’s gaping at him, so Chuuya continues with: “If it’s the tuxedo you’re worried about, I think we can still have a rush order completed—we still have a week. Or if you find a ready-to-wear one—we can shop after lunch?”

“Um, a tuxedo? Chuuya-san, that’s. That’s too much!”

Chuuya savors the lobster with a sigh. “If we go with Komeda-sensei, I’m sure she can give us a discount, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“—Komeda-sensei spoils you too much,” Dazai chimes in, poking his cheek with a still-wet finger. Chuuya swats the offending finger away, wipes at his face with a napkin.

“I’m a loyal customer, of course she’ll spoil me.”

“She does,” Dazai agrees with a half-smile, settling down on his seat to Chuuya’s right. The three of them are on a low square table, the place on Chuuya’s left empty. “She gave me a 25% discount on that new cashmere coat when I told her it’s for your… benefit.”

“I did not fucking—shit, urgh—order that coat.” Chuuya bites his lip when he notices the horrified look on Tachihara’s face. He tries to tamper down on his cursing—especially in English— whenever he’s with his colleagues, after all.

“I’ve seen your lust-filled looks towards that coat~♪”

Chuuya rolls his eyes. “It’s a good coat, but not that good.”

“Komeda-sensei will be shocked to hear that.”

“Shut the fuck up.”
“So, why are you buying a tuxedo this time? You have, like, nine right now.”

“Huh? I have ten.”

“You donated your Ermenegildo Zegna to that charity thing two weeks ago, idiot.”

“Geh. Urgh.”

“You can say ‘you’re always right, Dazai-sama~♫’, you know~♪”

Chuuya chances a look at his date, who’s stopped picking at his food. “I’m inviting Tachihara-kun to Salome’s opening night.”

“On the 23rd, right? Michiko-san gave me tickets on the sly.”

“Why the fuck is Michiko-san giving you opera tickets?” Chuuya thinks that Michiko-san’s taste is the worst. “Have nothing to do aside from swindling old ladies?”

“Michiko-san is a wonderful lady who has tickets to a number of invite-only places,” Dazai says with a laugh, no remorse at encouraging the event organizer’s crush on him. “We can all go to your private box then.”

“Did you just invite yourself to my private box?”

“Hmm, you are becoming deaf, oldie.”

“Fuck you.” Chuuya clears his throat when he remembers Tachihara’s horrified expression. “So, Tachihara-kun, would you like to?”

“I’d like to, love to,” Tachihara’s shooting looks between Dazai and Chuuya, looks that Chuuya’s unable to decipher. “But the tuxedo—the tickets—the hotel—it’s too much.”

“Well, I already booked us a room in Park Hyatt Tokyo.” Dazai’s smile is razor-sharp. “I guess you can come, Chuuya, though you have to be careful, because pets are not allowed there. Children below twelve too—”

Chuuya throws a salad fork towards Dazai’s face, but the man simply knocks it down with a flick of his spoon. “Just so we’re clear, whose card did you use to book the room?”

“Since I got the 51st floor with the park view, of course it’s yours?”

“Bastard.”

“I specified blackout curtains and the hypoallergenic bedding for you already, you bocchan.”

“I’m not a bocchan.”

“And it’s booked from Friday to Sunday, so we’ll have some time to shop around Shibuya before the show and go to Skytree the morning after.”

“The ice skating thing is on Sunday?”

“It’s on Christmas, so it’s a Monday, idiot.” Dazai shoves his new phone towards Chuuya’s nose, their itinerary for the holidays an image of Chuuya’s own planner. “You’re having so much memory problems, old man.”
“It’s been busy,” Chuuya says with a shrug. He’s been so busy cleaning up the records and eliminating any small-time spies from other organizations—and in a way, he’s grown to trust Dazai making sure to keep track of his non-work activities for him. It’s almost like he’s managed to acquire a secretary, if said secretary spends more time spending his money and spending his patience, really.

“That’s right, Chuuya-san’s been busy with… work.”

“That reminds me,” Dazai shifts the attention back to Chuuya, “since we’re doing your stupid anime rewatch on Atsushi’s dorm, do you want to just buy a widescreen TV for the occasion or have ours installed there for the day?”

“Yuri!! on ICE isn’t a stupid anime.” Chuuya’s learned so much from that show, really. Mostly in preparation for their ice skating thing with both the Agency and the Port Mafia (the picnic’s apparently not successful in driving everyone insane), but he ended up learning the limits of what one can do to someone. “And what, now you’re asking me?”

“Mm, because it solves your fretting about what Christmas gift to give to my disciples.”

“I’m pretty sure that they consider you the lousiest teacher ever.” But urgh, Dazai is right. He can just gift them a TV set—and a stand? XBOX 360 to go with it? “Also, Akutagawa agreed to have it on his apartment instead.”

“How did you manage to convince him?” Dazai looks relieved that it’s not going to happen on Atsushi’s dorm, because the walls there are paper-thin and if Chuuya’s memory serves him right, there’s a big trashcan there where he can dump Dazai’s body should the other be too annoying. Or maybe Dazai’s just relieved that Chuuya will not get to inspect his dorm?

“I didn’t. I told him that it’d be comfier for Atsushi if we watch it on his house, which has actual couches and beds. Instead of one lumpy futon.”

“I cannot believe you’re familiar with how Atsushi’s futon feels.”

“I went there, once.”

“You went home with Atsushi?!”

Chuuya throws his knife next, which suffers the same fate as his salad fork’s. “I brought him home—it was after our date. Remember, we actually dated before, memory guy?”

“I cannot believe Chuuya takes men home after their first dates…”

“You’re trying and failing to make it sound scandalous.”

“So, Christmas gift then?”

“You’re asking me, but I know you already bought the TV set.”

“…and an XBOX 360.”

“Urgh.”

“You can say ‘you always have the best ideas, Dazai-sama~♫’ , you know?”

Chuuya rolls his eyes again and turns to Tachihara instead. “So, about Salome?”
Tachihara doesn’t look too happy with the prospect of going to a black-tie event with Dazai nearby. “I… we can get dinner on Sunday night instead? Plus we’ll see each other on the skating rink after, right?”

“Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery has that Dada-exhibition on 24th,” Dazai says as a reply to Tachihara, but he’s looking at Chuuya, because he’s fucking rude like that. “Plus, Chuuya, if you really want to use your money to dress someone up, let’s go buy William Westmancott suits!”

“Young idea of a Christmas gift is a $75,000 suit?!”

“What, no, that’s just your regular gift to me.”

“What the fuck.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“I’m glad Dazai-san isn’t here,” Tachihara confesses in a small whisper as they walk side-by-side the busy Chinatown streets. Snowfall has stopped for the day, but it’s still pretty cold. He’s already wearing two coats – the second one being Dazai’s deep maroon cashmere coat, which okay, fine, he’s been staring at for the past few days.

Chuuya huffs as he adjusts his grip on his shopping bags when Tachihara tries to take hold of them. He can carry them. He’s not used to people offering to carry things for him—mostly because Dazai’s a lazy fucktard and everyone else knows he’s stronger than them anyway. “Me too. He’s on a meeting of some sort? About Abilities and what not.”

He keeps his voice casual, to match the festive atmosphere and Tachihara’s happy-go-lucky kindness.

Kunikida’s very flighty recently and Yosano’s postponed one of their drinking sessions. Hirotsu-san’s frown is deeper than normal and Ane-san’s busier than ever. There’s something going on – he heard Mori-san went to Russia yesterday – but as usual, he’s not in the loop.

Which is just fine, he tells himself. He’s more effective as a sword – he has no worth in trying to plan the ambush. He’ll attack when he’s ordered. If he’s ordered. Dazai’s been sneaking out of bed a lot of nights now, but he’s just camping on the floor with some files surrounding him—not that Chuuya cares, because bigger bedspace for him.

He—he’s useless when it comes to strategies and planning.

“Did you manage to buy most of the gifts you need?”

“Yes, Chuuya-san. How about you?”

“Mostly, yes.” He doesn’t care if Dazai’s been sneaking about doing what he does best: being a sneaky, manipulative bastard—who gets shot by Russians in alleyways, who gets stuck in collapsing buildings, who—urgh. “Say, can we drop by the Heavenly Empress shrine?”

“You’re planning on some sea travels, Chuuya-san?”

“I’m—” about to pray for protection over that stupid asshole. “No, but let’s drop by anyway.”
Chuuya walks faster, doing his best to ignore Tachihara’s confused expression.

☆ ☆ ☆

*We’re driving to the hotel now. Let me know if you have some requests for Tokyo ‘souvenirs’? Have a great weekend. See you on Monday.*

Chuuya doesn’t receive a reply to his text message; he gets a text from Hirotsu-san five minutes later instead.

*With a message like that, you sound like you don’t plan to contact Tachihara-kun at all during the weekend.*

Chuuya snorts as he reads the message while they’re waiting for the traffic lights to change. Dazai’s too busy fiddling with the temperature controls of his car, making it warmer. Their suits for tomorrow night’s opera are on the backseat, along with the travel suitcase Dazai has packed (Chuuya didn’t have time to check the contents, but he’s prepared himself to discover that Dazai has not packed any clothes for him, just for maximum annoyance.)

*I try not to expect Dazai’s good behavior whenever possible.*

There. It’s not like he doesn’t know that Dazai will hide his phone from him the moment they check in.

“Chuuya, don’t text and drive, I’d rather be wearing my new suit if you’re going to crash the car.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes—what kind of suicidal maniac cares about the clothes they’re about to die in? And he’s not going to crash, he’s only texting during stop signs! “Change in the backseat then, asshole.”

“Ahh, if you wanted to get me naked that quickly…”

“Good god, I’d rather crash.”

☆ ☆ ☆

*Salome* is always a vision to watch.

It’s the first time that Chuuya’s with company inside this private box of his—an octopus who clung to him the entire time, ruining the lines of their suits.

It should be annoying and too-warm, but the hall has impeccable airconditioning. He’s so distracted by fingers interlaced with his, that he visibly startles when Dazai whispers against his ear: “It’s the Intermission now, Chuuya.”

Dazai doesn’t let go though—not to get champagne, not to go to the restroom, not to mingle with some of the bigwigs that have descended to Tokyo’s cultural oasis—if possible, he crowds Chuuya deeper into his seat.
So Chuuya doesn’t either.

They hold hands until it’s time for the standing ovation and clapping.

Chuuya’s seen Salome countless times, but for the life of him, he can’t remember the storyline or the actors at all.

Stupid Dazai.

☆ ☆ ☆

“I cannot believe you booked just one bed.”

Dazai laughs, Chuuya feeling it against his scalp. “You’re small anyway, don’t tell me you need more space?”

It’s true that he’s not used to beds smaller than his custom-made one at his apartment, but he’s more concerned about the fact that despite a king-sized bed being spacious enough, Dazai has chosen to cling to him like an octopus, still.

“Plus, they don’t have an extra bed~”

Chuuya doesn’t argue about how a well-known hotel must have extra beds for their guests. After all, once Dazai decides that he’d like to leave again, there will be no repeat performances of this comforting closeness anymore.

He falls asleep to the hummingbird-quick flutter of Dazai’s heart, his phone on the bedside table, several unread messages on it.

☆ ☆ ☆

“Skytree, Tokyo Tower or both?”

“Why are we acting like tourists here?” Chuuya asks with a yawn, buttering up the toast from their room service breakfast.

Dazai hums as he flips the newspaper to the next page. He’s busy perusing the Entertainment section for gossip, Chuuya’s willing to bet his entire bank account on it. “But we are tourists, from the far-off land of Yokohama…”

“We’re thirty minutes away, what the hell.”

Chuuya’s careful not to spill his coffee or spread any breadcrumbs on the sheets pooled around his waist, but he gets this urge to not-so-accidentally spill his drink all over Dazai’s side of the bed. It’s not something he’d ever do in his own bedroom, but given that they’re at a hotel…

“So it’s both?”
Chuuya huffs at Dazai’s knowing smirk. “Damn right it’s both.”

☆ ☆ ☆

Messages Chuuya reads from his phone when he checks it just as they check out of the hotel:

(1) chuuya-san!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! you asdsalfeloped with dazai-san why
(2) you eloped how can i become the best man
(3) btw ryuu cooked chazuke for me!!!! ♥ ♥ ♥
(4) he’s apron uwan asa sada.d help too cute too much my ehadsaidas heart

(5) Chuuya-san, I heard you got kidnapped? Please let me know if you need my squad to provide back-up and/or rescue your kidnappers.
(6) Chuuya-san, please ignore the message above. Gin had provided me with your location. Please don’t make any decisions while drunk. Dazai-san knows how to spike water if needed so please be careful. Thank you for your advice on cooking the chazuke perfectly, Atsushi enjoyed it a lot.

(7) send me pictures of the room – I heard the view is amazing? also, please tell me you actually wore your tiny speedos when swimming in the hotel’s pool, I desperately need entertainment while hiding my shoes from that blasted raccoon
(8) actually, you know what, don’t wear those, the pool is a public place, we’re too busy to bail dazai out of jail if he snaps
(9) ozaki-san dropped by the Agency to visit kyouka and she’s a good conversationalist. good taste in wine too. also, tell dazai that I’m enjoying my FB & IG wall be flooded by pictures of your face (but can he take more pictures of the room? and the jacuzzi?)

(10) Fancy hat, I have it on good authority that there’s an antique book shop near Shinjuku Station. Go forth and buy first edition paperbacks of mystery stories. If you don’t trust your taste in books (I know you don’t), ask Dazai for recommendations. I’ll pay you back by trading an hour of my help on your cold cases. Wrap the book properly and box it with a fancy ribbon on top so that Edgar-kun is properly surprised.

(11) Chuuya-san, please send a text message to Tachihara-kun confirming that Dazai-san hasn’t whisked you away to register your marriage. (Or if that was what happened, let me know so I can… collect my winnings. And help prepare the right amount of alcohol, of course.)

(12) Hey, Chuuya! I tried to stop Francis, but he mailed our gift already – it’s a Stuart Hughes Diamond Suit. He said he expects you to wear it to our wedding, but I’ll definitely understand if you want to throw the tacky suit away. (You can remove the diamonds first before throwing the rest out.) We don’t have a gift for Dazai, but does that guy need anything aside from your company anyway? Anyway, I’ll tell Francis you liked his gift so he doesn’t sulk, and then give you the wine...
from our vineyard when we see each other. See you soon! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Nakahara Chuuya, this is Sakaguchi Ango. I heard that you’ve been made to entertain Dazai-kun recently. I offer my sincere condolences for that. I would like to establish a more open relationship with the future Boss of the Port Mafia. Let me know if you’d like to grab lunch after the holiday season. Happy Holidays!

Chuuya sighs at the messages, rubbing at his temples. Most of the time, he’s really thankful for his colleagues, acquaintances and friends, but sometimes, he just wishes they’d stop being so excited and giving him false hopes.

“Want me to reply to them?” Dazai asks as he reads the messages over his shoulder.

“No way in hell,” he replies even as his phone is being tugged out of his hold.

“Mm, you can worry about that… after Christmas?”

Chuuya walks alongside Dazai as they make their way to the valet parking where his car is waiting. They have enough time for the Skytree and the Tokyo Tower and still make it back for the art exhibition, but they’d have to be quick. “I’ll be seeing most of them tomorrow, you stupid fuck.”

“Then you don’t need to worry or reply to them at all.”

“You are the worst.”

“Mm, but you like it, right?”

Chuuya remembers the Agency’s lamentations about how Dazai never replies to their messages or calls. It’s gotten to the point that when any of them needs something from Dazai, they either (a) learn not to need it; (b) ask Chuuya to relay their message; (c) use Chuuya’s phone to send their message. Dazai always replies if it’s him, after all.

He doesn’t reply, but Dazai’s squeeze to his hand is enough of an indication that the other knows the answer anyway.

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya’s admiring the section for assemblages and photomontages – particularly, Hausmann’s Mechanischer Kopf in front of him, when a particularly loud throat clearing catches his attention.

His clutch on his champagne stem goes tighter for a moment, before he forces his body to return to its previous casual state.

“Good evening. Is there anything I can help you with?”

While he’s not self-important enough to think that he’s well-known beyond Yokohama, he’s also not naïve enough to think that Port Mafia doesn’t have enemies beyond its borders. He keeps his
name secret for now, but he shifts his drink to his left hand, so that his right hand can retrieve the dagger underneath his breastpocket quicker.

The man in front of him has a friendly—too-friendly smile on his face, almost similar to how Motojirou leers when he recalls the times he’s been scolded by Yosano. He looks normal, an everyday sort of salaryman, but the fact that he’s here on this exhibit and the fact that his watch has ostentatious diamonds—he’s far from normal.

“I realize I am in dire need – and only you can help me.”

Chuuya raises an eyebrow – so does this guy think that he still has Corruption? Or does he think he can buy Chuuya’s loyalty from the Port Mafia? Or does he think he’s already the Boss and he’s about to get a quick favor in?

“I am helpless against your beauty and I’ll need your company to cure me of this lovesickness.”

Is that a new fucking code amongst Tokyo’s mafia groups?, Chuuya doesn’t ask out loud. He squints at the guy – the smile spreads larger, almost like a Glasgow-grin now. Urgh.

“Did you just fucking imply that my looks made you sick?!” Chuuya hisses instead as his mind repeats the words and grasps its meaning.

“What? No! I mean, you’re pretty and I’d like to have you on as my arm candy. Plus – don’t you know who I am?”

“No? Maybe we should exchange business cards then.”

“Are you actually rejecting me?”

“Newsflash, rejection happens to everyone,“ Chuuya says snidely – though he keeps his voice low enough that the event organizers and the security will not escort him out. He’s seen most of the items in the exhibit, but he’s not looking forward to be escorted out, mostly because his phone and his car keys are with Dazai – and that guy is off somewhere, presumably to the restroom, but most likely to become the heartthrob amongst the old ladies in the gallery, since Michiko-san and her colleagues are here. While has money with him so he can call for a cab and go back to Yokohama alone, he’d rather not leave his car alone in Dazai’s hands, it’s not going to survive and his insurance company might blacklist him.

The guy looks flabbergasted at the thought of being rejected though. “You, do you even have a lover right now?”

“That’s none of your business, stranger,” Chuuya says – and reins in his desire to punch the guy.

“—As a matter of fact, I’m here,” Dazai interrupts by resting his chin on Chuuya’s right shoulder, pressing close enough that Chuuya can feel the other’s steady heartbeat from his back. Dazai’s hands immediately cross over his waist, prompting Chuuya to move his arm so that his champagne doesn’t spill.

“Urgh, I’ll remember this humiliation,” the guy promises before marching away from them.

“I didn’t need your help,” Chuuya mutters as soon as the guy’s out of earshot.

“You looked like you were seconds away from skinning him alive, I don’t think you want to go to jail on Christmas Eve.”
Chuuya breathes in and out, doesn’t smell overly feminine perfumes from the guy behind him. “Stupid Dazai.”

“Aw, Chuuya, I’ll stick to your side the whole night to protect your virtue.”

“Please don’t.”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Urghhhh, why did you let me drink too much last night, I fucking hate you.”

Dazai laughs – but it’s soft, instead of grating. Though that’s probably because the curtains are drawn, there’s very dim lighting, and Dazai’s pressing painkillers to his mouth, followed by two full glasses of water.

“You’re the one who insisted on watching *Casablanca* and then *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, while armed with wine.”

Chuuya keeps his eyes squeezed shut, waiting for the painkillers to take effect. He feels Dazai rubbing soothing hands all over him, though one hand remains pressed against his temples, drawing circles with his thumbs. “Use small words, fucker.”

“It’s around 7:15 – do you want to eat breakfast here or when we reach the skating rink?”

“It’s so fucking early,” Chuuya grouches out, though he knows it’s because Christmas at Shin Yokohama Skate Center is expected to draw big crowds.

He sort of hates Atsushi again for suggesting that they go ice skating for their weird ‘let’s have a great, fun alliance!’ trip. He knows it’s because Atsushi’s counting on hearing Akutagawa make (cute, in his words) sniffling sounds, plus the fact that he’s sure that he can spend time just holding hands while they both try not to fall flat on their faces. Sadly enough, it’s Atsushi’s approximation of a nice, loving Christmas.

(And because it’s Atsushi, most of the Agency members are game. And because it’s Atsushi, Akutagawa’s a definite yes, which means Higuchi’s spent too many hours hounding everyone else in the Port Mafia to agree. And because it’s Atsushi, cat-whisperer, the Agency’s President has allowed it, which means Mori-san approves by default. So ice skating it is.)

(And of course, everyone agrees on Christmas because they have zero social lives aside from each other. But then again, seeing that most people are dating each other within their not-so-little group…)

Shin-Yokohama is a bit farther away if he’s going to drive—and frankly, he’s not in the mood to be behind the wheels within the next two hours. But then again, the alternative, which is braving the trains is a bit… urgh.

“If we get moving now, we can arrive there in maybe an hour? There should be an izakaya open there. If not, we can always go for their 24/7 Mcdonalds.”

Chuuya sighs loudly, though most of it is swallowed by Dazai’s chest anyway. “Stop talking so much.”
“Let’s get you to your bath then,” Dazai murmurs softly, propping Chuuya upright so they can hobble towards the bathroom. The moment Chuuya sets foot on the tiles, he finds that they’re warm, already. So Dazai must have been awake for quite some time. “Once you get your drunkenness washed off, you should feel more alive.”

Chuuya just grunts as he keeps his eyes closed while Dazai clinically removes his clothes – well, it’s not like it’s much. It’s just his sleepwear and in seconds, he’s being led to his ceramic tub. There’s a hand gently guiding his head against a – plastic pillow? – near the edge of the tub. While this bath might help remove the grime and the general unpleasant feeling of waking up drunk, he thinks he’s rapidly going to fall asleep in the meantime. There’s a scent of freshly-picked apples, did Dazai bathe in apple puree or something?

“Don’t fall asleep, Chuuya,” a faintly amused voice tells him, “or else, you’d go ahead and drown in your own tub, tiny as you are.”

“Did you bathe already,” Chuuya slurs out as he feels the warm water soothe his limbs.

Dazai laughs, gently again, softer than the pillow squished beneath Chuuya’s cheek. “Is that your invitation for me to get in the tub?”

“We won’t fit.” Actually, they can, but Chuuya likes stretching his legs in his bath.

“Maybe I should wash you so you can get over this quickly.”

“Is that you asking me permission?”

There’s a snort somewhere above Chuuya, before there are hands helping him become clean, his head propped up against a sound of rapid drumbeats.

Just before Dazai tilts his head so that his face and hair can become wet and be shampooed, he asks: “Can you text Tachihara that I can’t pick him up? We can meet on the rink.”

The heartbeat that he hears stutters for a moment, so Chuuya adds: “Be nice. Or rather, don’t be such an asshole.”

Dazai’s heartbeat resumes, but it’s still hummingbird-quick. “I already sent him a message earlier. You always go too far when you’re drinking, after all.”

“So you know that means that you can’t do crazy stunts with my car, right.”

Dazai’s heart skips again – is the bastard actually sick, that doesn’t sound healthy – before hands dip his head back. Just as those same hands slide all over his scalp, Dazai murmurs: “You can trust me, Chuuya.”

☆ ☆ ☆

Of course, ‘you can trust me, Chuuya’ means that Chuuya’s about to throw up when they reach Shin-Yokohama, because ‘crazy stunts’ apparently don’t include reckless speeding and swerving in Dazai’s definition. Chuuya’s already dreading the fines and the paperwork that he’s going to face because of the traffic violations. More immediately, Chuuya’s dreading the state of his own car if he ends up throwing up inside.
“I hate you so fucking much,” Chuuya swears as he rests his forehead against the car window’s cool glass, willing the world to stop spinning. The painkillers Dazai gives him always work, but they take some time before the full effect can be appreciated.

“You’re just saying that because I haven’t fed you yet.”

“I’m going to throw up on your shoes.”

“Can you aim somewhere else?”

“Maybe your face instead.”

“Chuu, you can’t reach that high.”

Chuu snarls, but he accepts the steadying arm around his waist when he crawls out of the passenger seat anyway.

☆ ☆ ☆

Atsushi’s staring really hard at his gloves.

“So you want a McFlurry?” Chuuya asks the man, tilting his half-finished dessert forward. “Or do you need a visit to the optometrist?”

“I’m trying to see if you really got married over the weekend,” Atsushi confesses eventually when it’s proven that he hasn’t earned laser version in exchange for losing his Ability. “So, did you?”

“Why the fuck would I get married?”

“Language, Chuuya-san.”

“Don’t you ‘language’ me, man-tiger.”

Atsushi laughs – “Ah, so the man-tiger really sounds threatening when said by mafia members. I thought it was just Akutagawa.”

“You call him ‘Ryuu’ on your texts but ‘Akutagawa’ in person?”

“Do you really want to know what I call him, Chuuya-san?”

Chuu’s disgusted look speaks for itself, but Atsushi only laughs again and grabs his dessert from his hands.

“Whoever said you were innocent is a big liar,” Chuuya grumbles about his lost food, but not even two minutes later, Dazai and Akutagawa return to their booth – with a new McFlurry for Chuuya.

Atsushi leans against Akutagawa’s shoulder as he says: “Your power of prediction is really creepy, Dazai-san.”

“Mm, I can predict anything as long as it’s about Chuuya~♥”

Akutagawa sighs, as though pained that he’s stuck with them, even Atsushi. The rest of them aren’t
here yet, but that’s probably because they prefer to skate with a not-so-full stomach. “He was staring at this booth the entire time, that’s how he knew you stole Chuuya-san’s food.”

“Boo, Akutagawa-kun, why are you ruining my mystery?”

“Don’t worry, I still consider it creepy,” Chuuya reassures the man beside him, ducking when Dazai tries to hug him for those words.

“Chuuya, you’re such a great person!”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Let’s just charge everything on our card,” Dazai suggests as soon as everyone (sans their esteemed leaders, which is for the best, really, Chuuya’s sort of excited to see if they’d still wear beach outfits here) has arrived, practically camping out in front of the rink’s entrance so they get to be the first customers.

“And by ‘our’, you mean…?”

“Your card, of course!”

Chuuya wraps his hands around the bastard’s neck, all the more angrier when Dazai squats a little bit for it to happen. “I’m gonna fucking kill you—!”

“We’re not going to be admitted if there’s a homicide investigation here,” Naomi cuts in, steel on her words. “And I’m going to pair-skate with niisan, NO. MATTER. WHAT.”

Chuuya relaxes his strangulation, unnerved by the intensity from Naomi. Her brother’s just in the background, trying to disappear.

“Thank you, Naomi-chan, you’ve secured us our entrance and skate shoes rental fees~♪” Dazai singsongs triumphantly as he waves Chuuya’s wallet way above his reach.

“Bastard—!!!”

☆ ☆ ☆

“Oh… I thought you said you didn’t know how to skate, Chuuya-san.”

“I didn’t,” Chuuya agrees, as he skates alongside Tachihara, quickly distancing themselves from where most of their bags are, because that’s near the entrance and that’s near where Mori-san and Fukuzawa-san are going to appear once they actually arrive. Ane-san mentioned something about strange Christmas customs, while Hirotsu-san only mentioned praise for industrial-strength earplugs. Chuuya’s decided that he really doesn’t want to know what’s holding those two up.

“But…”

“But I… studied some well-made videos to help me learn.” Chuuya doesn’t mention the Yuri!! on
ICE marathon he did, followed by the obsessive Youtube-binge on this year’s Grand Prix Final that concluded two weeks ago. He also definitely doesn’t mention the fact that he’s watched a certain someone skate on an actual lake of ice before, enchanting and nymph-like and ever since then, he’s found ice skating beautiful. There are also some videos focusing on the angles of the legs versus angles of skate edges, so he only needs to… relax his body and let the things he saw flow into him. It’s working out well so far.

“So you’re able to learn things just by seeing them?! That’s so amazing, Chuuya-san!”

“Not really…?” Chuuya tries to deflect, but Tachihara’s already gushing about his skills—and he’s really just like Atsushi. Maybe they can be great friends, so that Atsushi has a partner in the mile-a-minute Akutagawa-praise moments that he has. “It’s just… what it is.”

Because there’s no other way to learn for him – he knew nothing before and he couldn’t catch up unless he absorbed everything around him. Killing and fighting are easy to learn, because everyone else around him does it, he has no shortage of moves to observe. Controlling Corruption—and failing, ultimately—is much more difficult because he has no references, only trial-and-error. Everything else is on books or on the Internet, so he tries to make up using that.

It is what it is—it isn’t special.

Because Dazai has the exact same ability—no, even better. Dazai started watching the skating videos three days ago and he’s already—

—speak of the devil. There’s a round of applause at the other end of the rink where Dazai illustrates a smooth triple axel out of nowhere.

Annoyed, Chuuya slides forward, gathers momentum, before he takes off from the forward edge, spinning and completing his own triple axel. There are less onlookers on their side of the rink, but Tachihara’s enthusiastic clapping—along with Higuchi’s cheering, even though both of her hands are tightly gripping the handlebars so she doesn’t fall over—are enough to get the attention of a lot of people.

Slightly embarrassed by his competitiveness, Chuuya skates back to where Tachihara’s still clapping at him. “Sorry about that—”

“—it was wonderful, Chuuya-san! Are you aiming for winning our mini-tournament then?”

“Not really.” Chuuya says with a shrug, as he pulls Tachihara by the arm so he can teach him the axel. “I just don’t want that bastard to win.”

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya spends the next hour and a half instructing Tachihara about the different jumps he’s watched, so he has missed quite a number of things around him. Once the two of them rest for a bit though, Higuchi’s all-too-happy to keep them posted.

Apparently:

- Atsushi’s prediction is right and he spent the entire time half-cuddling, half-holding hands with Akutagawa (Higuchi’s wails of I’m not jealous at all don’t sound convincing);
Ane-san and Yosano are apparently skating prodigies, all graceful moves and spins, and they apparently made a vow to beat each other in their mini-tournament?

Poe-kun tripped within the first 15 seconds on ice; Ranpo-san laughed at him for 5 minutes straight after that, then Ranpo-san fell on the ice (Lucy’s still sulking that she lost the rock-paper-scissors as to who’s going to help babysit Ranpo-san’s injured pride, especially since Ane-san’s apparently twirling Kyouka around on the ice);

Hirotsu-san’s volunteered to guard their things, but according to insider info (read: it’s Gin’s ninja skills during their drinking session last time), it’s because he doesn’t want anyone to see his secret skating skills before the mini-tournament;

Q and Elise are chasing each other across the ice at terrifying speeds, injuring the people they have bumped against. Nobody’s complained about them yet – presumably because they’re cute, but most likely because they threatened those people;

Motojirou’s dutifully recording Yosano – he got stopped by one of the security guards, because there was a complaint about a creepy man moving around the rink area. Higuchi’s not sure if he’s managed to extricate himself from that pinch, but it doesn’t sound like she’s particularly concerned;

Higuchi hasn’t seen the Tanizaki siblings in the past hour, but knowing them, she had wisely stopped any sort of pursuit. She’s too young and pure and innocent (Tachihara snorts at this; Chuuya approves of the Tachihara/Higuchi pair-up, if only because Higuchi seems a safer choice compared to Gin, or himself) for such things, you see;

Kunikida’s studying the videos Dazai watched, muttering and taking notes, generally disbelieving the fact that someone could learn figure-skating just from videos. He’s been at it the past hour and a half – Chuuya surmises that he probably won’t get to skate if he keeps this up. Miyazawa Kenji’s apparently balancing some things atop Kunikida’s head each time he passes by the man, but Kunikida hasn’t noticed – or moved yet;

Nobody admits to seeing Mori-san or Fukuzawa-san, but there have been eyewitness accounts about terrifying Hawaiian-print shirts and exposed hairy legs;

Dazai’s—

“I don’t want to hear about that bastard,” Chuuya says with a huff, stepping away from Higuchi and donning on his skates again. To Tachihara: “Do you want to skate some more?”

Tachihara declines it, saying that he’d rather rest for a few more minutes. Chuuya shrugs, thinking that at least Tachihara and Higuchi can spend time together.

☆ ☆ ☆

Like most things in Chuuya’s life, he’s not quite sure how it has come to this?

“And why did you volunteer us for a pair skating exhibition, fucker?!” Chuuya hisses to the bastard who apparently agreed to his adoring crowd’s demands for more of his flashy skating—and dragged Chuuya along with him for the ride.
“Pair skating looks more fun!” Dazai claps his hands together as they swirl lines on the ice, a big space made for them by the spectators. “Plus, we know each other’s moves well, right, partner?”

“We haven’t been partners in years,” Chuuya spits out venomously, but he tries to keep his expression from becoming too enraged, because there are lots of children around.

“Mm, it’s a good test of our bond, then!”

“Would you listen—!”

“We’ve decided, we’ll do the “Stammi Vicino” Aria~♪”

“We haven’t decided—!” Chuuya glares at Higuchi who gives him a thumbs-up as she sets-up her phone and speakers. To Dazai: “Are you fucking kidding me, that’s supposed to be a really difficult program, even in fiction!”

“Chuuya, we’re double-black.”

“That makes no fucking sense in this context, asshole.”

“Eh, it sounded nice.” Dazai shrugs as he shoves Chuuya away so they’ll have space for the initial individual portions of the program. “Plus, when have I ever been wrong?”

Chuuya’s about to reply, but the song’s already starting to play and goddamn he’s going to kill Dazai for this later.

(Like most things between them, it somehow works out well, in the end.)

☆ ☆ ☆

“I can’t believe we lost the tournament.”

“You tried to lift me single-handedly, what the hell did you expect,” Chuuya grouses as he gingerly touches his bruise on his near his liver. Dazai’s skinny arms have failed them and all he got for it was a hand-shaped bruise on his torso. (And a chance to dance that closely, intimately, with Dazai, but that’s neither here nor there.)

“Ah, let me get you an ointment for that,” Dazai says, disappearing into the bathroom for their medical supplies.

Chuuya removes his coats and hangs them by the doorway, wincing a little bit when he recalls Hirotsu-san destroying the competition. Gin’s insider info is apparently correct—and Hirotsu-san’s hiding some very flexible moves despite his maturity.

While waiting for Dazai to reappear, Chuuya checks his Facebook and promptly grimaces when he sees the first (and hopefully only) documented sighting of Mori-san and Fukuzawa-san for the day. He scrolls down to the comments and likes Akutagawa’s comment of I’m going to the hospital—before he panics and calls Atsushi to check if Akutagawa’s indeed going to the hospital. (He’s not; apparently just an exaggeration of his emotions. Chuuya very politely doesn’t snort about that turn of phrase.)

He removes his gloves for his right hand when scrolling becomes a bit more tedious—maybe he
should get those special gloves for phones?—and he likes all the photos he can see that doesn’t include Dazai.

He becomes engrossed in his social media—okay, fine, it’s because he hasn’t really had such an active Facebook account since recently, so it’s still a bit exciting—that he doesn’t immediately notice Dazai approaching him. He mostly ignores Dazai lifting part of his shirt so he can apply ointment to the part he bruised. But what he can’t ignore is how Dazai’s other hand ending up near his left ear, a sprig of mistletoe in his hand.

No.

Nonononono—it can’t be.

Chuuya slowly lifts his eyes from his phone screen and meets Dazai’s—the angle making it difficult to see anything beyond a pool of black there.

He can’t.

He can’t want to.

He just can’t.

Chuuya’s phone slips from his hand—it lands on his toes, but he almost doesn’t register the dull ache.

“Mistletoe are parasites, pests,” Chuuya rambles, tensing when Dazai shifts so that his left hand is steadying his hip against the door, so that his right hand is tucking the plant against his left ear. “They… kill trees. And stuff.”

“And stuff,” Dazai agrees, his right hand sliding down to his nape and gathering the longer strands of his hair. He hasn’t cut it for a fairly long time – some of the strands are long enough to reach the middle of his back. And Dazai’s—Dazai’s taking hold of the strands, looping them around his fingers—and—

Dazai’s pressing their bodies close together and it shouldn’t feel as—new as this, because they’ve done it countless times, but, never with Dazai looking at him like this, like there’s nothing else that exists, and Chuuya feels the tug on his scalp but it feels like a mild inconvenience, compared to how his heart clenches and dies inside his chest. It’s—it just can’t. Because things have ultimately not changed, have they? They can’t change—because that would mean—

“Merry Christmas, Chuuya,” is Dazai’s whisper before he starts unravelling the spool of his hair right above his lips – a red curtain, just before he leans in even closer, close enough that Chuuya can open his ribs and let him in – the pressure of lips over his unmistakably present, even if he deludes himself that it’s not really an actual kiss, because all he feels is the weight of the thick red veil over them. It only lasts a second, before Dazai retreats.

Chuuya doesn’t follow.

At least, not until Dazai comes back for him, still frozen near the doorway—and coaxes him to his bedroom.

☆ ☆ ☆
Chuuya spends the next few days closing some end-of-the-year deals for the Port Mafia. He dutifully texts Tachihara every day—the man’s back to Nara to see his family—the same way he dutifully declines any voice call requests.

Dazai’s spending a lot of time outside of his apartment—which is a good thing, really. The only way Chuuya notices is the absence of warm-smelling food when he arrives. Chuuya knows it has to do with the issue from a couple of days ago—Mori-san’s back to Russia, slated to be there for the next two months.

Chuuya’s the interim head in the meantime.

He has no room to falter.

He ends the year with his laptop half-filled with reports, his wine bottle half-emptied in his office.

☆ ☆ ☆

“How did you even get a goddamn helicopter?!”

God, he should have known Dazai was planning something when he was suspiciously gone for a few days.

Chuuya clings to his seat, because the helicopter is rapidly tilting as Dazai tries one maneuver after another, the seatbelt can only do so fucking much.

“I’m going to throw up on the control panel!”

“Can you aim somewhere else, petit mafia?” Dazai cheerfully asks him during the brief moment that the helicopter Chuuya’s at manages a fairly horizontal position. And this being Dazai, he doesn’t wait for an answer before he makes a damn flip, to the tune of Chuuya’s half-enraged, half-nauseous shrieking.

Eventually, Dazai tires of making Chuuya scream his vocal cords out, but as Chuuya rests his forehead against the glass windows, he sees the first streaks of sunlight breaking the horizon over Yokohama Bay.

Dazai’s smiling—he can sense it, even as he keeps his gaze riveted on the first sunrise of the year.

“Only you would think of hijacking a helicopter just to see the first sunrise.”

Chuuya feels Dazai grab one of his hands. “Let’s do next year’s hatsuhinode on top of Mount Fuji, Chuuya.”

Next year.

Chuuya smiles, because that kind of promise is nice, but ultimately means nothing. It’s nice, if only in this moment though.

So he squeezes Dazai’s hand back, then realizes that Dazai fucking let go of the controls to hold his hand, as evidenced by the sudden plunge in their altitude.
“You stupid fuck—!”

☆ ☆ ☆

“I cannot fucking believe you almost made us commit a double suicide. On New Year’s Day. What the fucking fuck?!”

“Come on, Chuuya, we survived, didn’t we?”

Chuuya’s not impressed, even as Dazai helps him out of the tangles of safety belts. “I think I lost a few years of my life there, you shitty dick.”

“But it’s an exciting way to start the year, right?”

“You kidnapped me from my office, ran off with me on a helicopter, nearly crashed the helicopter to the sea… that’s what you call exciting?!”

“Hmm, the kidnapping part isn’t really exciting because Ane-san called me to complain about your snoring in your office.”

“Ane-san?!”

“If you become too much of a workaholic, your subordinates will worry about you, you know.”

Chuuya glances at Dazai, who stands leaning against the helicopter from where they did their emergency landing. It’s a cliff, somewhere, Chuuya’s not exactly sure and his phone’s GPS is useless since it’s in Dazai’s hands now.

Dazai’s fidgeting a bit, some traces of sleepless nights on his eyes.

“Spit it out so I can go back to sleep, damn it.”

Dazai freezes for a moment, before taking a deep breath.

“I need to go with Fukuzawa-san to Russia. For an… investigation.”
Things that happened to Chuuya after his first hour awake for the new year:

- Dazai must have kissed him goodbye, somehow, because his entire face tingles (well, save for his mouth) and his neck actually hurts. Or maybe Dazai knocked him out by smashing his face against the helicopter door, because goddamn, it really hurts.

- Dazai must have planned – when has he not, really – for Akutagawa and Atsushi to pick him up there (so even their emergency landing isn’t an emergency after all) and bring him for the new year shrine visits. He knows he must have selected a fortune, but he can’t remember it. Knowing him, it’s a big misfortune.

- Dazai texts him nearly every hour. Chuuya shuts off his phone because the steady vibration is driving him nuts. Ane-san storms to his office every time he does that, because Dazai’s apparently driving her nuts if he doesn’t respond.

- Dazai reminds him to return to his apartment every single day. Chuuya ignores that every single day too. He has a fairly spacious office that has complete living facilities in the headquarters. He’s the Interim Boss, he can’t just leave.

- Dazai sends him a box of expensive chocolates on February 14, along with a message that he won’t sulk that much if he sees Facebook posts about Chuuya enjoying a date with Tachihara. Ah, that’s right, he has a boyfriend right now.

- Dazai doesn’t tell him about the investigation he’s assisting Mori-san and Fukuzawa-san with. Nobody in the Port Mafia or in the Armed Detective Agency tells him either. He gets the information from Ango, who treats him to a surprisingly-good coffee in some shady street stall.

- Dazai doesn’t answer his question about the likelihood of success for the new terrorist group threatening to break Fyodor Dostoevsky out of prison so he can return Abilities to the world. Instead, Dazai tells him i miss you terribly in pixelated characters devoid of feeling.

- Dazai sends him more chocolates on March 14, along with a message i’d like to bleach my eyes out, *they* are cuddling urgh i want to hug you in still-pixelated characters devoid of anything that Chuuya needs from him.

- Dazai siphons the life out of him, leaving him with work, work, work. It’s just like before, only with more phone contacts and more Facebook friends, this time. He wonders if he should feel happy for expecting this all along.

One more thing:

- Dazai doesn’t tell him that his flight back is on April 29.
Chuuya tells himself that he’s not excited for Dazai’s return.

“Are you excited for Fukuzawa-san’s return then?” Atsushi asks him as he seats cross-legged over his lumpy futon. Well, he’s about to say goodbye to the lump as he’s moving in with Akutagawa on an apartment just across Gin’s at the end of Golden Week. Higuchi’s going to be Gin’s new roommate, since her sister has apparently found a boyfriend and would like some privacy. (Higuchi’s been wailing about always being kicked out, to which Gin tells her that she’ll kick her out if she doesn’t stop wailing at home too.)

“I’m not,” Chuuya says with a groan as he slumps over the box he’s helping Atsushi tape over. Akutagawa’s been banned from attempting to help with Atsushi’s packing, if only because he’ll just be a liability (Lucy’s words, not Chuuya’s).

“I heard they plan to get married in June.”

“…Dazai and Fukuzawa-san?”

Atsushi takes the box away from him, causing him to slump forward against the tatami instead. He’s so damn tired, it’s like the work’s never-ending, now that there are other mafia groups beyond Yokohama that want to make deals with them. “You’re being silly, Chuuya-san.”

“I’d really rather not imagine Mori-san’s marriage, you know.”

“But you can imagine Dazai-san’s?”

“There are nooses everywhere. There’s a ticking bomb strapped to the unfortunate spouse. The ceremony’s held at a skyscraper about to fall down. Meteors will rain down on Earth as punishment for allowing such idiotic thing to happen.”

Atsushi laughs again, calls him silly again. “Don’t jinx yourself, Chuuya-san.”

“I won’t allow myself to be dragged to that, don’t worry.”

“If you say so.” Atsushi’s nearly finished, so he tugs Chuuya over to the futon so he can slump in a more dignified manner. “By the way, are you planning anything to welcome Dazai-san back?”

Chuuya closes his eyes so he can’t see Atsushi’s earnest eyes. It makes it harder to lie.

But then again…

“Actually, I’m planning to get some things from Dazai’s dorm.”

He remembers Dazai saying that he hid a bottle of his most favorite drink of all time somewhere in his home—for the life of him, Chuuya can’t remember what drink is it. He plans on cooking something that complements the drink—not because he’s actually relieved to see Dazai back. It’s just… the helicopter thing is kind of a nice gesture, that he needs to give something back? And he’s never really returned anything regarding the chocolates too.

“Eh, I was wondering why you bothered to visit me on your birthday,” Atsushi mock-pouts at him. “And here I thought you liked me better than honeypot!”

“I don’t ever want to hear that pet name for Akutagawa again,” Chuuya says gravely, slapping
Atsushi’s arm in admonition. “Also. Oh. It’s the 29th. Yes, I believe it’s my birthday.”

“It’s really creepy—Dazai-san texted me last week and told me you’d say that, word-for-word. Happy Birthday, by the way!”

“Thank you, Atsushi. Did he predict this too? Dazai Osamu should go to hell.”

“………yes,” Atsushi says with his face scrunched in creeped-out horror.

“Geh. Stupid bastard.” Chuuya then hits Atsushi’s arm again, gentler this time. “So? Come help me raid Dazai’s dorm.”

“But it’s been empty for months?”

“But he’s—has he moved?”

“…I’m not sure why you’re asking me, Chuuya-san.” Atsushi looks very concerned, and very much interested in running away. “I mean… you’re living together, right?”

☆ ☆ ☆

Things that happened to Chuuya after Atsushi shows him Dazai’s empty dorm:

•
Chuuya’s not surprised that the door to his apartment swings open without him even trying to slot in his key. He’s not surprised that Dazai’s already there, thick coat for Russian climate already discarded, already waiting for him on the couch.

Atsushi told him ‘Happy Birthday’. If he checks his phone now, he’s sure there’ll be similar well-wishes there.

Chuuya feels anything but happy right now.

“…You’ve moved in with me.”

Dazai’s eyes are as dark as coal, with the curtains drawn shut and the lighting dimmed. His voice is equally dark, low, almost like tar. “Yes.”
Chuuya takes a deep breath as he feels trembling spreading all over his body.

“…You’re in love with me?”

It’s a question that he knows the answer to. Or at least, he used to know the answer to. Dazai claimed to never lie on negotiations and what happened back then—was a negotiation, nothing else.

“—yes.”

*Dazai Osamu is a fucking liar.*

“Why—” Chuuya feels the shadows in the living room crawl all over his skin, skittering inside, clinging to his lungs, embracing his throat. “—why didn’t you tell me, you bastard?!”

Chuuya’s heart beats staccato beats of misery and hurt, as he watches Dazai’s face remain impassive, in control. He hates it. “You’ve got—you’ve got so much time on your hands, so many chances—”

He’s gesturing wildly, his hat’s dropped off, his outer coat is on the ground, his heart is crushed half-beaten by his own feet.

Dazai’s eyes remain impossibly dark, his face impeccably serene. “You’d have rejected me.”

“Damn right I would have.”

Dazai’s eyebrow raises, and Chuuya could hear what he was about to say, moments before he said it. “And you wonder why I didn’t tell you?”

Thing is, when he’s right, it’s always about the things that hurt him anyway.

He grabs his right wrist in order to stop himself from flipping off the table. He ends up kicking the table anyway, bowling it over towards the dining room portion of his apartment. The resounding crash doesn’t calm the noise inside his head, screaming at this injustice, at this disgrace.

“No, no, no – you do not get to turn this on me!” Chuuya uses both of his hands to tug harshly at the collar of Dazai’s shirt. “You – you do this. All the fucking time. You always didn’t trust me – you never did – to control myself, to make my own decisions, to actually know things, to decide on how I feel – all the fucking time.”

Dazai has the grace to look chastised, though his words are stone-edged. “…That was back then.”

Chuuya snarls against Dazai’s face, his teeth bared in anger. He can’t do this to him. He’s been doing so well. It’s been three—no, four years now. He’s been doing so well. It’s been seven—no, eight years now. He’s been doing so well.

“And now, you didn’t even trust me enough to tell me. Anything.”

Not about them apparently shacking up together for real. Not about the chance that Abilities—that *Corruption*, will return to haunt him, if Fyodor Dostoevsky’s released back to the world. Not about Mori-san continuing to ask Dazai to consider returning to the Port Mafia to be its new Boss. Not about the fact that their love is apparently mutual. Not about the fact that Dazai had lied to him for years.

“Even though, you’re what? Living with me? Telling all of your friends about how ‘Chuuya must
be so happy I’m paying attention to him now’? Well, guess what—”

Dazai interrupts with a shake of his head, even though he doesn’t wriggle out of the chokehold on his airways. “I didn’t—you know that.”

“I don’t really know anything, do I? Back then—”

“Chuuya, don’t—”

Chuuya glares at the man who has ruined everything for him. This _monster_ who used to be his partner, this demon he _trusted_ for all the wrong reasons.

“_Back then._ I told you I loved you back then. Back then, you didn’t even trust me enough to give me a proper rejection, did you? You probably thought that poor old me would lose my shit and be a liability to you if I got my heart broken. You—”

“Chuuya—”

Dazai struggles against his hold, but Chuuya tightens the grip around the collar even more, so that it raises red bruises around Dazai’s neck.

“—probably thought that, I – what, am blind enough to see that you were paying more and more attention to your drinking buddies? That I didn’t know you were going to reject me anyway?”

“—OdaSaku and Ango—they were my friends.”

Chuuya exhales—and lets Dazai go. He staggers backward until his back hits the television screen. “And I’m just the sharpest tool in your box.”

The placid façade over Dazai’s face ripples, for a moment. “No, you—”

“Back then, ha – and this is crazy, _back then_, you didn’t even reject me outright.” Chuuya’s voice turns wistful, even though he doesn’t mean to show even more weakness to this demon. His vision blurs, so he doesn’t see if Dazai’s expression changes again. It doesn’t matter. “Do you even remember what you told me? No? You told me that we’re not normal. That things like, what, holding hands, kissing, living together, being happy – aren’t for us. That we’re monsters.”

Chuuya exhales again, continues with a cracked voice. “And the craziest part is – I actually believed you. All this fucking time.”

“We were not normal then,” Dazai replies, a dark blur that’s approaching him. Chuuya leans harder against the screen, wonders, idly, if he can merge into it, so he can run away from this world, so he can leave everything behind in a burst of sparks and colors. “—and you know it. But it’s not like that anymore.”

Chuuya half-snorts, half-cries. Ah, so that’s why his eyes aren’t working right. He’s crying _—again—for this stupid jerk.

“No? You told me that I was just drunk and not in my right mind – that I was not really in love with you, because what I felt wasn’t love.” If he closes his eyes, he can still see everything _from that moment_ play out in technicolor. It’s been exactly eight years since that day. “But that didn’t stop you from fucking with me, did it? And then the very next day – I get the news that you left the goddamn Port Mafia.”

Chuuya takes another deep breath, lets it warm the shadows slithering inside his mind, exhales.
“You—you can’t just suddenly think, one day, that it’s a nice day to start screwing up my life again. I won’t let you.”

Never again.

“But I really do love you, Chuuya.”

“So?” Chuuya asks even as Dazai scrambles to wipe the tears from his eyes. “I’ve loved you longer and you’ve hurt me longer, after all.”

“So everything should work out,” Dazai says, sounding like the petulant child that he really is, underneath all those layers of bandages and strategies. He’s just a child who’s never really grown up, because he’s already an exceptional child genius, so there’s been no point to changing. He’s always seen the world in such simple terms of winning (him) and losing (everyone else) that Chuuya’s heart is just part of the dust that falls off a chessboard that’s flipped over one-too-many times.

Eight years ago and Chuuya would have carved out his own, beating heart, the moment Dazai said that it’s part of the plan.

Never again.

“Give me proof that you won’t just—” Chuuya bites at his lip, bites the fingers that tries to keep him from gnawing his teeth together. “Proof that you won’t just leave.”

“Chuuya—”

“Don’t have one, do you?” Chuuya spits out the blood from biting Dazai’s stupid fingers. He thinks it lands somewhere on Dazai’s face. The hissing inside his head doesn’t stop, calling him a disgrace loved by a fellow disgrace. But Dazai’s so very good at sloughing off his problems and leaving him behind with the mess. He’s the only one truly disgraced here, tainted with darkness, tainted with the budding light of hope that will never fully bloom.

“Chuuya—there might be no proof, but—”

Chuuya inhales, exhales. The air inside him is all clotted and dark. But once Dazai leaves, everything inside him will just be pure Nakahara Chuuya. Just like before. Just like how it should be. Just like how it always will be. “Get the fuck out of my life, Dazai Osamu.”

Dazai’s holding his face, the grip vice-like. Chuuya doesn’t feel that pain, because there’s something that will always ultimately hurt more.

“Don’t make me, Chuuya, I can’t leave you again—please.”

“Get out,” Chuuya repeats, but when Dazai doesn’t let go, he punches the man’s stomach, too quick for Dazai to guard the blow. Dazai flies to the other end of the room, almost as if—

But it doesn’t matter, because Dazai’s running towards him, more frantic than ever, and there are hands tugging off his gloves, and there are hands wrapping around him, and there are hands, shadowy hands wrapping around his beating heart.

“Don’t—don’t leave me, Chuuya—don’t—you can’t accept Corruption—I can’t leave you again —”

There’s a mumble of pleas—prayers—but all he hears is the own roaring inside him.
O acquaintances, grantors of dark disgrace, do not wake me again!
I will endure my solitude, arms seeming already useless.

O eyes that open doubtfully, open eyes that stay motionless for a while,
ah, heart, that believes in others more than itself,

O expectations, stale and dismal airs, leave, leave this body of mine!
I enjoy nothing anymore but my wretched dreams.
“—Chuuya, don’t leave me, I’ll do anything—just don’t—”

☆ ☆ ☆

This story that has no meaning
Will vanish this night along with the stars
If I could only see you, eternity would arise from hope

Stay close to me and never leave
I am afraid to lose you

Chapter End Notes

• before you reach for tissues/bricks, please take note that this is all according to plan. they'll be together in the end, i swear.

• the next two chapters will be the interlude re: dazai & chuuya's past - so we get to see the details for chuuya's past confession to dazai (aka: more more suffering)

• i did a post summarizing most of the symbolism/themes references for this fic. might be worth to check it out! ;) please note that it doesn't include spoilers for future chapters. mostly. LOL

others!

• lyrics / song is from the beautiful “Stammi Vicino, Non Te Ne Andare” (Stay Close To Me and Never Leave) from Yuri!! On ICE. the pair skating version is here (i couldn’t find a better version in youtube orz)

• timeline-wise, i’m basing the current year we’re in on the story to 2017 (crossing over to 2018) (so the days for the holidays correspond accordingly, as well as any of the “real-life” events mentioned e.g. Grand Prix Final, etc.)

• also, dude, if chuuya watched YOI, he’ll just go – so it’s ok to kiss and exchange wedding rings! it’s not considered romance because the genre label isn’t romance and they don’t refer to each other on the show itself as boyfriends, right?! (if you haven’t watched/heard of Yuri on ICE – omg wow! LOL well, long story short, it’s a figure-skating sports anime that has its main characters in
a canon BL relationship / …though the characters don’t use boyfriends/lovers to refer to each other in-show 8D)

references!

- *Michiko-san* is that event organizer during Chuuya’s date with Higuchi ;) // the *Stuart Hughes Diamond Suit* is quoted at $892,500 (WTF Fitz) // *Dada* (~European avant garde movement) is apparently one of IRL Chuuya’s main influences // *mistletoes* are considered “useful parasites”, because despite their parasitic ways, they provide a net gain to the ecosystem by increasing biodiversity // *hatsuhinode* is the ‘first sunrise of the new year’ is sorta a Big Deal in Japan + sunrise viewed at the top of Mt Fuji is considered A+++ // Chuuya’s birthday (APR 29) is also *Showa Day* in Japan (holiday celebrating Emperor Hirohito’s birthday) // the *grantors of dark disgrace* line is from IRL Chuuya’s poem: *Sheep Song* //

references for places!

- the *Heavenly Empress* Shrine is the one that Dazai & Chuuya visited on their “first date” // *Tokyo Opera City Tower* is a skyscraper in Shinjuku, Tokyo, that houses many facilities, like the Concert Hall & Art Gallery; it’s tall enough for one to be able to view the Tokyo Tower/Sky Tree/Mt Fuji from its sky restaurants // *Park Hyatt Tokyo* has 52 floors & is apparently the closest hotel to Tokyo Opera City Tower at 500 meters away? if I read the map right LOL // also according to Google, *travel time between Tokyo & Yokohama* is at 29-65 mins, depending on train/car/traffic/which part of Tokyo you come from/how much you get lost in the station platforms/etc. // *Shin Yokohama Skating Center* is… a skating rink… located 5 mins away from Shin-Yokohama Station LOL it’s open on holidays! // there’s quite a bit of restaurants near Shin-Yokohama Station – but the ones referenced here: *Mcdonalds* (24/7) & *PRONTO* (the izakaya; 7AM-11PM) both exists :D

• and of course, last but not the least, i hope that you managed to read till the end, and i love you all ♥ ♥ ♥
intermission: The House of The Dead

Chapter Summary

• interlude set a few weeks after dazai leaves the port mafia

Because Chuuya is a good partner, he cleans up the leftover missions and cases Dazai was working on before he left the Port Mafia. The last one he’s working on brings him to Russia to investigate a Demon who can supposedly “weigh one’s soul”. There he meets a sickly man who offers to help him.

(protip: it’s Fyodor)

Chapter Notes

• heya! i’m still battling my shitty internet situation (even loading ao3’s chapter posting page takes 10+ mins)... i’ll try to finish replying to all your comments from last chapter (you all rock so hard♥️) but if i can’t, i promise to do so once internet issues have been resolved!!! for now, sorry for any delays v___v

• so this isn't part of the two interludes that was supposed to happen after last chapter, but i got a request to post fyoya early, so... (just to clarify, this scene is supposed to happen anyway, just not posted now. supposedly. haha)

• thank you as always for your support!!! ♥ the soukoku-past interlude part 1 is 25% done as of now ^^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chuuya sneezes—and promptly tries to hide it. He’s hoping he could travel to Russia by taking the Eins Soya ferry from Wakkanai to Korsakov – it’s nearly six hours and it would have given him time to ignore the way Boss sussed out his supposedly-real intentions for doing this.

Boss had said that he’s trying to chase the feeling of adventure and purpose he got from D—the bastard. Boss had said that he’s simply recreating the days of glory of investigating and taking down organizations. Boss had said a lot more of things and Boss is always right.

Chuuya thinks that Boss understands him better than he understands himself, because he looks down at his gloves and he only sees trembling fingers.

He doesn’t bring the case files – anything that D—that jerk, works on ends up being an
overflowing stack of paper regarding evidence and a one-page executive summary. He’s not about to bring sensitive material on an international goose chase. He knows better than that.

In any case—the ferry service has apparently been terminated already. He didn’t want to enter Russia so blatantly by flying directly from Narita to Domodedovo. He’s not self-centered enough to think that he’s known to foreign mafia, but it doesn’t hurt to be more careful. D—he would have wanted an operation that’s been checked over thrice, not leaving anything up to chance.

Since he’s in Hokkaido anyway – he should have checked if the Eins Soya ferry was still running, but it’s not that bad, he had to check on some Port Mafia business in the north anyway – instead, he books a flight thru Aurora so he can fly from Sapporo’s New-Chitose Airport, arrive at the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Airport, before taking the next-day’s Aeroflot to Moscow’s Sheremetyevo International Airport.

Even counting for delays, that should land him firmly in the Moscow Oblast within two days. D—that guy’s report shows that the last known contact information for The Russian Demon places him at Khimki, but the notes state that moving their base of operations to Korolyov or somewhere further, Saint Petersburg.

It’d be extremely annoying if he has to travel further west, but once he’s already in Moscow, there’s at least the high-speed Sapsan train connecting the two major cities, so the travel time shouldn’t be too much if he needs to avoid airports. He hopes it doesn’t come to that, because there’s already a connecting flight between Sheremetyevo International Airport and Pulkovo Airport.

If everything goes well, he can just take a direct flight back to Narita, but in case not… well, he can lead them to a chase and provide them a seeming opportunity to ambush him. It would take a little over six days of travel, but he can take the Trans-Siberian Line from Moscow to Vladivostok, kill pursuers who’ll join him on the train, then catch a flight from there to Narita (after so much Aeroflot, maybe he can use S7 Airlines instead…).

…It’s difficult.

Because as Boss had said, he’s trying to relive the time he’s spent with D—that bandage bastard. But all it does is remind him that he’s never been the one to quickly devise travel plans, he’s never been the one to look at flight prices and instinctively know if they’re overpriced, he’s never been the one to enter credit card information bearing his name and simply waiting for the system to accept the money that he’s still bug-eyed at. He’s never been the one to strut confidently into a foreign city and manage despite not sharing a language with most of its inhabitants.

It just makes him feel the loss all the more keenly.

It makes him wonder why he’s pushing so hard for this, really.

It’s not like Dazai will learn of this and praise him for his work and return to the mafia.

☆ ☆ ☆

It’s been two weeks of bitter Russian winter and he’s unable to find traces of the Russian Demon he’s chasing. He doesn’t doubt the information that D—that guy was able to research, but there’s a few months of catch-up that he has to do and Chuuya’s—Chuuya’s never been good at too much
logical thinking. He looks at the maps and notes and he doesn’t see the patterns and lines that connect one’s thoughts together.

He promises himself to give one more sweep at the city before he ends up calling it quits, but for tonight, he plans on—maybe not drinking himself silly, but at least give that infamous Russian vodka a try.

It’s a wonder how he ends up nursing some transparent cocktail with a drop of red in it (his Russian is embarrassingly insufficient aside from the usual greetings and polite phrases) – he doesn’t know what drink the bartender gave him. It tastes overly sweet and fruity – something that he thinks D—that asshole would actually enjoy, given his sweet tooth. It also doesn’t taste or smell very alcoholic, but Chuuya’s head spins a little despite having only two small sips.

The thought that his drink has been drugged is just—hilarious isn’t the proper word, but it’s close. His head continues spinning in that awkward, noncommittal fashion for the next couple of minutes. The spinning doesn’t stop even when he senses the presence of a mini-army hulking behind him—maybe a dozen or so heavy-muscled men. If they’re smart—they’d have snipers trained on all exits to this bar.

This is why he fucking hates making strategies—he chose this bar because… instincts. And it seemed decrepit enough to annoy the aristocratic arrogance of the Russian Mafiya or the possible delicate sensibilities of someone making a name for himself as the Russian Demon. But apparently that’s too predictable.

He considers the cocktail that he doesn’t think he’ll end up finishing. The urge to challenge them to a brawl is pulsing underneath him, but he’s alone in a foreign country with zero back-up and zero negotiation finesse. He’s not about to offend a big-time Mafiya—not to the point that he’d end up dragging their feud back to Yokohama.

It’s as he’s considering the too-sweet cocktail that he gets a new seatmate, an extremely fluffy overcoat brushing by his arm as his seatmate settles himself awkwardly over the neighboring barstool. There’s a stream of murmured Russian, but the stream is fairly shallow with rocks in it, because there’s hesitation and fear there. Chuuya tilts a bit so that he’s able to observe the newcomer better, subtlety flying out of the window when he notices the guy looking right back at him.

An oversized black fur coat wraps around the man like a blanket, covering everything save for the angular face framed both by a snow-white coolskin cap and ebony hair. His looks match the description of Snow White – hair as black as ebony, skin as white as snow, lips as red as the rose – sans the gender. The slope of his cheekbones look sharp enough to hint at his heritage, but soft enough to appear boyish and welcoming. The way the coat sags around him tells Chuuya about how thin and fragile the man should be.

All in all, not quite someone Chuuya would expect from this place.

Despite that, it’s the man who speaks first – in English. Chuuya tries not to panic, tries to remember that he looks foreign enough that nobody expects him to speak Russian. “Bad people are to be found everywhere.”

Chuuya’s English is still leagues below his French, but it’s enough for conversation. “That… doesn’t paint a very welcoming view of this country. Or the world.”

“…but even among the worst there may be something good.” The man continues with a neutral smile on his face, tipping his head a little when the bartender returns with his drink. “I hope I can
be that ‘something good’ for you, this time.”

Chuuya hums as he watches the man sputter a little bit from his drink. It smells like vodka – the man coughs and coughs from the burn of the hard liquor. He’s not quite sure why this man is attempting to blend into this place when he looks so terribly out of place. He looks like some beautiful painting – or some incredibly naïve boy.

“I do hope that means you won’t try to protect me from the men wanting the attempt to beat me up.”

Chuuya’s here on a mission – fine, it’s D—that guy’s mission, abandoned, forever – but he’s not about to get some overly-curious weak-looking civilian get caught in the crossfire unnecessarily. “But I can help you.”

Chuuya watches the prim smile balance itself on the other man’s face.

“Tell me how I can get out of here,” Chuuya starts to say, but he doesn’t make it past the second syllable when there’s a deafening roar from behind him.

☆ ☆ ☆

Chuuya’s not quite sure about the sequence of events – he’s running on instincts and ingrained moves that doesn’t need much mental power to use. He knows he’s able to suppress most of the grunts’ attacks – some of them diverted to the bar’s surfaces and liquor collection. He knows he’s able to catch the bullets from the snipers and render them useless. He knows he’s able to survive that attack unscathed, alone.

He looks at the man who has shown him the way away from the bar – ducking underneath tall buildings and empty alleyways. The man, who right now is panting like his lungs are giving up, so very different from the men pursuing them.

It almost—a almost feels like back then, when he’s the one who’s able to effortlessly subdue the enemies’ physical attacks, but it’s D—that guy who has to devise the plan to move in and out of the situation they’re in. D—that bastard’s all about panting like a dog once there’s nobody else around to judge his skinny arms and low lung capacity.

It almost feels like back then—too much, that Chuuya ends up laughing at the absurdity of the situation, at finding a random Russian that reminds him of D—that jerk. It’s almost too pathetic, his shit luck, really.

“I may be mistaken…” The Russian starts, voice breathy from all the excitement earlier. “…but it seems to me that a man may be judged by his laugh.”

Chuuya tries to get his laughter under control—he looks like a madman, probably, tears in his eyes and laughter in his throat and slaughter in his wake.

The Russian continues: “And that if at first encounter you like the laugh of a person completely unknown to you, you may say with assurance that he is good.”

“So did you get assurance that I’m good?” Chuuya asks once his laughter has tapered off to a lazy
grin. He still has his dagger inside his coat’s inner pocket—he’s still ready to react to an extraordinary thing happening. He doesn’t think this man’s dangerous—at least, not in the way that he knows.

“I wouldn’t be here still if I didn’t.” The man’s voice has started to lose its breathy quality, back to the neutrality from before. He sounds young—not entirely innocent—but almost like he’s young enough to know only good and evil and hasn’t had to encounter problems about gray areas. Chuuya likes that voice—if only because he can’t be like that. “Though, maybe I should give you a chance to ascertain for yourself if you like my laughter too.”

“Will it work as well if you laugh without reason?”

“I have plenty of reasons to laugh, I assure you.” The man says with the same prim smile as before, walking towards a still-white frozen lake. Everything seems covered in white – with the way the snow is falling, even Chuuya’s coat and hair will be drowned in white in no time.

“See this?” The man continues, waving a hand towards the lake. Chuuya follows him, a bit warily, because he’s not sure if the sheet of ice will be able to carry their weight. He’s not particularly looking forward to be doused in ice water. “Here is the world to which I am condemned, in which, despite myself, I must somehow live. I’ll continue laughing as I continue living here.”

Chuuya doesn’t get a chance to reply as he sees the man glide into the lake’s surface, feet graceful in their slide over the ice, thin arms raised in different directions, an intricate dance that Chuuya’s transfixed into watching, even though he knows he should be running further away, in case there’s backup chasing him. Somehow, he’s pretty sure that the abandoned park they’re at is safe enough – it has that kind of atmosphere, as though it’s tucked away into the ends of the world.

The man looks like he’s skating over the ice, despite the normal shoes, despite the absurdity of the situation.

Chuuya watches the man’s motions over the next ten or so minutes.

The man approaches him again, coat still wrapped over the man’s body, the two of them meeting at the edge of where the frozen water meets frozen land.

“You remind me of someone,” Chuuya ends up blurting out after a few moments of just staring at each other.

“I should like to think that I’m not like anyone.” The man’s smile goes razor-sharp. “Just like how you are also quite unlike anyone.”

No.

Yes.

“I’m—”

A monster.

“The one I reminded you of—tell me, is it Dazai Osamu?”

Chuuya’s heart stops for a moment, because it’s been weeks and nobody has dared to say or show that name to him. And then it stops for a moment more, because—

The man’s hand is resting on top of his stuttered heartbeat, the moment as frozen as the smile on
the man’s face. One-three-five seconds pass – Chuuya *breathes* and his heart resumes beating.

The man’s smile wavers for a split-second, his hand leaving Chuuya’s chest slowly, like he’s surprised by what’s happening.

“You have been spared from *Punishment,*” the man says hotly, purple eyes gleaming like amethysts. “Japan’s Demon has inadvertently sent me such a unique, unexpected gift. How fitting that you’re his partner.”

Chuuya takes his dagger out and points it towards the man, unease coiling inside him. “*Who* the fuck are you?”

“I’m someone who can’t wait to meet you again, Nakahara Chuuya,” the man replies serenely, as though it’s a normal everyday thing to have a dagger pointed to his face. That’s moments before a flurry of gunshots arrive and Chuuya becomes preoccupied with annihilating the force that’s been sent to chase him.

When Chuuya turns back to look at the frozen lake, he sees no sign of the strange man.

Chapter End Notes

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**notes!**

- yes, the guy Chuuya fanboy’d re: skating was Fyodor all along;;;
- Chuuya’s travel itinerary (ferry, plane options, etc.) are c/o my Googlefu… though please don’t use it to plan your Japan-Russia trip in case you get lost :)))))
- the quotes Fyodor says (re: bad people, re: laughter, etc.) are from the novel: *The House of The Dead,* a semi-autobiography written by IRL Fyodor re: his own experiences in being imprisoned in Siberia. IRL Fyodor is apparently also referred to as *Mad Russian* because most of the characters he writes about are “mad” & that he likes writing mindgames that will drive the readers mad :))))) on top of that, IRL Fyodor’s considered to be the founder of modern existentialism… which is a theme that IRL (and BSD) Dazai subscribes to.
- For purposes of this fic, Fyodor’s Ability, *Crime and Punishment* – is an Ability that weighs one’s soul’s attachments to itself with one touch and punishes it with death should it fail the test.

thank you as always & see you next chapter! :♥

intermission: the long way home

Chapter Summary

• interlude re: soukoku past, part 01
• the 5 times chuuya has lost his home, plus the 1 time he found it

Chapter Notes

• this is part one of the interludes re: the soukoku past! please be on the lookout for the usual mix of angst/fluff :))) more specifically – chuuya's childhood is definitely not pretty. pov is a bit shaky especially in the beginning, which should, hopefully, reflect chuuya's struggles back then? D: D: D:

especially in the first three “sections”, there’s allusions/mentions/hints/showcases of emotional/physical abuse, starvation, human trafficking, prostitution, ‘witch-hunts’, ‘fantastic racism trope’ against ability-users, brief suicidal thoughts (that don’t come from its usual culprit for the show), Corruption going out of control, actual government corruption, bullying/homophobia in schools, general mafia things, MAFIA!DAZAI. most of these things have been shown/hinted/alluded to in BSD canon (orphanage flashbacks!!) but i’m listing them out, just in case. let me know if more warnings are needed!

• French translations c/o of the lovely (RisaMadara)! ♥ tysm dear ♥ ♥ ♥ please hover over the French words for the translation! :)

• as always, i hope you enjoy reading!!! :D it's a fairly long chapter (~15.8k) so please take your time :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ first ☆

—make them pay—everything's a disgrace—taint everything—make everything just like you—

A young kid—aged anywhere from four to ten, with a face beautiful enough to attract hordes of unwelcome attention, with a body thin enough to serve as a testament of prolonged starvation, with reddish curls fiery enough to look like a sun that burns anything that dares approach, with bluish eyes cold enough to appear like a marionette frozen dead in time—kneels in the middle of what
used to be a four-walled studio apartment on the fourth floor of a shabby residential building, sharing a common bathroom and mess area with seven other apartments in the same floor.

Ten other floors atop theirs have been blown off, while the three floors underneath have been crumbled.

Nobody dares approach the young kid—or ask—or understand why there are tendrils of black, black and more black spilling out from his fingertips and crushing everything it touches to nothingness.

Which is why nobody knows that thirty minutes prior to this, he’s alone inside an apartment with an empty fridge save for an apple with a maggot inside and a cob-webbed cupboard with mold festering inside, dutifully waiting for his mother to arrive and fervently praying that she’s safe, like always, and guiltily fantasizing that she’s able to get enough customers so they can eat this week.

Twenty-five minutes before this, his mother arrives with a literal bang—rusty hinges cringing in protest as his mother’s current patron knocks her head to the wood with enough force to finally unhinge the door. The young boy immediately tries to stand up and hurry to her defense, but a week of no food makes him slow, weak, useless, that he’s only able to kneel and collapse back, horror in his eyes and fear locked inside his throat. The young boy sees the touches on his mother’s body and remembers the echoes of his mother’s words about how touch between two people only serve to cause more and more pain.

Terror seizes his body even more violently when he recognizes that the man his mother’s with is the head of the city’s police. He has a gun, a baton, a bevy of bodyguards, a lot of power. He’s the same man who approached his mother after her back-alley performance of Salome, the clothes falling off her body at the same rate their dignity as humans do. He’s the same man who heads the manhunt—no, witch-hunt for father, who had left them behind as soon as the boy was born. He’s the same man cursing his mother’s looks now, cursing the way she apparently made him lose control.

The young boy doesn’t fully understand what happens between twenty-five minutes ago and now—but when he focuses again, he sees himself alone in a nest of soot and blood and crumbled cement. There’s black and black and black everywhere. There’s noise inside his head—a noise that his mother used to say his father had complained about—had stopped complaining about the moment he was born.

He doesn’t understand anything and when he spots his mother, he sees her with her hair windswept and curled in all directions, her eyes wide with terror that he feels acutely. She’s yelling, yelling, yelling, and there’s a march of the city’s police, that man’s subordinates behind her, surrounding him.

“Emmenez ce monstre loin d’ici!”

In the middle of the roaring inside his head, he hears that man say something about sorcière and exterminer and brûlé.

He knows they’re talking about his father—his father who had left them because he had gone mad and had been subsequently hunted down and burnt as a witch, all thanks to his mother’s cooperation in the investigation, all in exchange for a chance to sell her body in back-alleys and a moldy apartment in the outskirts of Paris, even though they don’t have any identifications and passports and permits to remain in this country that they had fled to in futile hopes of curing his father’s madness.
“Ce n'est pas mon fils, ce n'est pas mon fils,” his mother’s voice travels to him, even as she denounces him. As some of the men in terrible black try to haul her to her feet, she adds, frantically, “Je ne sais rien de ce que cette chose ignoble a bien pu faire!”

She continues yelling, as the words fill him, as the roaring inside him fills him, as the black tar flowing from him fills everything within a fifty-meter radius, as the men in terrible black try to cage him, chain him, contain him.

“Ce n'est pas mon fils - ce n'est qu'un monstre sombre et sale - une honte aux hommes - ce n'est même plus un homme!”

(several, uncounted, months after this, he ends up losing control of the rage festering inside him like a disease once more. this time, it happens while he’s being transported—caged like a wild animal, shamed like a war prisoner, treated like a non-human—over turbulent seas to the east. this time, there are no survivors aside from him, just as there are no remains of the shipwreck aside from the crumbled steel, eviscerated guts of captors old and older than him, and pulverized bones of kids young and younger than him, saved from the indignity of being sold to those who find human trafficking a passable pastime.

several, uncounted, moments after that, he ends up washed over a port filled with cargo and ships and men in black. before he passes out from the struggle of staying awake so he can keep himself afloat the sea, he remembers seeing a boy wrapped in black and bandages peering down at him like he’s a particularly nasty piece of shit, eyes almost black-red in the moonlight.

several, uncounted, seconds then after that, the other boy whispers, “what a unique, unexpected thing you are”, and he doesn’t retort that it’s even more unexpected that this boy talks to him while he’s covered in the blood of the people that’s been destroyed by his rage.)
“Je n’ai rien à dire,” has been his default turn of phrase whenever someone tries to talk to him. He understands more than mere bits and pieces of Japanese, because his father’s a Frenchman who has fallen in love with his mother in Japan—at least, before the voices inside his head drove him mad. He doesn’t tell them that.

People shove him by his shoulders, shove his face towards the industrial showers for high-pressure hoses can douse him in icy water, so he can be assessed properly if he can’t be of any use as the lowest sort of human being.

The touches change slightly after that—he’s clothed in oversized clothes that are too nice compared to what he’s had to deal with his entire life. An oversized coat is wrapped around his shoulders as he’s presented to a beautiful woman with heavy make-up that hopes to cover up the heavier feeling inside her. She’s the head of the courtesan house he’s been sent to, he knows, even if the Japanese words used are too rapid-fire for him.

She’s Ozaki Kouyou, but she’ll only answer to Ane-san from those who live and work inside her domain.

She’s speaking to him, asking him something.

He replies with "Je n’ai rien à dire".

This goes on for a couple more months, lessons on how to move gracefully, lessons on how to string admirers along with make-up and strategic falling of clothes over shoulders, lessons on how touches all mean that their patrons seek to control him. This goes on long enough that he’s almost able to stay asleep without the echoes of “Ce n’est pas mon fils - ce n’est qu’un monstre sombre et sale - une honte aux hommes - ce n’est même plus un homme!” ringing inside his ears for at least two hours. This goes on long enough that he forgets to correct his thoughts when he thinks of this place packed with beautiful clothes and sparkling courtesans and wealthy patrons as his second home.

New Year passes and the fortune he draws tell him of bad luck. He crumples it because he doesn’t need a slip of paper to tell him that. New Year passes and Ane-san’s most devoted patron stops coming after one night and the morning after, Ane-san’s make-up is heavier than ever.

He doesn’t comfort her—he doesn’t know how—but he tries not to flinch so much when the patrons examine him and judge if he’s worth enduring for his looks when he’s got nothing else going for him.

The day after Ane-san shows up with red-rimmed eyes, the courtesan house is filled with men in black, guns not even hidden well in their holsters. He tenses when he sees them, but the ones who’ve been here longer don’t seem that worried, so he tries not to worry so much.

“We’re here for a routine inspection, Kouyou-kun,” the only man not in black in the entourage says with a friendly smile on his face. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Ane-san minds a lot, he can see in the tense lines of her shoulders. She smiles back with the same level of friendliness, though. “Of course, Mori-san, please feel free to inspect everything.”

The courtesan house operates under the protection of this land’s mafia group and are therefore subject to sudden inspections, but he has a feeling that this is just a way to make sure that Ane-san is still here despite the disappearance of her most devoted patron. He doesn’t ask her why she
tolerates his touches or smiles when she (and his mother) insists that touches and affection only serve to manipulate and imprison one’s heart.

He stands with his back flat against the wall. He sees that boy again, more bandages on his face this time. The boy sees him too – proves that he’s not only enchanting under the cloak of moonlight. The boy moves slowly – not with weakness, but with confidence that every single moment is dedicated to him.

He remains still, even while the boy reaches him and reaches out for his right hand. He remains still, even when the boy presses small, deliberate kisses against every single one of his fingers, almost like a perfect gentleman that his fellow courtesans sigh about. The boy’s smile looks smitten and adoring, but he sees the boy’s eyes, deep coffee brown at this angle, and sees nothing but a yawning chasm.

“How are you finding the life inside this birdcage?” The boy asks him in English – he’s tempted to snatch his hand away, scratch the boy’s mouth off. But Ane-san’s looking at him, the man who led this inspection is watching him.

So he lets his hand tremble in the boy’s hold. "Je n'ai rien à dire".

The boy doesn’t look deterred from their incompatible languages and continues in English: “I wonder what other songs can come out from a broken bird like you?”

He doesn’t roll his eyes, but he doesn’t stop the stream of put-upon words that leave his mouth. It’s not like the boy will know. “Ce gars a des lèvres aussi rouges que la peau d'une pomme, mais avec une âme aussi pourrie qu'une pomme desséchée.”

He bites his lips after that statement – because it’s an unfair insult to the memories of apples he’s had in France.

The boy’s smirking at him – and his hand genuinely trembles at the sight. The boy’s grip on his hand tightens. “Je n'avais jamais entendu parlé de mon âme étant comparée à une pomme pourrie, d'habitude ils se contentent de juste dire que je n'ai pas d'âme.”

The accent is all wrong, but the words are fine, almost mechanical, as though they were lifted directly from some book.

He pulls his hand away and hisses: “Who the fuck are you?”

The boy’s smirk grows wider.

“I’m someone who finds you interesting,” the boy replies in Japanese this time, confident that he can be understood despite him only speaking in English and French so far.

“I don’t need your interest, you wretched man.”

The boy lets out a huff of derisive laughter. “Tu es intéressante, petite poupée.”

He watches the boy move towards other courtesans, questioning them with a smile on his face and a soulless glint in his eyes, though there have been no hand-kissing with them.

The inspection goes on for another two hours, but once that’s done, most of the men in black spilling out of the courtesan house, they open for business, because no work means no food. Annoyingly enough, the bandaged boy and the doctor-like man remains, seated in the VIP room reserved for extremely important people.
But he’s been doing this for months—he’s seen how his fellow courtesans act. He can endure this, even though the mafia force behind their business is surveying their work.

*He can endure this,* he repeats to himself, when a wealthy patron known for lascivious leers and wandering hands appear by the reception area. Ane-san looks troubled; the courtesan beside him murmurs something about it not being the usual schedule for ‘Jack-san’. Ane-san’s troubled gaze transfers to him—and within seconds, he knows why.

Jack-san makes a beeline for him, cutting through the meters of space and décor, lascivious leer in full force. He doesn’t quite tremble from the weight of such… lust, but he feels the noise inside him skittering like ants underneath his skin. The noise is always particularly rowdy whenever he gets a gaze that exceeds appraisal, appreciation, admiration. It whispers things like desires tainting him even further, whispers how he can just close his eyes for a moment and *then* everything will disappear. It tempts him, with promises of eternal silence from all the noise.

*He can endure this,* he repeats to himself.

Five minutes and a brush of hands against his lips later—and he *blinks.*

Ane-san’s troubled look is now gone and replaced with such deep sorrow—like she’s, like she’s sorry for him.

He blinks at the man underneath his slippers and he doesn’t recognize him. He knows it should be Jack-san, but there’s nothing left to identify him. He chucks the arm he’s holding to some far-off corner—only, there’s no corner anymore, because there are no more walls. He sees most of his fellow courtesans huddled behind Ane-san and the glow of her Golden Demon.

He tries to go towards them, maybe he’s supposed to be with them, but Ane-san points a wakizashi at him. He tries to ask why, but all that comes out is deranged laughter that hurts his throat. His mouth feels strange, like it’s been stretched out. He tries to stop laughing, but he can’t. He tries to stop what he’s doing—he doesn’t even know what he’s doing.

He can almost see faint lines of black and red crawling underneath his skin—he tries to claw at them, get them out, but it only makes the lines darker, bolder. Everything itches and everything hurts and he should just take it all out, why not let everything flow out so he can be rid of this nasty feeling?

He continues laughing and laughing and laughing, until his lungs feel like they’re deflated balloons, until his chest feels like it’s hollowed, until his eyes feels like they’ve been gouged out. There’s black and red everywhere—and he thinks about his mother’s dance that led to his father’s death, he thinks about the rage he feels inside him, he thinks about how there’s no such point in living in this kind of black-red world.

He continues laughing and waving his hands, launching destruction at all directions. He continues to do so, until his right hand is caught by another.

“Your song right now sounds like languor dreams of death,” the bandaged boy tells him almost dreamily, “I wonder what other songs you’re hiding?”

He doesn’t reply—he doesn’t have anything to say, because his mind has practically short-circuited at how fast the noise suddenly zeroes into silence. His knees wobble; he collapses to his knees a second after, his right arm stretched taut above his head. Feeling returns to his body—*hundredfold,* and his eyes roll to the back of his head from the onslaught of pain and fatigue.
Before he faints, he remembers seeing the gaping chasm of the bandaged boy’s eyes—no, it’s not completely empty and that’s even more terrifying.

(unknown to him, seconds after he’s started losing control of his own raging corruption, the strange man in the strange lab coat tells the bandaged boy to use no longer human to contain the destruction.

unknown to him, the bandaged boy refuses, though he shifts closer, as though eager to watch an entertaining show.

unknown to him, the strange man in the strange lab coat intones in a sing-song voice that wrongly suggests he doesn’t care either way: that destruction to port mafia property deserves a grave punishment.

unknown to him, the bandaged boy replies that since things are interesting, he doesn’t mind taking responsibility for this destruction, isn’t that what a good strategy is, to pay in advance to get what you want?

unknown to him, the strange man in the strange lab coat already makes plans of forwarding an incoming request—in just a few hours, no tomorrow, because the bandaged boy will not want to appear too invested in his new toy—to have a broken bird transferred to a new cage, with a new jailer that will masquerade with the title of a partner.)

☆ third ☆

Things that happened to the young boy that was always left kneeling behind the carnage he had caused, after he was taken away from the courtesan house’s care:

• He gains a name – the young boy becomes Nakahara Chuuya. It happens on one of the days of Golden Week, a strange holiday for the Port Mafia to participate in. It happens roughly two weeks after he’s been deposited by Ane-san to a tiny dormitory that only has a lumpy futon and Dazai Osamu in it.

It’s been roughly two weeks and his body hurts in places he’s never known it could hurt, since the
training to make him resistant to physical blows is very hands-on.

His new jailer, Dazai Osamu, is absent for the most part of those two weeks, though he’s not oblivious enough to not sense that the other’s been checking up on him quite often. He gets the sense that the bandaged boy is fairly important and also rather hated, in equal turns. A disgraced or exiled heir, perhaps? He can’t find it in himself to care too much, as he lives every day with persistent aches in his body.

He needs to be better soon, because he hasn’t saved enough money from his work with Ane-san – he wants to visit the place they used to live at when they were a family in Japan. When everything was still bearable. He’s not sure where to start looking first, but he knows he needs money for that.

His new jailer apparently has strict instructions that he’s not to be sent to any mission that could earn him money if he hasn’t completed the ‘basic training’. He knows that his new jailer is stricter with him – because he’s seen some others who flinch at the sight of his training. He doesn’t really care—well, he does—but it doesn’t matter.

In any case, it happens on a day when he doesn’t have any training scheduled. It’s his only day of rest, his only holiday. He looks around the tiny room – a dormitory-of-sorts for new Port Mafia recruits – and sighs at the emptiness. There’s nothing here aside from his futon. There’s no Dazai Osamu either—

“Hey there, petite poupée~♪”

O-Okay. So now, there is a Dazai Osamu inside his tiny room. It should make the room feel smaller, with the presence of one more person to take up the space. It doesn’t. Though he privately wishes that Dazai Osamu would pick a personality and stick with it. He’s a bit worried at how quick the man cycles between stone-cold blankness and fake cheeriness. The only constant is the blankness in the other’s eyes – but even that is changing slightly each time they meet.

Honestly, what a terrible man.

He looks out at the opened window, sees and hears birds chirping. Decides. “Good morning, Dazai Osamu.”

Dazai Osamu has huge bags underneath his eyes. The white bandages near his nose just emphasize it even more. “While it’s nice to call you a little doll, you should have an actual name, no?”

“You’re…losing sleep. Nightmares?” He asks because it doesn’t hurt to try being slightly more open to his new jailer. He’s younger but he looks like he has more power than the chief of police, than the human traffickers, than Ane-san.

“Maybe your first lesson should be listening to me and answering my questions,” Dazai Osamu murmurs, but his eyes retain that sliver of interest inside the abyss of nothingness. “I just have some research project I needed to finish, deadlines and all, nothing to worry your pretty little head about.”

“Stop saying I’m pretty. Or that I’m a doll.” It reminds him of how everyone called his mother pretty – right before they ruined her face.

“Maybe when it stops being true,” Dazai Osamu compromises with a shark-like smile. “Or if you actually listen to me about having a name.”

“I don’t know what my name is,” he says and he repeats it again in English and in French. “Mother… never really called me by name.”
There’s a small hum – like whatever he’s said is inconsequential. Dazai Osamu’s smile doesn’t waver. “Well, it’s good that I’ve prepared a name for you!”

“O-Okay. I don’t really care about my name.”

Dazai Osamu’s smile falters then, but only for a quick second. No, it’s faster than that. “After all the time I spent! Thinking about your name!”

“How much time did you spend thinking about my name?”

“Mm, two seconds, tops.”

“Two seconds wasted,” he says dryly, only flinches slightly when Dazai Osamu hauls him out of his futon by his arms.

“From today onwards, your name shall be Nakahara Chuuya.”

“Okay.”

“Come on, think about my two seconds.”

He—he’s Chuuya now—sighs and tilts his head obediently. “Does my name mean something?”


“…so it’s a middle-field, middle-sum-of-money?”

“Appropriately average, don’t you think?”

“So it’s a normal name?”

“No – average. Nothing about you is normal, you see.”

He—he’s Chuuya now—sighs again. He thinks that with the amount of kids in that human trafficking ship, he cannot be considered an outlier, with the number of courtesans working under Ane-san, he cannot be considered strange. But then again, he remembers the way he’s always looking back at savage carnage around him—and agrees.

“O-Okay.” He stretches out his right hand, a gesture he’s seen others do. “I’m Nakahara Chuuya. Pleased to meet you, Dazai Osamu.”

Dazai Osamu shakes his hand, but doesn’t let go. The abyss looks at him—and there’s a spark there, something like interest. Like he’s still a disgusting piece of shit, but he’s at least an interesting disgusting piece of shit.

“And your birthday is going to be today.”

“Can’t my birthday be on some nicer holiday,” he says, not asks, because Dazai Osamu doesn’t strike him as someone who’d answer that kind of question.

“But today’s Showa Day. It should be a good day!” Dazai Osamu tightens his grip on his hand, just as he continues muttering, “I skipped video games to complete the research—nevermind that. But today’s your birthday!”

“…Right. Happy birthday to me,” he says without that much bitterness.
“Happy birthday, indeed,” Dazai Osamu echoes and his smile is very bitter indeed.

**He gains things**, all bought with a black card that has Dazai Osamu’s name on it.

“Think of it as your birthday present from me,” Dazai Osamu tells him when they first venture out to the shopping malls in the incredibly busy Yokohama Station Area. It’s particularly crowded—probably because it’s a holiday?—so Dazai Osamu holds his hand the entire time so he doesn’t get swept away by the throng of people. It feels—not exactly wrong, but not right either. It makes his entire body tingle, but whenever he tries to pull his hand away, Dazai Osamu only tugs tighter.

They spend a lot of time there, cycling between *Takashimaya, Lumine, Marui* and *Sogo*, buying things like air mattresses, dozens of pillows, small kitchen appliances, shower heater, a wall television that he’s not sure will fit in his room, a gaming system despite the fact that he’s not particularly interested in those, a lot of other things.

All of them will be delivered tomorrow to his dorm—Chuuya protests about that, because he’s supposed to be training tomorrow, because he’s not sure if any of the things will fit in the tiny room, because aren’t they supposed to get permission from the dorm manager before they make any change to the dorm?

Dazai Osamu tells him that he’s already texted Hirotsu-san (*the right-hand man to the Boss*), just how high up the ladder is Dazai Osamu??) and that he’ll be in Chuuya’s dorm to receive the deliveries.

“All things else that won’t fit can go to my place,” Dazai Osamu tells him as he’s tugged towards the electronics shop so he can get a cellphone. “Or I can get you another place too.”

Chuuya doesn’t manage to gape at that flippant statement, but it’s close. Once the purchase is completed, Dazai Osamu tucks his new phone into his pants’ pocket, bandaged fingers burning a path from his hips to his upper thighs.

“Make sure you pick up when I call.”

It sounds like a threat—when Chuuya checks the phonebook (it takes him several attempts before he manages to navigate properly, Dazai Osamu being supremely unhelpful as he’s busy checking out new video games), there’s only two entries on it: his own number and Dazai Osamu’s. Against common sense, he actually flushes at that. He knows that it’s unsurprising, because it’s not like he actually knows anyone else in the Port Mafia, in his life, right now, so of course his only contact will be Dazai Osamu. He stares at the numbers and thinks he’ll have it memorized forever.

**He gains clothes**, enough to fill the built-in wooden cabinet at his dorm.

More things bought with Dazai Osamu’s black card—though their shopping trip this time takes them to several stores that remind him of the high-end designer shops that he caught glimpses of in France. He doesn’t know what to order – *how* to order – so he just stands there and trails Dazai Osamu as the bandaged boy dictates the clothes and colors and fabrics he wants to encase his new doll with.

And he—he’s Chuuya now—he knows that he’s just a doll to this bandaged boy. There’s careful remarks and lingering touches on his hair, on his face. There’s assessing looks towards him. He’s just a little different from the usual dolls, he knows, because he’s also able to destroy everything around him. He knows he’s supposed to earn his keep alongside Dazai Osamu—as a partner, he’s been told, though he supposes that it’s better than a plaything.
Then again, despite the aristocratic posture and the sneering glares, he doesn’t suppose that Dazai Osamu is plenty strong. He looks just as thin as him—and at least, he has the excuse of living in poverty and slavery before this. He’s not sure he wants to know what the other boy’s excuse is.

In any case, he’s whisked to a dressing room with a floor-length mirror with golden linings, thick drapes acting as a curtain to shield his body from the rest of the store. There’s a rack of clothes already waiting for him, an armchair facing the mirror, a small desk behind it, with two glasses of water.

He falters as he stands in the middle of the dressing room, hesitates to pick something to try.

“Just try them,” Dazai Osamu says as soon as he settles on the armchair, looking bored already. “We need to be back by 1 so I can supervise your training.”

“You’re not…” He’s not quite sure how to ask the other boy to fuck right off, because he’s supposed to strip and try on clothes?? Why the hell is Dazai Osamu still sitting there for?? Or is this part of this partnership thing, then?

“I promise not to shriek at the sight of your scars,” Dazai Osamu says dryly, hitting his main concern quickly. “Now, hurry up so we can still get lunch before you get beaten up.”

(He doesn’t quite beg, but he does tug at the bandaged boy’s sleeves and ask him if he can buy a hat to replace the one he destroyed while at Ane-san’s care. It’s—it’s hard to explain. The only picture he remembers of his father has the man’s face shadowed by the *fedora* he’s wearing. When he was first dragged off the water to be presented to the courtesan house, a hat has been shoved on top of his face, in order to mask his hair and eyes—sure marks of a foreigner. Dazai Osamu lets out an irritated sigh at his request, but allows him to get a plain black hat. He thanks him, hands clutching at the hat’s rim as they make their way to a restaurant for their lunch.)

**He gains knowledge of how to write *kanji*, courtesy of Dazai Osamu.**

“If you’re going to keep staring at me, might as well make yourself useful,” Dazai Osamu tells him one day, while he nurses the bruises all over his arms.

It’s been two months—and he’s more-or-less able to dodge most of the heavier blows, doing wonders to his bruise collection. It’s been two months—and he hasn’t lost control in that time. He considers celebrating, but acting like a normal human being isn’t exactly a cause for celebration. Plus, he has nobody to celebrate with, he doesn’t have any money so he can celebrate.

All of the things inside his dorm, all of the food that’s inside his fridge and his stomach are all bought by Dazai Osamu. Sooner or later, he’s sure that it will feel that his entire being belongs to Dazai Osamu. It isn’t a nice thought—but it’s comforting, in a way. There’s something soothing about the thought of knowing where to belong. He just wonders when would his mother’s screaming about him end up being repeated in Dazai Osamu’s voice.

“You’re not listening to me again,” Dazai Osamu complains after a few moments, one finger reaching out to poke his forehead. “Get some paper and watch how I write.”

He copies the *kanji* for his name – middle-field, middle-sum-of-money – reeking of something completely *average*, the *kanji* for *naka* and *chuu* the same even though they’re pronounced differently. *Chuuya* is the name of someone who’s both average and a monster.

How fitting.
• He gains knowledge about things to like and dislike.

He ends up sticking his tongue out at the taste of crabs preserved in cans. Strawberry-flavored things make him want to brush his tongue immediately, even though he’s fine with actual strawberries still tart with sourness. He isn’t particularly fond of sweets, but he enjoys apple pies and bitter coffee.

Dazai Osamu drops by, unannounced, usually in time for dinner. They usually go out and ignore the curious looks of the adult passersby—they must make a sight, two young boys filled with bandages and bruises, but with clothes expensive and tailored, with men in black trailing them a respectable distance away.

When Dazai Osamu’s in a mood, they stay inside the cramped space of his dorm, sharing the single air-mattress as Dazai Osamu either plays racing games in deafening volume or picks at his healing wounds by stabbing his fingernails over them again and again.

He dislikes it, seeing and smelling the blood in the air, whenever that happens. During one of his moods, Dazai Osamu tells him that he’s just waiting for a suitable moment to die. He’s not sure how truthful that statement is—it feels like something Dazai Osamu will not lie about, but there’s also not much point for him to speak the truth. It feels like a threat and he dislikes it.

He dislikes the times Mori-sensei drops by during his martial arts training, dislikes the heavy weight of the doctor’s hand on Dazai Osamu’s shoulder as they both watch him struggle against a barrage of strikes. He dislikes those times the most, not only because Mori-sensei watches him with a sense of a doctor who wants to dissect him—like his ribs are going to be broken one by one so that his insides can be exposed to the man’s curiosity. He dislikes those times, because Dazai Osamu has ordered him to act like a weakling each time it happens—easy to follow during the first few weeks, but it’s difficult to allow the blows to reach him after he’s able to understand the rhythm of the movements.

Nevertheless, they’re supposed to be partners. He supposes that Dazai Osamu hasn’t given him a reason to not follow his words yet.

He dislikes the nights when he tries to sleep and he only hears the nightmares echoing inside his mind. He supposes that he should be thankful that the sight of his mother screaming at him has been reduced to patches of black and red. He wonders if there will come a time when he won’t hear the words, when he’ll hear something else, when he’ll just be suspended in the darkness, drowning in all the destruction, all alone.

Some nights, Dazai Osamu drop by, unannounced, way after curfew, sitting down on his legs as he trashes about in his futon. Some nights, Dazai Osamu holds him down, pins him on the tatami floorboards as he tries to claw at his own face. Some nights, Dazai Osamu talks to him about difficult words, about existentialism and leap of faith, talks to him about wandering around in the paths toward purgatory, talks to him about an emptiness so vast it overcomes one’s life.

Those nights, he’s unable to answer, to hear, to see.

Those nights, he’s unable to understand.

Those nights, the “Ce n'est pas mon fils - ce n'est qu'un monstre sombre et sale - une honte aux hommes - ce n'est même plus un homme!” blend into something else.

He likes the voice, deep in the dark of night, that says: “Crois moi lorsque je te dis que tu es là avec moi.”
He likes the hands, strong and reliable, that says: “Tu es Nakahara Chuuya, et tu es là avec moi.”
He likes the presence, *there with him*, that says: “Tu es Nakahara Chuuya et je suis là avec toi.”

- **He gains power** – strong enough to defeat the strongest martial artist in the Port Mafia.

He doesn’t mean to do it.

He’s never meant to do any of it.

He’s—he’s tried so hard to not do anything like it again. He’s been taking up meditation, he’s been undergoing harsh *training* under Dazai Osamu so he could withstand not giving in to the darkness inside him. He’s been doing *so well* – he’s been able to complete missions backing Dazai Osamu up, not standing out too much as he’s been ordered, his hair all curled up inside his hat, his eyes covered by a sheet of brown contact lens. He’s been doing so well, pretending, acting, masquerading like someone in control.

It only took one *word* to unravel everything.

*You’re just a tainted dog of that demonic prodigy.*

He tells himself it’s because of the word ‘dog’ that he’s lost control, but it’s useless, because he *knows* it’s not. He’s made peace with that part of himself – that he’ll always remain an *adog*, waiting to attach himself to a master, waiting for an order, waiting to be fed, waiting for treats, waiting for praise, waiting, waiting, waiting.

He’s not supposed to react so easily – to the word that alludes to his own corruption. It’s the entire point of his additional training with Dazai Osamu, for the other to verbally abuse him with reminders about his past (and present, and future, and forevermore) so he can build resistance to it.

He should have backed down – he’s already subdued the person teaching him martial arts, the person who has traveled the world in pursuit of learning many different arts and has accepted millions of illegal yen so he can lend his strength to the Port Mafia. *Taekwondo, karate, aikido* and *capoeira* – he’s bested this *master* known as the best martial artist, not only in Port Mafia, but also in the entire Kanto region, bested him in all four arts.

He shouldn’t have extended a helping hand to his teacher then, when he was sprawled on the ground after he’s been defeated. He should have known that defeat stings, even more when it comes from some odd foreign monster like him. Of course, Dazai Osamu had told him that his *Ability* to cause mass destruction hasn’t been made public to most Port Mafia members yet (how they were able to suppress that information, when he had destroyed the courtesan house, he’s not sure). So his teacher shouldn’t have known to connect him to *that*.

Still.

His teacher spat at him, “Don’t get cocky, brat. You’re just a tainted dog of that demonic prodigy.”

And minutes later, he’s spitting blood, and he’s—

“Ah, did you have to blow up even your dorm?” Dazai Osamu asks the cratered ground, covered in blackened blood. There were some low-level trainees still in their dorms when the *Ability* had activated. They’re now stuck there, to the *tatami* floors, forever. “I still haven’t beaten that one game.”

He hears the words, but he doesn’t really understand them. They’re coming from outside, from all
around him, while he’s floating inside his mind. All he feels is pain and rage—and maybe, that’s fine. He takes a step forward, the ground rumbling with each step he makes.

“I just wanted him to stop,” he tries to say, but only blood and laughter bubbles from his mouth.

Through the veil of black and red, he sees Dazai Osamu’s eyes tinted with black and red too. There’s a spark there, bubbling like scattered stardust, and he realizes, **oh**.

Dazai Osamu finds **this** situation interesting.

What a terrible man, indeed.

His heart tries to beat faster at that revelation—someone, no matter how soulless and terrible, actually finds his corrupted form **interesting** instead of **terrifying**—but it’s overburdened by exertion. It stutters, freezes, breaks, inside his ribs and his vision swims.

The last thing he recognizes before succumbing to the darkness is Dazai Osamu whispering to him, hands cradling his face, “**Tu es Nakahara Chuuya, et tu es là avec moi. Tu es Nakahara Chuuya et je suis là avec toi.**”

(unknown to him, in the report that comes after the incident, dazai osamu tells his higher-ups that there’s just your run-of-the-mill explosion from an experiment gone wrong in one of the dorms for low-level trainees. unknown to him, dazai osamu tells them that the **best martial artist in the region** has quite unfortunately, been caught up in that terrible explosive accident.

unknown to him, dazai osamu tells the executives that nakahara chuuya remains to be a weakling of no further use to them, so he’s going to try some new training, in some new environment, because it also doesn’t bode well for the port mafia to have stupid members who have zero education to their name.

unknown to him, dazai osamu confronts hirotsu-san afterwards, about things like meddling in his business and informing more people than needed about the uncontrollable power of **corruption**. unknown to him, dazai osamu tracks down the family, friends, dormmates, mission partners, anyone in contact with the **best martial artist in the region** for the past two weeks.

unknown to him, dazai osamu makes it so they couldn’t speak about **corruption** to anyone.

unknown to him, dazai osamu tells mori-sensei afterwards that he’s not someone who likes their **games** interrupted.)
High school is such a terrible place to be. But then again, he’s had a number of terrible places to be, so it shouldn’t be so bad…?

Chuuya tugs at the collar on his uniform, the cotton sticky from the nervous sweat of standing in front of the class to introduce himself.

Because he has little practice with using his name – before Dazai Osamu had given him a name, it’s always ‘you’, ‘boy’, ‘monster’; after Dazai Osamu had given him a name, it’s not like he’s had a lot of people around him and most of them don’t call aside from ‘you’, ‘boy’, ‘Dazai’s dog’ or ‘little doll’ – he stumbles on his name, “G-Good morning, I’m Na-Nakahara Chu-uya. Um. Nakahara Chuuya, that is.”

Also because his name still feels alien to him, he doesn’t immediately respond when he’s addressed by the homeroom teacher, prodding him to say more because he’s a transfer student with striking hair and even more striking eyes – his records show that he’s half-French, does he want to share some details to the class?

He mumbles a reply that convinces everyone that he’s a freak.

It doesn’t take long for people to crowd him on his desk during break; it takes even faster for them to disperse upon seeing his utter inability to deal with them.

In between their admission to high school and that day – when Chuuya literally blew up his dorm – Dazai had him stay on the other teen’s dorm’s sofa. (Dazai rarely sleeps on his own bed, he finds out, almost always camping out in his sofa as he alternates between speed-reading through books, reports, novels and playing different video games. He also discovers that Dazai is a weirdo who can’t decide on a personality, because the other teen cycles between snoring against him when it’s only the two of them and coldly shoving him away when they’re in public.)

They’re roommates now – this school is inspired by European boarding schools, so they offer dorms to its students – but Chuuya’s still surprised when Dazai drops by his classroom and drags him out for lunch, effectively saving him from the torturous questions from his classmates.

***

Actually, now that he thinks about it, he’s not sure how he’s able to attend school when he has zero credentials or identification paperwork.

He coughs as Dazai stabs his hand with a fork, his punishment being unable to control his Ability when their classes were playing baseball for PE.

Actually, now that he thinks about it further, he’s pretty sure Dazai handled everything here too.

A fourteen year-old with the Ability to deny others’ powers, with the ability to play around a person’s thoughts that they can’t help but spilling out information during torture sessions, with the
ability to negotiate crazy business deals and come out the unscathed victor – what a terrifying man indeed.

“Chuuya, stop daydreaming about me.”

“I’m thinking about how terrifying you are, you wretched man.”

Dazai actually claps his hands together, the fork clattering to the scant space separating them. “That’s much better – tell me, do you want to kill me when you think about me?”

“I always do want to kill you,” Chuuya says honestly, because he’s never learned how to lie. Lately, he’s also been thinking that it’s nice to sleep beside Dazai when they push their beds together. It’s nice because no matter how bad his nightmares become, Dazai’s there to deny him destruction. It’s nice because Dazai always calms him down—unless it’s those times that Dazai’s teasing and mocking him, that is.

“That’s great to hear, Chuuya,” Dazai replies with zero honesty.

Honestly, Chuuya’s not sure why he even expects the other teen to not lie to him.

***

Lately, Chuuya’s taken to writing poems—about how he’s left alone by his classmates once the wonder about his foreign looks fade, about how the wind rattles the leaves off the trees on the school’s courtyard, about how a certain man can’t stop rambling about ways to die, about how a certain man’s eyes look under different lighting.

He never signs his work and he definitely never tells anyone – even his partner – about the subject of those poems.

Dazai being Dazai though—

He worries that he’ll lose control of Corruption when he finds out that Dazai’s posted his poems all over school.

He doesn’t.

He’s pleased—but only for a moment, because it means that Dazai, once again, is right about his methods working.

***

On Friday afternoons, Chuuya writes poems as he waits for Dazai to stop making a nuisance of himself inside the Student Council room.

This particular afternoon, Chuuya knows that Dazai’s dropping kisses steadily up the Student Council President’s fingers up to her face. Her father monopolizes Yokohama’s drugstore industry and Dazai has picked their company out of a literal hat—Chuuya’s still annoyed that his kanji practice now includes writing down dozens of company names on strips of paper and dropping them on his fedora.

He sits on the floor, just beside the sliding door, the afternoon sun not visible from his spot, mostly because it’s raining heavily. There’s a couple of meters of uncovered walkways separating the school building and the school dorms. Chuuya’s not sure if his hundred-yen umbrella can withstand the heavy downpour.
He hears a gasp and a moan—it’s not from Dazai, mostly because that guy has too much control to slip up like *that*.

He promises himself to not plug earphones into his ear and listen to songs from the mp3 player Dazai handed him before he went inside—if only because he wants to prove Dazai wrong, that he can force himself to sit still for hours while listening to Dazai seduce the unwitting daughter of a company he wants to control for the Port Mafia’s income’s sake.

He ends up using the mp3 player fifteen minutes after he hears that gasp and moan.

He focuses on writing poems, cycling back to the line: *Oh connaissances, vous qui cédez cette honte sombre, ne me réveillez // Je n’apprécie plus rien mais que mes propres pitoyable rêves.* His French remains better than Dazai’s—he’s not counting on being able to completely hide his writings from Dazai’s detecting ways, so he’s working on making it more difficult for the other to understand what he’s written to begin with.

He sinks into his own bubble of writing that he almost jumps when one earbud is tugged out of his ear, replaced almost immediately by a pair of lips whispering, “Let’s go, Chuuya~♪”

Chuuya stands up and averts his eyes from the sight of the debauched-looking Student Council President. There’s a flush on her cheeks that’s absent on Dazai—and it feels, good, even. He hastily packs his notebook inside his bag, taking care to not accidentally slide it inside Dazai’s bag that’s with him ‘for safekeeping’.

“Osamu-kun…?” She asks uncertainly, like she’s not quite sure why he’s stopped kissing her.

It’s almost time for his new TV show obsession, Chuuya doesn’t tell her. He’ll probably get over it next week, he doesn’t tell her either.

*He got all the blackmail material he needed,* Chuuya definitely doesn’t tell her.

“I’m bored with you,” Dazai says simply, and for a moment, Chuuya thinks that Dazai’s talking to him. But Dazai’s tugging at his arm, dragging him towards the stairwell so they can go their lockers and change out of indoor shoes. It feels—like relief. “And I’m going home with Chuuya, so.”

“My umbrella’s shit,” Chuuya says when Dazai doesn’t say anything as they arrive at the locker area. The sound of the Student Council President’s outraged sobs echo in the mostly-empty school building, since it’s pretty late.

Dazai doesn’t seem bothered by the fact that he’s going to get wet and catch pneumonia and die. “Eh, remind me to make you my supplementary so you can have your own card.”

“I’m not going to use a credit card to buy an umbrella!”

“But you don’t have much money,” Dazai says – not unkindly – well, okay, a little unkindly, but it’s so matter of fact, because it is.

“Urgh.”

“For now, give me your umbrella.”

“I’m—you want me to drown in the rain?!”

“Pfft, you’re so small so you’d probably drown,” Dazai laughs with childish cruelty. “But no – I’ll
“Hold it because I’m taller.”

“I have a feeling you’ll just let me get wet.”

“Let’s see if your intuition has improved then?”

They share the umbrella, Dazai holding it with his left hand so that his right hand is free to wrap around Chuuya’s shoulders, to keep them close, to keep them warm, to keep his promise that he won’t intentionally let Chuuya become wet.

They don’t go for the dorms and they don’t call for a Port Mafia car to pick them up. They go to Yokohama Station, buying more clothes, more video games, more random knickknacks to fill their dorm room to bursting. They buy books—philosophy and business for Dazai, a whole lot of others for Chuuya because he’s playing catch-up to his genius partner’s knowledge.

They have dinner at one of the sky restaurants, seated near the window so they can watch the raindrops slam forcefully against the windows. Chuuya spends more time watching Dazai’s eyes though, but Dazai doesn’t comment even though he’s sure the other notices. They leave the restaurant with Dazai’s hand warm on his lower back—it’s enough to make him shiver when the cold rain’s unable to make him do so.

Dazai whines about being too lazy to go back to the dorms and books them a hotel room with two king beds that they shove together. They order wine and the room service staff doesn’t question their ages. They fall asleep with mere millimeters of space separating them.

Chuuya wakes up from his Friday night’s nightmare with his sweaty forehead mashed against Dazai’s.

All in all, it’s a pretty okay day.

***

Saturdays are saved for the Port Mafia—reporting to the headquarters, completing leftover missions. Dazai always drops by the interrogation rooms—Chuuya stays outside the rooms, always. He makes it a mission to finish homework while waiting for Dazai to complete the torture—in the thirteen times this has happened, he’s never been able to be faster than Dazai.

Dazai doesn’t hold his hand or direct him with a hand on his back on Saturdays. When they walk the dark hallways of the Port Mafia Headquarters, Chuuya walks behind Dazai, Dazai’s orders. He always hears some murmurs about being a dog, but he doesn’t lose control.

***

Sundays are more-or-less free days, unless there’s some extremely important mission. He knows it’s not a luxury offered to most members, but since he’s Dazai’s partner, he’s able to enjoy that perk too.

There are times Dazai spends the day roaming Yokohama and finding ways to die. There are times he forbids Chuuya from leaving the room so they can just spend the entire day ordering food and playing video games. There are times Dazai quizzes Chuuya on the different books he’s read.

There’s one time that they go out and Dazai tries his version of getting a chauffeur—forcibly entering an expensive car stuck in traffic and cocks a gun against the head of the driver, cheerfully threatens the driver about death unless he drives them around in some screwed-up roadtrip. It
doesn’t happen again—because Chuuya’s slammed Dazai’s head against the dashboard for doing something so stupid. It doesn’t happen again—because Chuuya ends up having to kill the guy anyway because they’re recognized as part of the Port Mafia.

There are times that Dazai takes him to some underground casino—Dazai clears most of the millionaires’ pockets by cheating outrageously in poker. Dazai clears the rest of their money when the millionaires send some thugs after them once they leave the casino. Chuuya clears the rest of them when they persist to follow and get the money back from Dazai.

“Such a good dog, Chuuya,” Dazai teases him with a smirk that’s calculated to infuriate him.

“Shut the fuck up,” he replies, because there’s nothing else he can say.

***

That Monday, Chuuya sees the school billboard filled with pictures of him sharing his hundred-yen umbrella with Dazai last Friday. The teachers don’t say anything—instead, they eye him warily, judging whether he’s gay or just half-French.

He knows it’s because of the Student Council President.

He doesn’t reply when they call him various names. To be fair, they could have called him ‘Chuuya’, but he’s pretty much still unused to anyone calling him name, aside from Dazai.

He takes a moment to wonder just how Dazai has manipulated an entire school to think that he’s a goddamn innocent, harmless, charming man, that they’re all focusing the blame on Chuuya instead. And then, he realizes that it doesn’t take much effort—maybe they’re just more perceptive in knowing that Chuuya’s the one who’s less human between them.

He tries to ignore them all – they’ve practiced Chuuya’s outbursts of power to be controlled by a phrase – but it’s not particularly good if he ends up losing control now. There are too many witnesses – the Port Mafia is being watched more closely by the government now, after all.

Dazai ignores him too – no lunches together, no spending time with each other after club activities. Chuuya fills his days with studying his books – because when he stares at his classmates so he can copy their behavior, they all yell at him to look away.

***

That Friday, Chuuya passes by the Student Council room. He doesn’t hear gasps and moans—instead, he hears the velvet-soft voice punctuated by angry sobs of the Student Council President. He walks past—because he hasn’t received an order otherwise.

***

That Saturday, Chuuya goes to the Port Mafia Headquarters separate from Dazai.

Dazai locks him out of their school dorm until he apologizes about it. He’s not really sorry, but he also recognizes that one of Dazai’s orders is that they must always be together when they report to the Five Executives.

When he wakes up from his nightmare that night, Dazai tells him that he’s stupid, over and over. He disagrees each turn, until their words melt into each other by the time there’s sunrise.

***
That Sunday, Dazai nags at him to try a bespoke suit that he knows he can’t ever pay back. They’re supposed to go to some opera that evening—a story about a man so arrogant he thought he could outsmart a devil.

“Are you Faust in this scenario?” Chuuya asks as he fiddles with his tie, his fingers a bit stiff. “Or are you Mephistopheles?”

“You’re doing it wrong,” Dazai tells him, but doesn’t take mercy, content in lounging on his bed, all suited up, phone angled so he can take a video of Chuuya’s ineptitude with ties.

Chuuya huffs and takes a break in trying to strangle himself, opting to drink a cup of coffee that’s grown cold because of how long he’s taking to dress. He takes pains to avoid spilling it all over his suit, even if Dazai assures him that all of their laundry are always handled by the best cleaners – able to remove all sorts of stains, no matter how old or bloody.

They mill around the crowd eager to watch *La Damnation de Faust* in Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, most of the patrons there greeting Dazai with firm handshakes, while Dazai flirts shamelessly with their dates, while Chuuya’s hanging off his arm like a limp doll dragged all over the place. Most of them ignore the fact that they’re way too young to be unsupervised, but Chuuya supposes that there’s a different sort of power with them, one that transcends their younger looks.

Dazai hums during intermission, mutters about the possibility of buying a private box. Chuuya swats his arm and tells him to be more responsible with his money. Dazai hums noncommittally in response, but then he leans in close enough to brush his lips against Chuuya’s cheek when one of the patron’s teenage son try to pass a champagne flute to Chuuya.

Chuuya doesn’t pull away, not even when the hall dims again after intermission.

***

It’s still Sunday, though it’s close to midnight when they walk back to their hotel from their post-opera dinner at the Tokyo Opera City Tower’s sky restaurant.

Dazai holds his hand as they walk, doesn’t drop it even when they get surrounded by some men wearing ski masks on their faces. They look like low-level grunts and Chuuya bemoans the fact that his suit is definitely going to be ruined—and even with the cleaners, Dazai will never let him hear the end of it with his passive-aggressive whining about Chuuya tainting his gift.

“Does Keiko-chan think that you’re enough to take me on?”

“Who the fuck is Keiko-chan?” Chuuya manages to get out despite the squeeze to his hand. He supposes it should feel comforting, but who the fuck is Keiko-chan?

As always, Chuuya’s questions don’t get answered, because Dazai’s shoving him forward, while saying, “We’ll use code *Songs of Bygone Days*!”

*So basically you want me to take them all alone while you watch,* Chuuya doesn’t say out loud. He ends up wiping the floor with all fifteen grunts anyway.

***

It’s already Monday by the time Dazai drags him up the hotel they’re staying at. They skip classes, returning only to Yokohama after paying the fine for late check-out because they slept for ten straight hours.
Tuesday finds them back at school—though not for learning.

Chuuya’s inside the Student Council room this time, watching Dazai pluck one fingernail after the other from Keiko-chan, until she ends up crying out the name of the member of the school’s board that she bribed with her father’s money to get information about Chuuya’s affiliation to the Port Mafia.

Dazai asks him if he wants to be the one to execute her—Chuuya declines and closes his eyes. Three gunshots later and they’re on their way towards the director they need to silence.

“I don’t think you can keep them from knowing about me,” Chuuya haltingly says seconds after he watches the director’s blood paint his office floor with a red that clashes against his décor.

Once again, Dazai hums noncommittally in reply.

☆ fifth ☆

It’s the first apartment that Chuuya’s paying for—yes, it’s kind of cramped, yes, there’s mildew proliferating in the bathroom tiles, yes, there are mold patterns on the ceiling, stupid Dazai, if you’re going to complain, then don’t fucking visit—so of course, knowing his shitty luck, it’s going to explode.

Adjusting to Mori-san as the new Boss is more-or-less okay, since the previous Boss… the less said, the better. It’s much harder to adjust to the thought that Dazai’s up for a promotion to Executive soon—but then again, knowing the bastard, it’s all part of the plan or something jerkish like that.

After that dismal attempt at being a normal highschool student, this apartment has become his home, filled with useless souvenirs and knickknacks courtesy of Dazai (he swears that bastard just buys whatever without thought about usage, common sense or interior design), very full shelves and cramped furniture. Most of the things here are things Dazai has bought—he keeps on promising to give Chuuya a supplementary card, but Chuuya doesn’t really care for that, and Dazai doesn’t like him going out shopping on his own anyway. (And to be honest, not that he’d admit it out loud even with a gun to the head, Chuuya prefers shopping with Dazai too, even if it’s in Tokyo, in an effort to get away from Port Mafia surveillance on Dazai.)

—In any case, warm and fuzzy feelings towards his apartment aside, it has exploded in a show of fireworks, fire easily burning down the fairly ancient building. He hopes there’s not a lot of other tenants caught inside the burning building. He hopes Dazai’s tapes of himself singing various suicide-friendly songs are all burnt to ashes.

“Oh, it’s a challenge to us, Chuuya~♪”

“Couldn’t they have blown up your place instead?” Chuuya’s starting to get attached to his apartment—it’s not very nice, but there’s something to be said about something bought with his
“They probably thought we live together,” Dazai offers, but as all things Dazai, even his guesses work as truth.

“So it’s because of all your stupid sleepovers?!”

“How can there be stupid sleepovers?” Dazai asks him with arms crossed over his chest, but even in that commanding pose, there’s something that sparkles like laughter in him. Chuuya knows that Dazai’s been dividing his time with his now-blown-up apartment, the Port Mafia Headquarters, their various missions and his newly-found drinking buddies. He’s… not jealous, because it’s not like he wants 100% of the other man’s intense attention completely for his own.

“It’s because you’re involved.”

“Well, it’s in your place…”

“I’m going to fucking kill you, one of these days,” Chuuya promises darkly, but he doesn’t shrug off the arm that curls around his shoulders to steer him away from his still-blasting apartment building.

The two of them catch a cab easily—Dazai paying for their fare with a handful of yen and thanking the cab driver, rather meaningfully, for dropping them off so quickly. It’s a twisted version of a hush money—especially since Port Mafia is actually fucking illegal in Yokohama, the previous Boss mucking up the organization’s standing with the government with its unhinged grabs for power. They’ve always been an illegal organization, but it’s easier for the government to ignore their dealings and to lower both sides’ body count if there’s at least some semblance of pretend-peace.

Dazai’s apartment is fairly empty – furniture-wise – though it’s filled with a carpet of take-out boxes and game discs. There’s an overflowing tower of paper on one corner of what can be classified as a living room – all files about previous reconnaissance for missions. Chuuya’s fairly certain that he has a file there, somewhere, because it’s unthinkable for someone like Dazai to not do more than a passing scouting regarding his partner.

Chuuya wrinkles his nose when he’s led to a dining table that’s deep-red cherry mahogany that looks like it came from the 18th century or thereabouts, but it’s covered in some filthy checkered tablecloth that seems more apt to be used as a rag. There’s a centerpiece – a plastic bowl with coffee stains, various small figurines and pocket figures mixed together inside like some fucked-up salad.

Sometimes, it bothers him that someone as logical and powerful as Dazai can have such… disorganized whims. To be more accurate, it bothers him how much he finds it endearing. It’s annoying—because it means he doesn’t really put up much protests whenever Dazai throws his money around and buys useless shit that will end up scattered in strange décor salads in his apartment (or Chuuya’s, once he gets a new one).

“Let’s wait here for further development,” Dazai tells him when he tries to stand so he can stalk around the apartment, restless energy humming inside him. “I’m pretty sure that an organization as bold as that to make an opening challenge can’t help but issue an invitation soon.”

“I’m not just going to sit around and do nothing!”

“We can order something,” Dazai dumps a file five inches thick in front of Chuuya. “Or I can cook
us something while we wait.”

“And how will we get news,” Chuuya asks even as he starts reading through the file that Dazai has compiled—a list of organizations that might have unsettled issues against the Port Mafia, ranked in order of strength, network of operations, intelligence, and probability of attack.

Chuuya means to keep going, but his flipping stutters on the organization ranked 19th on Dazai’s list, The Setting Sun. It’s an organization that’s steadily growing in numbers—despite its highly-selective membership rule of only admitting Ability-users into their fold. Their motto is uniting Ability-users together, to delineate the division between normal humans and Ability-users. Dazai scribbled a note in the margins about there being a 95% certainty that this is an organization who would eventually seek to occupy territory and create a country of its own, made solely of Ability-users, within the next three years. Most of its satellite offices are scattered all over Europe and Continental Asia; the reason Chuuya’s interest is arrested is because their start-up headquarters is located in France, even though they have already relocated their main base of operations to England last year. There’s another scribbled note about England being easier to secure due to it being an island nation.

“I’ve asked the Research Team to make some new listening devices,” Dazai answers belatedly, sitting back down with two mugs of hot chocolate. He places one of the mugs a few inches away from Chuuya’s right hand that’s all bundled up into a fist. “Mm, good choice. There’s a 50% chance tonight’s attack is from them.”

Chuuya frowns, even as Dazai reaches over to ease out the tension from his hands. He knows he’s crinkling Dazai’s reports, but he’s pretty sure that the other has copies of it anyway. Dazai dismantles the way his hands curl into fists, but only for a moment, before he tangles their fingers together, anchoring him to this moment.

His head clears a little at the action. “We have a Research Team?”

“It’s a start-up.” Dazai drinks, but the action leaves a faint stain on his lips. Chuuya stares at it, his frustration at the sudden attack to his home fading away and being replaced by the urge to lick the chocolate away. “We’ve found a scientist—he’s a bit mad, it’d be funny if you guys meet, though he’s pretty bonkers when it comes to beautiful people, so maybe not—and he’s helped develop it.”

“So we literally have a mad scientist in our organization.”

“He’s got a strange Ability, but he’s quite useful when he’s not being a nuisance.”

Really, that about sums it up. Dazai rates people based on their usefulness versus being a nuisance. Chuuya figures he ranks fairly high up on this ranking, what with the way Dazai keeps on sticking by him. Of course, it’s also possible—just highly improbable—that Dazai actually likes him back, but Chuuya’s not counting on it.

“In any case, once we get confirmation that it’s The Setting Sun, we can set out for their headquarters so we can return the favor.”

“You already sound pretty sure it’s them,” Chuuya points out, tries to untangle their fingers so he can drink his own chocolate. Dazai doesn’t let go, instead using his free hand to lift the mug and nudge it against his lips. Chuuya’s frown grows deeper—he’s not a fucking invalid who needs to be assisted. But then again, the stupid part of his brain rejoices at this close intimacy, because surely, Dazai will not just do this for anyone?

“50%,” Dazai reminds him with a smirk—Chuuya keeps his eye on the report, but he can hear the
smirk. “*That guy* will approve of my mission request.”

Despite being Mori-sensei’s charge for the most part, Dazai has taken a rather cold stance against the man as soon as he’s become Boss. Well – it’s years in the making, but the open hostilities (as open things can be between two extremely manipulative people) between the two now is rather obvious.

“Is it my turn this time?”

“No – I already packed our bags.” Dazai moves their chairs closer together, to the point that their thighs are fitted against each other. “I bought you a new, *fashionable*, overcoat that shouldn’t be too heavy in the rain.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes at the other’s passive-aggressive sniping about his fashion sense. His renewed obsession with hats is plenty fashionable, okay! He almost makes a comment about that— but Dazai’s thigh buzzes and there’s something from the device Dazai has planted around his apartment building (because, of course, Dazai has planted surveillance around his home, even before this threat has made itself known, that fucker).

Dazai shoves one earbud against Chuuya’s cheek—after some minor wrestling with each other for that, he manages to place it against his ear and hear the strange static on the line, as though someone’s tampering with the device. There’s a creak, then two, then something like chalk grating against wood.

And then a robotic voice-alteration: “*Nakahara Chuuya—we’re inviting you to join The Setting Sun. Japan’s Port Mafia is too small an oyster to hold someone of your caliber.*”

And then there’s the sound of the device being stomped on by a sharp heel.

“…Huh.” Chuuya thinks about whether he should feel flattered that he’s actually known by people other than those he deals with in Yokohama, that he’s actually being acknowledged by people outside of Port Mafia, that he’s actually seen as someone other than the dog that acts as Dazai Osamu’s human shield and sword. “That’s the most fucked-up recruitment tactic I’ve ever heard of.”

Dazai’s pouting like a kid who’s been told that he can’t have any more sweets until he eats his vegetables. “I cannot believe Chuuya’s actually *popular.*”

“You do realize that they just want the firepower of my Ability, right,” Chuuya says, feeling ridiculously fond of the ridiculous man pouting in some strange sort of jealousy. “Are you actually annoyed that my Ability is more popular than yours?”

“All of our missions are credited to my name,” Dazai whines, flopping against him sideways, until his pouting face is staring up at him from his lap. Chuuya freezes for a moment, because *Dazai Osamu’s head is on his lap, abort, abort*—but then his heart untwists, because *pouting face.* “Why do they know about you?”

“Is that why my salary is much lower than yours, bastard?!”

“You make it sound like I’m not taking care of your needs, *Chuuya.*”

“D-Don’t make it sound like *that!*”

“Mm, like what?”
“Urgh, I really am going to fucking kill you one of these days.” More believable if his right hand doesn’t settle on Dazai’s forehead as he speaks, but it’s not like it matters when Dazai’s gaze glitters at him from this angle. A strange thought flitters inside his head—something about the looks he gets regularly from most Port Mafia members—like he’s a useless piece of shit who can’t do anything unless he’s attached to the frightening monster that is his master. Like it’s almost planned. The thought disintegrates when Dazai pouts at him even more.

“Maybe they invited me too!” Dazai mumbles, but he doesn’t sound like he’s counting on that to happen. “I can’t believe they’ll invite you but not me.”

Chuuya’s fondness crinkles inside him at the decidedly dark undertone of Dazai’s last mumbling. It doesn’t feel like he’s annoyed because he’s being looked over in favor of Chuuya. It almost feels like Dazai’s angry that someone else has noticed Chuuya—in that strange way of his, that is.

He feels the littlest bit flattered, which he knows is fucked-up, he knows, but it’s Dazai, so it’s expected that he’s going to be a bit stupid about it, because Dazai wants to be the only one who owns his cage, the only one who has his key, the only one who can hear the song of death and destruction that wells inside his body. That kind of possession is dangerous, but also very attractive, because nobody has wanted to possess him this much, because everybody else has always wanted to push him away, because most people in the Port Mafia don’t acknowledge him as anything other than Dazai’s lackey anyway.

“…So when will we leave?” Chuuya diverts his mind away from dangerous roads.

“Our flight is in two hours~~~♫”

“You goddamn piece of shit—you could have told me that our mission got approved already—”

“Mm, I expect that guy to approve it in an hour.”

“You and your goddamn plans…”

“When has my plan ever been wrong though, Chuuya?”

And it’s even more dangerous when Dazai’s voice go that low, and dark, like he’s leading him blindfolded inside a seedy labyrinth. And Chuuya could have looked away, could have snatched his hand away, but all he does is sigh helplessly, guilelessly, fondly, when Dazai practically stabs him with his piercing gaze, when Dazai tugs at the hand that’s not clammy against a hot forehead, brings that hand over to his lips in a patent rendition of a gentleman’s kiss.

The two of them don’t speak for minutes afterward—wordlessly and skillfully maneuvering around each other as they quickly make their way to Narita Airport in order to catch their flight so they can catch and destroy The Setting Sun.

Chuuya’s body tingles the entire time.

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*British Airways* transports them from Tokyo to London’s bustling Heathrow Airport—and Chuuya’s thankful for the companionable silence that they have silently agreed upon when Dazai wraps his left arm around his shoulders and holds his right hand as well in some awkward octopus-like hold. How they managed to actually navigate around the busy airport and into their rented car that will let them cross the M6 motorway all the way to the City of Carlisle—escapes Chuuya. Quite possibly, nobody bumps into them because of how strange they must look—like some eloping lovers who can’t stop hovering each other protectively and possessively.
In any case, the driver behind the wheel doesn’t make a comment about their disgusting clinginess to each other, simply raises a privacy window as the two of them huddle together in the backseat.

As soon as they shut the door, Dazai plugs his spying earphones in and closes his eyes. Chuuya sighs and allows the other to rest his head over his lap again for the duration of the ride.

Chuuya takes Dazai’s phone from his pocket when it buzzes—he enters the passcode (it’s the first 16 digits of pi for shit’s sake)—sputters at the lock screen when his own, sleeping, drooling face greets him (it’s him eating an ice cream the last time he saw it! when did the bastard get a chance to snap this picture, urgh)—then once he gets his bearings straight, he answers Hirotsu-san’s text inquiring about their whereabouts while mimicking Dazai’s texting style. With a pounding heart, he navigates towards the picture gallery, blushes to the tip of his toes when he sees his own face taking up the better part of the 8 GB of the image folder.

He considers opening the car window and throwing the phone out—then maybe hurling himself out too, just to spare himself this giddy elation. But then Dazai mumbles and wrinkles appear on the space between his eyebrows and damn it it’s too comfortable even though his thighs are beginning to feel numb.

Instead, he considers the grayish scenery that they pass by beyond tinted windows, the heavy drops of rain that hammer against the glass. They’re on yet another mission—they’re still partners even though Dazai’s being considered for promotion even though he’s just about to turn 16—they’re building a life together slowly but surely. They’re near the place where everything went wrong for Chuuya, but maybe, just maybe, it’s finally time to create a different legacy.

He closes his eyes and leans back against the car seats and thinks of the organization that they’re arrogantly taking on with just two people. It’s hard to feel any real trepidation, since he knows that Dazai’s plans never go wrong, not really. He closes his eyes and doesn’t wake up until they’re ten minutes until their destination.

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They check in to their one-king-size-bed hotel room with a hand curled around Chuuya’s waist and a saucy wink from Dazai to the receptionist. Chuuya’s not quite sure why vacationing couple became their cover for this mission, but he’s too lovestruck to comment. Dazai’s attentiveness is annoying and irritating and why can’t this bastard act like this all the time?, and you know what, never mind, because Chuuya will certainly die of a heart attack within a week of this intense play-acting.

(But then, is this really play-acting, there must be something there, with the way Dazai’s hand lingers on his waist, with the way they remain pressed close to each other as they study mission notes before they attack??? It’s all confusing and irritating and he doesn’t want it to end.)

“If things deviate from the original plan,” Dazai tells him as they sit cross-legged on the bed, their knees knocked against each other, “will you use Corruption?”

Chuuya huffs irritably at the memory of Dazai saying those lines to him. Since they’ve managed to put a lock on Corruption unless it’s deliberately invoked, Chuuya hasn’t had to use it. But there are other ways to slam against his limits aside from Corruption, he’s learned. “You only ever ask if I don’t have a choice.”

“Would you prefer if it was an order?”

“Urgh—it means the same to you anyway.”
Dazai doesn’t deny it—because really. Dazai’s questions and illusions of permission are just smokescreen for what he really wants. It’s irritating and it’s something that Chuuya’s lived with the entire time they’ve known each other.

“So, will you?”

“You know I will, bandage asshole.”

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Things end up deviating from the original plan—because there’s a dozen of Ability-users not in Dazai’s dossier, all recruited to the organization within the past two days under really shady circumstances—but Chuuya doesn’t feel any fear.

He’s angry, yes, mostly because he’s already dreading the recovery time for this and how he’d be stuck in bed and how Dazai would probably get him all the strawberry-flavored food he can get his grabby hands on, just to piss him off enough to faster recovery.

He’s angry, because these people think that he’ll fit right with them, spending time drinking tea and making a small country for themselves, terrorizing those who disagree with their point of view, and they expect him to last without inviting Dazai?

He’s angry, because the wrathful voices inside of him hasn’t been released in quite some time, accusations about taint and corruption and rage all swirling in a mass of tar-like agony. Corruption is enraged at the hulking building of steel and glass, a bit out of place in a fairly rural area, enraged at the leader with a tattoo of a black snake captured seconds before striking, enraged at the haphazard and irresponsible use of fire by most of its members, enraged at the fact that it’s been collared effectively by Dazai’s meditation and control techniques, unleashed only when it’s needed, like a dog that answers to its master’s commands, enraged at Chuuya for allowing to be caged to begin with, enraged at every single thing.

Power burns from his insides and out of his fingertips, the control of the most powerful force on Earth seeping out from his pores. Blood pours along with it, clotting from his ears, dripping his nose, tearing from his eyes and drooling out of his lips. His internal organs weep with the agony the heavy set of power subjects him to.

Yet Chuuya doesn’t feel any sort of fear.

He doesn’t fear for his life nor does he fear anything else.

He doesn’t see or hear or taste or smell or feel anything, not anymore.

No—more accurately, he doesn’t feel anything aside from the twist of rage and trust. He’s enraged. He trusts Dazai with his life and the life of everyone else in the world that might be caught up in the unending destruction should they fail to stop him.

Uncountable minutes later, Chuuya feels a hand wrap around his bruised wrist. He smells blood and smoke and smoky corpses and bloodied earth. He tastes fatigue and victory as he sags against Dazai’s chest. He hears a staccato heartbeat even out to a calm tune as arms wrap around him. He sees the blur of destruction even as Dazai sways them together to a lulled rest, standing together at the center of a mess that will be called a dawn of double black agents of mass destruction.

“Rest, Chuuya,” the whisper rumbles from his scalp all the way to his toes. “You’ve eliminated the enemy.”
(And that’s when he realizes that he has one remaining fear—and that’s for the man making him see or hear or taste or smell or feel these things to disappear.)

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Seconds-minutes-hours later and Chuuya regains his senses, tastes dried blood in his mouth. He’s lying down on a surprisingly-comfortable patch of rubble—when he slowly sits up, he realizes it’s because Dazai has laid him down atop a makeshift cushion made of their coats. His gaze refocuses just in time for Dazai to do a little victory dance after he’s able to unlock a rather sizable safe—revealing a very sizable amount of wealth in terms of actual ingots, practically thousands of euro notes, and more than a pirate’s share of stolen gemstones.

He remembers the days-nights-weeks-months-years of staring at moldy cupboards as though he can wish food and happiness to appear with enough glaring. He remembers the way his mother begs for a coin or two to be sent her way. He remembers the days of nothingness.

_The Setting Sun_ has apparently made it a top priority to gain wealth and Dazai now has all of their hard work in his hands. Trust the bastard to win a lottery of the lifetime when it comes to mission loots.

“Chuuya, come on, stop pretending to be asleep, come and look at this!”

Chuuya rolls his eyes and half-crawls towards Dazai, minding his left side where it feels like his stomach has been punctured. He manages to stand and lean against the safe’s doorway, splashing a spot of red against the steely gray.

Dazai’s rooting around the piles of gemstones, all sparkly enough to serve as flashlights in times of blackouts, he’s sure. Dazai doesn’t seem like the type to enjoy jewelry, but then again, maybe sparkly things is his current obsession?

“Mm, this looks like it matches your eyes and your hair,” Dazai says in a tone that would make Chuuya blush if he had enough blood to spare, lifting an apple-green stone from the pile. “It’s a polished jadeite stone.”

Chuuya shrugs helplessly—jadeite sounds expensive, but he doesn’t really know. He’s also not particularly sure how something green matches his eyes and his hair, but then again, it must be true, because Dazai says so.

“Eh, you’re useless, Chuuya,” Dazai mock-pouts and pockets the stone as they wait for the extraction team to take them out of this place along with the loot.

“I don’t really care for jewelry,” he ends up saying as he also ends up sitting down. Standing up takes too much effort and he still feels woozy.

“Then you can take all of the money.”

Chuuya shrugs again. “No, you can take it. I don’t… really know what to do with it.”

Dazai doesn’t comment on his background of poverty, instead going for, “Then just keep it in a bank account?”

“I… haven’t really earned it,” he says after a few moments’ pause. It’s hard to explain, but it feels like something that he doesn’t deserve. He can admire the wealth from afar and long for it, but it feels wrong to be so near it. He remembers the way his mother went mad for just a few bills and he’s reminded that he’ll probably go insane if he’s afforded more than that.
Dazai goes silent for a moment, before he sits down beside Chuuya, sliding downwards until his head is pillowed on Chuuya’s lap yet again.

“You’re a really strange guy,” Dazai murmurs and Chuuya boldly grips his hand while they wait for the telltale sound of a helicopter arriving to fetch them.

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If Chuuya isn’t feeling so out-of-sorts, he’d actually want to congratulate himself for discovering the cure to jetlags—which is to be so fucking exhausted from using Corruption. As it stands, he’s barely able to lift his arms once the aftershocks of using such a dangerous Ability sinks in. He’s definitely been taken over by Corruption before but it feels much harder and more painful now—almost as if his own Ability is making him pay for attempting to cage his power.

Dazai hasn’t filled the bedside table—oh, they’re back at Dazai’s apartment—with strawberry-flavored snacks yet. Instead, there’s a wealth of bandages and half-open first aid kit and several syringes. He knows the other isn’t an actual doctor, but trust Dazai to be able to understand medical theory effectively while just trailing after Mori-sensei and reading books.

He tries to ask what the fuck is going on, but it comes out as “Gurghhhh.”

Dazai gently pats his hand—right on top of where the dextrose needle is in, that fucker—and tells him that he has successfully molested Chuuya and snapped photos of his nude body while he has bandaged him up. Mortification shots through him—and he’s apparently received a blood transfusion, because he feels a blush warming his face.

“Goddamn bastard,” he manages to hiss out, oh-so-very cross now that he feels nearly his entire body wrapped in bandages.

“You look very fetching like this, Chuuya.”

“Just because I now share your same fashion…”

“I was tempted to bandage your face too, you know.”

“I cannot fucking believe you expect me to praise you for restraining yourself.”

“Hmph, I’ll upload your photos if you keep this up.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes and doesn’t point out that Dazai’s irrational possessive streak isn’t going to enjoy other people taking a glimpse at his dog.

“Why the hell am I here instead of the infirmary?”

“Med Team is scattered all over the place, missions, whatnot, etc.”

“Etcetera?!”

“Etcetera?!?”

“Eh, there’s been some barrage of attacks, but don’t worry your pretty little head about it.”

“Guuurgh.” Chuuya bites his lip until he ends up mentally chastising himself for flailing at being called ‘pretty’. “So you took care of my wounds?”

“I told you I can definitely take care of your needs, no?”

“Shut the fuck up.”
“You can’t move well yet, so I’m definitely helping you take a bath later~~~♫”

“Guurghhhh.”

☆ plus the one time he found it ☆

Chuuya opens his eyes to the morning of April Fools, discovers that he hasn’t trashed about too
wildly during the night, the nightmares down to a more manageable level of chaos. He’s neatly tucked in, blanket and comforter pulled up to his neck. It’s warm, like he’s floating in a toasty oven.

Thick blackout curtains are drawn; his view of the hotel’s bedside table’s clock is blocked by Dazai reclining against the headboard with a folder of reports in hand. The man’s brown hair looks soft and mussed from sleep, like he woke up and immediately started working even though it’s their rare day-off. With the way the blanket is drawn over Dazai’s body – oh, they’re sharing a blanket; oh, they’re sharing a bed, again – he’s able to see the hotel’s fluffy wraparound white robe loose around Dazai’s chest, the infernal bandages peeking out from the V that would normally show off one’s collarbones. Long, oversized sleeves nearly cover Dazai’s fingers as he stops writing and flips to the next page.

He looks comfortable and at-home. Like he belongs there, leaning against the headboard, enjoying his day-off with his partner, sharing the same bed. Looking at Dazai, surrounded by all the things that Chuuya’s never had in his life pre-Dazai, by the glow of the dimmed bedside lamp—it makes his heart flutter and tumble towards—towards—he doesn’t know—only that he wants it so badly—that he wants it to be forever.

Chuuya’s sure that he doesn’t make any sort of noise, doesn’t gasp at how lovely the pain he feels is, when he thinks about Dazai so within reach, but Dazai’s attention swings to him anyway. There’s a lazy smirk on Dazai’s face as he tilts the neat lines of his handwriting towards him, all contrasts of teasing hard edges and cozy soft curls, and Chuuya wants, so very badly, to touch it. He doesn’t want anything to shatter when he does so.

It’s Dazai who reaches out—poking his forehead with one slim finger.

It’s—

He tries to open his mouth to say something, anything, everything.

Like thanks for Dazai getting him tickets to the opening night of Salome. Like thanks for Dazai’s overall existence in his life—because now, he can actually watch Salome and see it as a wonderful, powerful opera, instead of a searing reminder of his mother’s abandonment. Like thanks for Dazai remaining as his partner even though he’s an Executive now, even though he now has a list of women he’s bedded as part of his chase to fill the void in his life, even though he now has new drinking buddies that he actually likes enough to call as friends.

There’s a lot of other things he owes gratitude to Dazai for—being recognized as part of soukoku and an asset to the Port Mafia, supplying him with books and materials that he uses to learn more about the world, co-owning a two-bedroom apartment with him that serves as their home, being able to live a life where he can pretend he’s not wholly tainted by Corruption by caging it as much as possible, being able to live a life where he doesn’t feel fear in case he loses control.

Even though he’s lost all traces to his family—it doesn’t feel lonely, not anymore.

“Didn’t they tell you that leaving your mouth open is an unattractive look?” Dazai asks with a tone that tries to be teasing, but only ends up hushed. The smirk widens, but it remains hard-soft, curling against Chuuya’s heart. “I can see your tonsils from here, you know?”

That one finger traces the outline of Chuuya’s face, drifting near his right ear and curling a stray lock of hair there, traipsing near his eyes, brushing by his eyebrows and eyelashes when they flutter shut, patting the tip of his nose like it’s a button that he can’t help but press, tracing the bow on his upper lip, flirting with the edges of his lower lip, stopping in the middle of his mouth once
he manages to stop gaping and actually close it.

Dazai’s just staring at him—assessing him—and Chuuya tries to prolong that ephemeral moment, his lips parting the slightest bit so that Dazai’s touch feels like a butterfly’s wing fluttering against him. He raises his right hand and lands it against Dazai’s heart, the staccato beats making his toes curl.

Because, because, it means that this means something, right?

Dazai’s always had an effortlessly calm heartbeat, even while killing, but he’s now unravelling, just like Chuuya.

He splays his fingers there—and if he curls them just so, it almost feels like he can take Dazai’s heart out of his chest and put it against his, for safekeeping, forever. He doesn’t do anything like that, just stares at how the black-red taint on his hand looks impossibly dirty against the pure white robe, but it doesn’t hurt, because it’s a reminder of a power that they can unleash together. He’s tainted but it doesn’t matter as much because Dazai treats him like he’s precious anyway.

He parts his lips even more, because he wants to say everything.

I love you.

I love you so fucking much.

I love you so much that I feel like I’m going to die if I stop.

He just needs to get the words out—words that he’s felt since the day that he’s felt those lips pressed against his knuckles—since the day that he’s looked up from the mass of water and gore to the moonlight and the devil that lurks there, waiting for him—since the day that he’s been abandoned by his mother and he’s wished for someone to look at him and see something else aside from the monster howling with rage.

I love you—the you who can see the corruption and accepts me anyway—even before I met you.

“I—”

Just a few more words.

He doesn’t think of asking for much.

He’s not asking for to be considered a priority over advancement in the Port Mafia. He’s not asking to be chosen on top of the tight knit of friends that have a level of understanding that he doesn’t possess. He’s not asking to stop the strings of affairs and games that the other enjoys.

He’s not asking to be loved back with the same intensity that burns inside him.

He’s just—he’s fine with this, with whatever they have.

He’s fine with this, as long as Dazai never leaves.

“I—”

“—I’m hungry, Chuuya.”

Chuuya exhales—and Dazai’s finger moves away. There’s a shuttered look in Dazai’s eyes—disappears, after a moment. He considers saying his words anyway, but he moves his hand away
too, so that Dazai can stand up.

“Go get your messy hair sorted out so you don’t horrify the room service staff.”

“Pffft, you wish, bandage bastard.”

It’s fine.

Dazai’s the youngest Executive in Port Mafia history, he’s got an information broker and someone who can see the future as friends, he’s got the rabid dog as his subordinate, he’s got Chuuya as his partner. They can preserve this moment forever, Chuuya believes.

He makes a promise to himself—one day, soon—he’ll be able to confess even just a tiny part of his feelings for Dazai.

Maybe he can make it on a special occasion—learn how to cook both their favorite meals—order some absurdly expensive wine since Dazai enjoys drinking, the last time they’ve gone on an overseas mission, they’ve dropped by a wine auction and Petrus has caught their attention even if they didn’t end up buying—maybe do it on his birthday less than a month away, because it’s a reminder of the day that Dazai gave Chuuya his life.

Soon.

*I love you*, he practices in his mind.

He’s giddily counting the days inside his mind, and he doesn’t react too badly to Dazai telling him that he looks strange being so happy.

Just twenty-eight days until then.
days before dazai osamu leaves the port mafia: 28

Chapter End Notes

- mafia!dazai is a huge dick – though I wrote the scenes above with the HC that mafia!dazai is an emotionally-constipated idiot who was so bored and angry at the world, that he really doesn’t care about shit – but then he meets chuuya who he’s very interested in, to the point that he’s kind-of obsessed, but then he’s also very pissed that he’s that into chuuya (because he’s supposed to be this strategy genius, he’s part of the mafia, he can’t have weaknesses) so he alternates between acting really in love… and being a huge dick. though he tries! he’s all about trying to downplay chuuya's strength to the executives in the beginning in a twisted effort to shield chuuya. in this story, he’s been in love with chuuya all along, though dazai doesn’t recognize the depths of his feelings until that scene in ch6.

- that said, dazai is one big influence to chuuya but there are others. the idea about how chuuya got orphaned is inspired by the revelation re: kyouka’s parents being the original owner of her ability. as of this point in the fic, we haven’t seen (1) the final fate of chuuya's mother, (2) how exactly did chuuya become so rich, (3) THAT CONFESSION. so those 3 things will be the focus of the final part of the interlude ^^;; i promise we’ll go back to the ‘regular timeline’ after that! well, actually! the next part will be 75% flashback and 25% back to present time, so. ^^;

references!

- *Salome* is written originally in French – it’s the opera that has popularized the *Dance of the Seven Veils* (aka: the origin of striptease) + the way Salome seduces a guy in love with her so he’ll bring her the head of the guy she’s in unrequited love with.

- “Languor dreams of death” is a line from IRL!Chuuya’s *For The Tainted Sorrow*.

- “pay in advance” theory is Mori’s line when he details his strategy for having soukoku work together again in ch30-31; the “interesting to watch corruption” is callback (!?) to dazai’s line as to why he didn’t stop Corruption immediately (or rather, just admit that you want to watch chuuya, stupid dazai)

- the meaning behind the “naka-hara chuu-ya” is based on searching for
individual kanji meanings – though i’m definitely not an expert on the language and i think the name as a whole means something different? (in any case, it’s not like dazai actually thought of the name, after all :))) so him being wrong about the meaning is within the keikaku)

- “Jack” is throwaway OC but I just wanted to point out that for the Port Mafia’s side, we already have A (Ace) and Q (Queen?). And maybe even a Kouyou (King). So we’re just waiting for a J (Jack/Joker???)
- jadeite is 1 of 2 stones considered as jade; it’s in the top 10 rarest precious stones in the whole world as of 2015. i’m also pretty sure that’s the stone on dazai’s pendant haha.
- The Setting Sun (Shayou) is one of IRL!Dazai’s works. It’s a story set in WWII & has copious amounts of black snake/flame symbolism.
- Similarly to the previous chapter, the travel info is c/o Googlefu, but please don’t use it to plan your Tokyo-London vacation in case you get lost :)))

• thanks again for reading!!! your feedback is always ♥ ♥ ♥ see you next water time~

• ETA - my internet is being wonky again so my replies to the previous chapter's comments might be delayed again;;;;;; but i will reply to them as soon as i can, promise!!!

ETA#2 - please see Hanabi_Angel's lovely drawing of 'broken bird' chuuya in a birdcage guuuuuuh *A* s-so beautiful *___*
intermission: home, run

Chapter Summary

• interlude re: soukoku past, part 02
• the four times dazai tried to break chuuya's heart & failed

[psa: this update is a double-update!] [ch 17] [ch 18]

Chapter Notes

• this is the final part of the interludes re: the soukoku past! style is a little different compared to the other interlude chapter, because while that one focused on the fluffier/more romantic aspect of their relationship (e.g. in dazai helping chuuya replace the homes he keep on losing) – this one is about the harsher aspect. i felt it important to show that they have such a dynamic relationship – they can be fluffy/bickering/romantic/dastardly toward each other and still love each other deeply. that said, this is teenage soukoku still – so please be on the lookout for mafia!dazai being a dick still (specifically: manipulative bastard tendencies, torture technician dazai). i rewrote this chapter a couple of times because i wanted chuuya to have a really… dry (?) tone while experiencing the shit dazai did;;; i hope it was successful orz

• special warning for the last scene – wine + tissues are preferred as accompaniment (though feel free to throw bricks at me too?)

• as always, feedback is appreciated!!! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

☆ first attempt ☆

“Stand up.”

He groans as he mentally yells at his legs to obey the coldhearted command. He manages to rise to a half-kneeling position when a fist sinks to the top of his head and topples him back to the ground, his face getting reacquainted with the bloodied cement.

“Is that it?” Dazai Osamu asks the boy splattered to the ground; he slowly, deliberately, steps on
top of the other’s head, squashing his face more forcibly against the ground. “You’ve caused so much destruction when you’re this weak?”

He groans again, the seething inside his head redoubling their efforts in trying claw out of him. He’s not particularly bothered by being called weak, but the howling inside him belong to beings that fancy themselves as gods, who cannot be contained by a mere human, not even by a monster. They’re affronted by the implication that they are weak, red and black beginning to stain his eyes.

Dazai Osamu keeps his heel on top of the red locks, until he feels the stirring of power below him, the force of gravity shoving him away from the redhead and towards the ceiling of the abandoned warehouse they have claimed for themselves.

“What do you want to do to me?” Dazai Osamu asks as he smoothly kneels down beside his fallen partner. “Do you think you can do anything to me, little doll?”

He hisses against the floor, tastes his own blood and rage. The babbling of the voices inside of him threaten to spill out; he bites his lip until it bleeds—fifteen seconds, twenty. “I… I’ll repel you. Send you flying.”

“What?” Dazai Osamu barks his laughter, slapping a hand on top of his dirtied hair, No Longer Human cancelling the Ability that covers his body. “Someone as weak as you—who can’t even control his power—can’t do anything to me.”

“I’ll control this,” he promises stubbornly.

Dazai Osamu places a hand underneath his chin, tilting his head up. He doesn’t know it, but his blue eyes are practically burning in their determination.

“You’re just someone who kills and kills and kills,” Dazai Osamu tells him point-blank, line of his lips severe and unforgiving. “You—who can’t even rise from your own carnage—what can you do to me?”

“I’ll—” He can—he can—he can harness the threads looping around his limbs, gather the points of energy scattered all around him, focus them on his hands, on his feet, on his head—he can send Dazai Osamu flying high above, past the high ceilings, past the tallest skyscraper, past the clouds—he can—he can—he can— “I’ll—!”

Gravitational force responds to him, forming an invisible armor around his head, wanting to slap Dazai Osamu’s hand away from him.

No Longer Human activates faster, negating his Ability, cutting the threads he’s holding in his fragile grip. He sees the backhand coming, but it doesn’t lessen the ache to his jaw and cheek when it lands.

“You’re a disgrace to humans,” and he waits for the just like me to fall, but it doesn’t, though it’s probably lost in the roar of blood inside his ears. “You just taint and corrupt everything around you, don’t you?”

Dazai Osamu transfers his hold to his right hand, circling his wrist with force enough to snap it.

Black-red tendrils—roots of a tree of death, webs of a deadly poison, veins of a monster with black blood—run all over his fingers, his palms, his wrists, his forearms, his elbows. He knows that his body is cocooned in such tell-tale markings, whenever he tries to survive the drowning from the gods inside him, just as he knows that most of them are concentrated on his hands and feet with each passing session with Dazai Osamu.
It should make him—not happy, per se, but accomplished—because it means that the training sessions are working, because he’s able to narrow the focus of the explosion of his power, somehow.

“You’re just a dirty dog eager to please its master, aren’t you?” Dazai Osamu asks him these questions, tells him these things, in an effort to rile him up, to test his teetering control over his own insides gushing out of him in a display of destruction.

There are times that the words that Dazai Osamu tells him hurt more than usual though, all jagged edges curated to pierce him into pieces.

“You just want to do whatever I say, don’t you? You don’t listen to anyone else—you don’t interact with anyone else—you don’t know anyone else. You just know me, me, me.”

And he knows that nobody else in the Port Mafia looks him in the eye, that nobody bothers to speak to him, that nobody bothers to acknowledge him. He’s the black-red shadow to the person who will eventually rise to the top, he’s the pet monster locked up with bound wings and strangled throat, only able to sing in tunes of destruction of others and calling for his master. He’s a nobody, a disgrace, but as long as Dazai Osamu’s there, he’s not truly alone, not completely useless.

“And that’s what you should do, hmm? Just listen to me, believe in me, follow my orders. Anything else and I just might find a more obedient partner, Chuuya.”

There’s a finger shoved against his eye, but his Ability activates in time, faster than before, more focused, so that it only shoves back against the tip of Dazai Osamu’s fingernail, while the boarded-up windows don’t shatter and the ground only rumbles faintly from the aftershocks of his Ability.

“So you do know how to follow instructions,” Dazai Osamu says appraisingly after a few tense seconds, breaking off their eye contact. “Make sure you have an appropriate name for your Ability by tomorrow.”

He draws a blank, sighing against the ground when his partner drops him. “I don’t—”

“Naming it should help you control it better,” Dazai Osamu explains, not patiently, but not as abrasively as before. Though—his eyes are burning, like he’s enraged at him for being obedient, disappointed in him for not managing to leap to the other’s train of thought automatically. “You should know all about that, Nakahara Chuuya.”

☆ second attempt ☆

“What the fuck was that!!”

Recovering from the engineered free-fall unfairly quickly, Dazai sits up in one smooth motion, torso gliding like a snake—right on top of Chuuya’s stomach, because he’s an inconsiderate bastard, that’s why—and throws him a lazy, self-satisfied smirk. “That, my dear petit mafia, is what you call everything going according to my plan.”
“You attempting a murder-suicide by jumping off a goddamn skyscraper is according to plan?!”

“You do shriek worse than the birds we saw in the zoo last weekend.” Dazai complains halfheartedly, placing one hand lightly over his heaving chest (more like, making sure that No Longer Human can intercept any attempts to lob him with the force of gravity), still smirking like the asshole that he is, inconsiderate about the fact that Chuuya’s heartbeat is still in 100s—or rather, it feels like he’s somehow left his heart and soul at the top floor, maybe it’s been held back in the glass shards of the not-shatterproof floor-to-ceiling windows that Chuuya smashed when he barreled into it, Ability activated over his entire body because goddamnit, Dazai and their target jumped off the fucking tower!

“Because you goddamn jerk actually have zero consideration for my suffering—and I cannot fucking believe you would attempt to complete our mission and go for a fucking suicide attempt in broad daylight—do you know how many inches of paperwork I would have needed to accomplish if you actually fucking died—not to mention how annoying the clean-up and media blackout, fuck —why do you never tell me these things—I could have drowned myself in some sedatives first!”

“But it’s the perfect plan,” Dazai replies with such zen calmness that Chuuya gives in to the urge to trash underneath Dazai, his hands gripping the other’s biceps and shaking his stupid partner. Dazai’s peaceful tone continues even as he’s being shaken hard enough to scramble his brain. “You’re too honest—it would have been obvious if you knew that I wasn’t really planning to commit my suicide then. And see, it’s successful! So don’t worry too much!”

Chuuya snarls and shakes the bastard again, ignoring the gory splatter a few steps away from them—courtesy of the target that needed to be eliminated in an accident, the same target that Dazai had apparently convinced to jump off with him on top of a goddamn skyscraper, the same target who’s not aware that Dazai is confident that his partner’s not going to waste a second to bend the laws of physics to save his scrawny ass.

Dazai’s still smirking at him, even as men in black suits and black sunglasses start to secure the perimeter so the Cleaning Team can waltz in and scrub the sidewalk clean of splattered body parts. Using the one hand that’s not pressed against Chuuya’s traitorous heart, Dazai takes a couple of shots at his handiwork, presumably so he can attach the grainy, low-res picture to the report that’s going to be up to Chuuya to embellish and refine so that it doesn’t sound so batshit crazy that they end up being executed for besmirching the Port Mafia’s name and image via ultra-creative, open-to-public-when-it-shouldn’t-be ways of target disposals.

“Dazai-sama, your transport back to the headquarters is ready.” One of the countless black-clothed men steps forward, back already bent in a 45-degree angle. “Please, this way.”

Chuuya huffs in annoyance when Dazai doesn’t even turn his head to acknowledge the guy. He squirms more violently, ignoring Dazai’s not-so-silent laughter about him being like a wild bull. “You heard the guy—Okamura, right?—shitty mackerel, get off.”

Dazai’s smirk melts into a smile that appears so innocuous—if not for the way his eyes are frozen over, like a thin sheet of humanity layered over nothingness. “Mm, Chuuya, you didn’t tell me that you’re friends with… Okamura, here.”

“You don’t tell me about a lot of shit,” Chuuya parries back, doing a little stretch on his legs once Dazai actually deigns to stop sitting on him.

See, it’s just the way they landed—maneuvering while free-falling from the fortieth floor is all well and good, but it’s not like he can allow Dazai to be the one who’s going to crash to the ground first! See if he does it again—the next time shit like this happens, he’s going to absolutely not care
whether Dazai lands head-first or not.

“How can we have an outstanding partnership that will last the test of time if you won’t tell me things, Chuuya?”

Chuuya rolls his eyes as he walks toward their designated car, their arms brushing as they move. “You don’t tell me mission plans, you fucker.”

There’s something that feels like a pinch against his chest—memories of missions just like this one, plans that unravel without his input, games that end with him as Dazai’s favorite game-breaker NPC.

Dazai doesn’t say anything for long moments: not even until they’re seated on the plush leather backseat; not even until they’re back in Dazai’s place, Chuuya’s glasses perched on his nose in an effort to stop the words on their report from blurring; not even until Dazai’s in front of the top brass, reciting the words that Chuuya’s slaved over while Chuuya himself waits outside with his back flush against the opposite wall.

He knows—knows that he’s just the shadow, the lackey, the pet. He knows that he should find pride and contentment in that—because Dazai’s too much of a picky bastard to work with anyone else, so it’s not like anyone’s going to steal his role. He knows that it’s the best thing someone like him can hope for—a nameless, good-for-nothing vessel for power, a monster donning on human skin. He knows.

It hurts—a pinch inside his chest—worse than the nightmares that play inside his head—worst still when Dazai finally comes out of the room and wraps his bandaged arms around Chuuya’s body, like some octopus clinging to its prey, sticky and sickening and Chuuya’s heart stutters and scrambles, the voices inside him writhing about wanting to erase this man wrapped around him, in the dark and empty hallways away from anyone else’s prying eyes, because this man will surely destroy him.

☆ third attempt ☆

“You should watch and learn, Chuuya.”

Chuuya bites his lip so that he doesn’t end up saying anything. He tastes blood—acidic and bitter and just—he tastes his own blood. There are bandaged hands clamped over his shoulders like talons that have captured their prey and won’t let go until they’ve finished playing with their food.

He doesn’t tell his godforsaken partner that it’s useless to hold him down. He’s—he’s in too much shock, no, pain, to even contemplate about moving an inch.

The surveillance room is usually bustling with activity, dozens of black-suited men milling about. It’s also usually projecting live feeds from different parts of Yokohama. It’s not usually quiet with just two men—or is it more accurate to say two monsters?—in the dead-center of the room. It’s not usually broadcasting recorded footage from one fancy hotel room.
The screens don’t usually forego variety and thoroughness in favor of hammering down on Chuuya’s heart by showing off Dazai fucking some girl for information.

“See, you wouldn’t have to watch this if you succeeded in doing your part, Chuuya.”

And that’s the most distressing thing.

Because Chuuya faltered in making small-talk, in trying to reel their chosen informant in with jokes and expensive food. Because Chuuya had taken three days and didn’t have any results to show. Because Chuuya had failed his part in the mission.

Because Chuuya’s sure that even his failure is within Dazai’s plan.

“Yes, yes, you’re the best when it comes to seducing poor, unsuspecting people,” Chuuya grits out when Dazai’s fingers tighten their grip, clawing into his coat.

There’s a heavy silence—punctuated only by the loud, breathy moans erupting from the surveillance video playback—that has Chuuya second-guessing his decision to speak up. He’s accomplished great things regarding his control over his Ability, but reining in his desire to snap at Dazai at every opportunity—to let the other see that he’s not just a yes-man who agrees to all of the other’s ideas, to adopt the charade that he doesn’t always automatically do whatever the other commands—it’s a work in progress.

“See how she sells out her clients with just a kiss to her pulse-point?” Dazai asks meanly, the hands on his shoulders cold and—trembling. “See how she babbles all of the information just so I’ll push my cock into her?”

Chuuya bites his lip again, tastes the blood again.

On one hand—it’s success for their mission. It’s sad for someone like him—who’s actually been other Ane-san’s care—to do so badly when it comes to seduction.

On another hand—

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous, Chuuya?”

Chuuya’s whole body stiffens. “I don’t—”

“Because you don’t have a right to feel that way,” Dazai cuts in like a particularly sharp knife. “We do whatever it takes to accomplish our mission, even if it means dirtying yourself. That’s the Port Mafia’s way.”

Another moment of heavy silence passes. Dazai takes a deep breath, exhaling it loud enough for Chuuya to feel it.

“Just leave the planning to me,” Dazai says. “After all, you know better than anyone that my plans never go wrong, right?”

☆ *fourth attempt* ☆
“—thing is a monster!”

Dazai shoots the woman’s—it’s not just any woman, that’s—right pinky, the sound of pained yelling reverberating all around, masking the sound of a bullet whistling to the air and burying itself on the ground while cushioned by blown-off flesh and bone.

“I told you…” Dazai’s tone is casual, almost-friendly, the wide smile on his face frozen like a caricature of warmth. The icy anger burning in his glare is anything but casual. “…I’d let you speak if you apologize to Chuuya for being such a despicable human being. Do you understand?”

Chuuya’s frozen by the doorway, a couple of footsteps away, but he feels detached, like he’s anywhere but here, in a closed-off, soundproof room reserved for the most atrocious of Dazai’s torture sessions. It’s an empty, desolate room, with only bloodstains for floor-to-wall carpeting. He’s frozen, ice in his veins, since Dazai has commanded that he keep his eyes and ears open throughout this.

He’s not a complete animal—he still remembers bits and pieces of familial affection for his mother, even though they haven’t had the most congenial relationship. He still remembers, in the same vein, her screams as she realizes that she’ll never be free from the curse of the Ability that drove her husband crazy, not when he’s around. He still remembers all those things—and here, in front of him, is Dazai, erasing them from this world.

“It’s not too late,” she babbles through the pain, her back bent as she cradles her wounded hand. “You can still—that monster must have seduced you, no, cursed you somehow—”

“—wrong.” Dazai says with the finality of a funeral bell, shooting her other pinky this time. “Do you want me to coach you on what to say? Since it seems that you’re not understanding what you’re being asked to do.”

Cradling both of her hands close to her chest, she lifts her head and glares back at Dazai, full of hatred. “I will never apologize for throwing that monster out.”

“Hm. Now I know where Chuuya got his stubborn streak.” Dazai hums as he pockets his gun.

There’s a moment of hope on her face, her body relaxing, but it only lasts a second, the very same second it takes for Dazai to take out a serrated dagger. And then he takes a step forward, the click of his heels terrifying inside this bloodthirsty room.

“He’s way more beautiful compared to you, though,” Dazai continues, just seconds before he smoothly kneels down and cuts off her left ring finger.

Chuuya’s there—but he can’t do anything—not to save his mother from his partner’s sadistic torture, not to help his partner extract information from their target—can’t think, can’t feel, can’t smell, can’t taste, can’t hear, can’t see, can’t understand.

He can only stand there and remember:

—Helping Dazai hide the gold and gems that they’ve transported from The Setting Sun’s vaults. In just a couple of days, he’s sure that all the wealth would be laundered into untraceable money under Dazai’s offshore accounts.

—Reporting together, for the first time, in front of Boss about their successful annihilation of an entire organization overnight. Dazai leaves out the part about Chuuya receiving a strange recruitment message prior to their mission.
Discovering that they’ve been dubbed as *soukoku* – ‘double black’ – by those who have seen them and the destruction that trailed their footsteps. Dazai makes a number of quips and congratulations about Chuuya being visible enough, despite his meager height, to the onlookers.

Meeting with Dazai’s real estate contact so they can look for a two-bedroom apartment, because Chuuya’s home has been sacrificed by *The Setting Sun* and because Dazai spends more time in Chuuya’s place anyway. Chuuya carefully doesn’t react when their contact insists on offering them one-bedroom apartments, primarily because he’s not sure what the correct reaction is anyway.

Traveling with Dazai to Yamaguchi supposedly for an errand to be accomplished during their time-off. Chuuya doesn’t complain about being strung-along to some sightseeing, only because he *did* not know the significance of their destination. He doesn’t notice it until it’s too late—doesn’t recognize the shabby bungalow tucked at one end of the street, overgrown weeds softening the walkway, dark-green moss curled around the rusted, unhinged nameplate that’s been scratched-out, only leaving the *kanji* for ‘naka’ visible.

Kicking open the wooden door as per Dazai’s orders, because he’s an ass who can’t be bothered to physically exert himself not even during his own errands. Dazai’s wearing his full Mafia Executive regalia despite the fairly rural atmosphere of their destination, something that Chuuya understands too late. He doesn’t recognize the man who yells at them from a four-seat dining table, even though he looks familiar enough with face etched in rage as he yells and shoots at them. He doesn’t recognize the next set of people who make their appearance: a lanky teenager wielding a baseball bat with shaky hands; a grandfather with greying hair brandishing a rickety cane; a woman with an even more familiar face and an unfamiliar kitchen knife.

Gasping in shock as Dazai takes a step forward, shrugging off the fiery welcome and the bullet embedded on a wall a few centimeters away from his face. Dazai says something coolly, slowly, condescendingly, like he’s speaking to ants crushed underneath his heels—says something about selling Nakahara Chuuya’s information to foreign organizations that collect and study Ability users. And Chuuya realizes it too late—that there’s no reason for these people to know who Nakahara Chuuya is, because it’s a name picked by his partner—that these people snarl and sneer when they hear the name and don’t deny the accusation.

Paling white when his mother—aged with stress lines and wrinkles, but still utterly regal and beautiful despite the anger that distorts her expression—makes her presence known, saying something about her doing the right thing, because nobody was able to stop his father from spiraling out of control, and if *The Setting Sun* is able to control the monster at the expense of his sanity and freedom, if they’re able to help make the world a better, safer place by helping him become locked up, then they should be compensated for that.

Freezing when Dazai knocks their foreheads together—his grandfather, his uncle, his cousin, his aunt, his mother all bound and gagged for further *treatment* because Dazai needs to know who else has information on Chuuya—and Chuuya realizes that this, *this*, is the home where he was born, from a foreign father who has attempted to live a normal life and failed, from a beautiful mother who had her dreams shattered when she fell in love with a monster wearing a human mask, this is the home that he’s been forced to abandon, this is the family who’s supposed to love him but has instead
sold his information, that this is the place where he’s been named Nakahara Chuuya one April 29 years ago, the place that Dazai had researched prior to the day he received his name and identity.

—Shoving Dazai’s face to the sink once they arrive in their current home in Yokohama, because there’s one thing about claiming credit about thinking of his name and identity and lying to him about it for years., there’s another thing to track down the remains of his family and sentence them to death without letting him know until the last minute. Dazai asks him—only it’s not a question, really—whether he’ll actually let them go for betraying sensitive information that can endanger him and his partner and the Port Mafia. Chuuya doesn’t answer that—he doesn’t need to, because him being endangered means trouble for the Port Mafia, means trouble for Dazai, more importantly—but he still knocks Dazai’s forehead against the porcelain in retaliation for underestimating him, for not trusting him with information regarding himself.

He can only stand there and remember: everyone but Dazai thinks of him as a monster that needs to be shackled and destroyed.

“Chuuya, she’s pretty stubborn about giving you that apology,” Dazai says with a pout, as though they’re discussing the weather or the corner store not having Dazai’s favorite snacks. “I think it’s better if we just kill her and get this over with. I got all the other information already.”

It takes a few tries, but his throat finally cooperates to say: “…Did they tell other people about my Ability?”

“It’s all been taken care of.” Dazai’s expression smoothens into terrifying calm. “Did you need anything from that place? I was thinking of locking them in and burning the place down. Get rid of any leftovers.”

Chuuya’s breathing hitches, but it’s how things go. He’s named Nakahara Chuuya and his birthday is on April 29, but he’s not the same person that came from that place. Not anymore. The people that Dazai wants to burn alive are not his family – they’re just people who want to sell information about Corruption to the highest bidder, people who have abandoned him to the mercy of fate.

They’re – they’re not people who have cuddled him close when he has nightmares, not people who have brought him food when his stomach threatens to burn his insides, not people who have told him stories about their lives, the world in general, not people who have saved him from a sinking boat weighted with shackled children, not people who have saved him from the leering looks and terrifying touches of clients waiting to sample the most exotic courtesan.

They’re nothing.

They’ve given birth to a monster so they’re not as human as they think they are.

They can be burned alive for betraying the Port Mafia’s information and Chuuya will not feel any guilt or see any nightmares or—

There’s only one person who has been with him through all the painful parts of his life. That one person is the cause of more than half of those painful parts, true, but he’s stayed by Chuuya’s side. That one person is the only one he’ll consider as his true home, his family.

Not them.
Not the people set to die soon.

The voices inside of him don’t say anything, but they’re warmly purring in satisfaction with what he’s thinking, deciding.

*Make them pay.*

*We will not be disgraced any longer.*

*Erase everything that has caused us disgrace.*

“Do whatever you want,” he manages to say, voice flat and unfeeling. “Will you execute them first before burning their bodies?”

“Want to do the honors?”

Chuuya doesn’t look at the woman bleeding on the ground from a few steps away. “You can take care of it.”

“You won’t think that I’m not trusting you to take care of yourself?” Dazai asks teasingly, one hand reaching up to rub at the bruise on his forehead, from the time he allowed Chuuya to enthusiastically beat him up.

“You’re not taking care of me.” Chuuya still doesn’t look at her sprawled, bleeding form. “You’re taking care of a traitor to the mafia.”

“Mm, maybe you should watch. You never know when you have to do it yourself.”

He doesn’t think anyone’s stupid enough to betray the Port Mafia, but stranger things have happened. This instance, for starters. “…Alright.”

“I see how it is.” The woman gasps out, spitefully, despite the bloodloss that should have made her more compliant. Her accent is heavy with the influence of French. “You think that he accepts the monster. You’re wrong. Everyone who gets close to you is only because they want to capture the monster. Everyone will look at you and only see a disappointment, a tainted monster—”

Chuuya blinks and his hand is already wrapped around her throat. Just one more squeeze and she will be silent forever. The heavy cloak of gravity around him shields him from her attempts to kick out at him.

*Make them pay. We will not be disgraced any longer. Erase everything that has caused us disgrace.*

He’ll make them pay. If only she didn’t give up on him—if only she didn’t fall in love with the previous vessel of Corruption—if only she didn’t exist—

“—Stop it, Chuuya.”

Chuuya gasps—and Corruption starts to recede even before Dazai’s fingers fully close over his wrist.

“I’ll take care of this.” Dazai continues calmly, like he didn’t just stop Chuuya from killing his own mother. “Just sit tight and wait for me back home.”

*Corruption* is seething at being robbed the chance to unleash itself. “…I… thought I needed to learn how to execute traitors.”
“We can do that next time.” Dazai pulls him away from the woman, letting her crumple to the ground while glaring at them. “Now, go home and wash your face, you look awful.”

“Fuck you,” he returns weakly, scrubbing a hand over his face.

“You can join me when we hunt down the person who sold you to human traffickers back then.” He didn’t tell Dazai about that – about the client this woman roped in so he would provide them meager assistance with living in Paris. But then again, a much younger Dazai was able to research his name and identity in under two weeks – finding out about the chief of police is child’s play for him. “He’s now enjoying retirement in Nice. We can visit him there and do wine-tasting afterwards.”

“…Alright.”

“I’ll be back by dinner – make sure you have a lovely meal ready for me, okay?”

Chuuya thinks of retorting about not being a goddamn live-in chef, but he catches sight of the hatred on the woman’s face—and Chuuya knows, that she’s seeing herself and his father again, a person who accepted the monster, even for just a short while. There’s a strange twinge on his chest—disappointment that she gave up too soon, happiness that he’s managed to find Dazai even though his father and his much younger self had failed, inevitability, finality, goodbye.

He closes his eyes and leaves the room, ignoring a woman’s shrieks about not deserving to die for doing the right thing.

He has a dinner to prepare.
Triple chocolate cake with candles (unlit, because he doesn’t fancy the thought of having to deal with a kitchen fire, thanks) on it: check. He’s not a particular fan of the too-sweet flavor, but living with someone who’s brazenly courting diabetic coma on a daily basis with the amount of sweets he shoves to his mouth… is a good exercise of his tolerance.

*Petrus* decanted: check. He also has *Domaine de la Romanee-Conti* on stand-by in case Dazai sniffs that *Petrus* isn’t expensive enough; he also has *Yamazaki Mizunara* single malt whisky if Dazai’s in a whisky mood.

Lobster thermidor, flambéed beef steaks, sashimi platter, chili crab: check. It’s too much for just two people – he’s already packed some for his colleagues, because they might not interact with him that much, but as the partner of an Executive… it feels like something he should do.

He took the day off and he ended up cooking too much to counter his nerves—not that he’d admit that.

Dazai’s been caught up in a case—solo mission, because Chuuya’s needed for some additional muscle that doesn’t require *Corruption* in the Continent, and he’s only able to arrive in Yokohama just the day before. Chuuya doesn’t know a lot about the mission – only that it’s something that the Boss is involved in, along with Dazai’s favorite drinking buddy. Chuuya doesn’t interrogate Akutagawa who’s been shadowing Dazai as part of his extended training, but some well-placed inquiries told him that it involves an organization called *Mimic*. He’s not particularly worried – because Oda might be as pure as driven snow when it comes to his Port Mafia existence, but *Flawless* is the perfect defense.

He’s not particularly worried – though he’s getting annoyed that he’s been waiting for Dazai for
hours already. It’s almost midnight and his birthday is about to be over – well, okay, he’s not worried about his birthday, for there’s always next year – but where the fuck is Dazai? His phone is shut off and Chuuya’s throat is already itchy from leaving dozens of voicemail about promises to roast the other’s ass once he shows up.

Chuuya considers cleaning their home – but he already did that in-between the waiting time of his cooking. Maybe he can do it again? He’s only been gone for two weeks, but Dazai’s laziness knows no bounds. Maybe there’s a bundle of unwashed clothing still hidden under the bed? Maybe he should scrub the bathroom tiles in case there’s still some grout? Maybe he should check Dazai’s desk and look for a note that’s probably buried underneath his game discs?

Or maybe he can start drinking already.

He considers taking a sip out of Petrus but then. He bypasses that and grabs a convenience-store bottle of Merlot instead. He likes wine – though a huge part of him thinks that it’s probably because Dazai’s always with him on some fancy wine-tasting event. But then again, he does appreciate the flavor, even if it’s a cheap bottle. It’s good that it’s not as lovely as he’s used to, because that means he can control his drinking better, only taking a sip every ten minutes.

He arranges himself on an armchair near the living room window, his overcoat that’s supposed to make him look so much nicer already folded in his bedroom, because stupid fucking Dazai is late. He considers eating the food already – he’s been studying the recipes and making sample batches and they all taste nice – but. He’s cooked them while imagining that he’ll eat a candle-lit dinner with his partner. Who’s still fucking late.

Chuuya must have fallen asleep on the armchair, because he startles awake to the sound of Dazai closing the door and to a lap wet with spilled cheap wine. He hasn’t quite managed to blink the sleep out of his system when he spots Dazai’s closed-off expression from the distance, spots the all-too-familiar specks of blood on the other’s clothes.

“I was so worried.” He ends up blurting that out, before his mind catches up to his mouth. But then – he’s promised to confess even just a tiny part of his feelings tonight, right? He feels his cheeks warm as he watches Dazai impassively remove his overcoat, hanging it over the coatrack near the doorway. “You—are you alright? The blood—didn’t belong to you, right? I’m—was so worried.”

“Of course it’s not my blood,” Dazai ends up saying, eyes deader than Chuuya remembers. No – he still remembers that bandaged boy from long ago, but he hasn’t seen Dazai like this since then. “And why are you worried? Someone like you doesn’t have the right to worry about someone like me.”

“Someone like me—”

Chuuya cuts himself off, because he’s not sure how to proceed. Corruption – who’s been so quiet, so behaved, for the past few weeks – laughs and laughs and laughs.

“A monster like you,” Dazai clarifies, his hands crossed over his chest, imposing despite the lines of fatigue on his entire body.

“A monster like me, you say.” Chuuya’s heart thuds inside him and he digs his fingers to his palms, shaking fists by his sides. “Someone like me is in love with someone like you, you bastard.”

Dazai does the impossible – appear even colder than ever. “You’re not in love with me.”
“What the fuck,” Chuuya feels his vision shake – but that’s probably just because of the tears in his eyes. He’s not sure why things are suddenly like this – he’s just. He’s just cooked and prepared something for his birthday, hoping to welcome Dazai home after his grueling mission that he doesn’t want to involve Chuuya with. And—hopefully confess his feelings so that he’s not keeping anything secret from Dazai. His wineglass underneath his feet when he takes a step forward. He doesn’t notice—not really. “I know I’m in love. I know what the hell I’m feeling!”

“You’re drunk.” Dazai’s expression is shuttered, his voice freezing. “You’re confused.”

“I just drank a little bit while waiting for your sorry ass to arrive!”

“You reek,” Dazai counters with a disdain sniff. “And you can’t be in love. A monster like you – like us – can’t be in love.”

“You—”

“What, you think just because I hold your hand, we’re in love? Just because we live together? Just because we spend a lot of time together?”

“Well—”

Yes.

Isn’t that part of being in love?

Chuuya’s heartbeat goes into overdrive whenever they’re together, he feels like he can do anything, like he can ignore everyone else who regards him with disdain, like he can survive without being noticed by anyone else. He doesn’t feel anything when he’s not with Dazai and he doesn’t even want to be anything with anyone other than Dazai. He thinks he can consider it a blessing if he dies protecting Dazai, an ideal ending for someone who’s always failed to protect or preserve anything.

“Normal humans might consider those as part of being in love. But we’re not. We’re monsters, Chuuya.”

“You’re not—”

“Why do you think I managed to rise up in Port Mafia so quickly? Why do you think I was able to tolerate you?” Dazai’s staring at him, but there’s no connection there anymore, like a line that has been severed. “It’s because I’m not normal too.”

“T-Tolerate?”

Chuuya’s mind strains to remember all the years, the moments, that they’ve spent together. Playing video games together. Using up Port Mafia funds to go hotel-hopping. Eating different cuisines and trying to cook them at home. Walking aimlessly in shopping malls while window-shopping. Killing and destroying together. Living together.

“You’re just the shiniest, newest, most interesting doll.”

“You—”

“I just used you and played with you, Chuuya.”

“I—”

“But I’m bored with you already.”
“You—”

“I cannot believe you would think that you’re in love with me.” Dazai’s just two steps away from him. Chuuya’s not sure if it’s him that moved, if he’s subconsciously used his power to pull Dazai towards him. “You’re stupider than I thought.”

_I love you._

_I love you so fucking much._

_I love you so much that I feel like I’m going to die if I stop._

Words that he’s felt since the day that he’s felt those lips pressed against his knuckles—since the day that he’s looked up from the mass of water and gore to the moonlight and the devil that lurks there, waiting for him—since the day that he’s been abandoned by his mother and he’s wished for someone to look at him and see something else aside from the monster howling with rage.

_I love you—the you who can see the corruption and accepts me anyway—even before I met you._

Words—feelings—lies.

Dazai never told him that they’re in love, that he could feel something like love. His mother told him that he could never find anyone who’d accept him.

They’re right, aren’t they?

Dazai, especially, because he’s always right.

But then what is this feeling? If it’s not love—then what is it?

“Hmm, nothing to say?” Dazai asks – and there’s a split-second of relief there. Chuuya doesn’t catch it. He’s not in love and he’s not supposed to pay so much attention to Dazai and he’s not supposed to feel anything. “Finally realized how stupid you’re being?”

Chuuya doesn’t say anything—because his lungs feel like they’re collapsing into themselves, like his insides are filling with black tar. Thoughts of celebrating – of candle-lit dinners and birthday wishes – they’re all swirled inside and devoured by hisses about corruption, tainting, monster.

He sways, a little bit to the right. Dazai doesn’t catch him.

His vision is blurry so he doesn’t see hope and resolve flicker in Dazai’s eyes. “I’ve always disliked you, since back then. But I knew that I had to work with you, so I merely tolerated you, played with you so you’ll be bearable to deal with.”

This is—

Dazai is telling him an answer, in riddles.

“…I’ve always disliked you too.” Chuuya thinks of all the times that he’s wanted to punch Dazai for making irritating observations, that he’s wanted to smother Dazai so he’ll stop saying things that make his skin tingle, that he’s wanted to remove Dazai from his sight so that he can breathe easier. “You’re a disgusting piece of shit.”

It must be true.

It must be true, but his insides are curling into each other, voices inside him hissing that he must
make Dazai pay for making him disgrace himself.

*Make them pay. We will not be disgraced any longer. Erase everything that has caused us disgrace.*

He’ll erase Dazai and his feelings will disappear and everything should be alright.

He feels *Corruption* agree with him, black-red veins tainting his entire body as he surrenders to the destruction. Maybe if he destroys himself, he’ll be able to destroy his heart as well.

His senses are already overpowered by the *grantors of dark disgrace* spilling out from him—so he doesn’t hear the words *I’m sorry, Chuuya* just before everything turns black.

***

Nakahara Chuuya wakes up to the following:

- his face sticky with tear-tracks and his entire body devoid of blood and dirt, like he’s been cleaned before being laid down in the middle of rubble, leather gloves covering his black-red hands – something that rarely happens, overcoat draped over him like a blanket;

- a chunk of his hair chopped off;

- the smell of burnt leather as his car is apparently bombed to smithereens due to some unknown perpetrator;

- the two-bedroom apartment he used to co-own with Dazai mostly destroyed, the food in smashed dishes, the bottle of *Petrus* the only survivor;

- the metal safe inside his bedroom tampered with – his notebook of handwritten poems flipped to the page where he’s written two lines that he ended up not having the courage to have prescribed on plain platinum rings: *Reste près de moi et ne t’en vas pas, j’ai peur de te perdre*;

- the inside of his safe gaining an addition: a checkbook under his name, along with documents with an attached credit card, bank statements stating that he currently has billions of dollars in offshore accounts, as well as a vault filled with gold and jewelry, transaction history stating that he’s received most of the funds via wire yesterday;

- a visit from Hirotsu-san telling him that Dazai Osamu has officially left and betrayed the Port Mafia in the middle of a mission yesterday – with said betrayal going on, he’s forbidden from undergoing any missions that require the use of the Ability that Dazai Osamu’s been hiding from the top brass in an effort to hold his cards close to his chest in an event of a coup: *Corruption*;

- an invitation from the Boss for him to join the Five Executives’ dinner for he’ll be the one to replace the open spot left by Dazai Osamu;

- the key to the cage he never wanted to leave in place of his hollowed-out heart;

He feels lighter – because a chunk of his hair is missing, because his feelings have been destroyed, because his heart is now missing.
Nakahara Chuuya wakes up to a world without Dazai Osamu.

★ …and the one time he succeeded ★

Chapter End Notes

• feedback / comments / questions / screaming = always welcome, always a+++ :
• [reminder: this update is a double-update!] [ch 17] [ch 18]

• just in case it’s a bit confusing, timeline is as follows:

1\textsuperscript{st} scene = set during ch16’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} scene;
2\textsuperscript{nd} scene = set before ch16’s 4\textsuperscript{th} scene;
3\textsuperscript{rd} scene = set after ch16’s 4\textsuperscript{th} scene;
4\textsuperscript{th} scene = set after ch16’s 5\textsuperscript{th} scene;
5\textsuperscript{th} scene = set after ch16’s last scene;

references!

• IRL!Chuuya’s birthplace is at Yamaguchi City; his father is an army doctor. IRL!Chuuya also started writing poetry at a young age (8 y.o.) & started submitting poems for publishing when he was 13. I think I forgot to include this in previous chapters, but Chuuya has lived/studied/moved in a lot of places. IRL!Chuuya also wrote a lot of poems as coping mechanisms for pain/tragedy – and he’s also an example of bros before hoes (his girlfriend left him for his
friend, but he remained friends with him).

- first scene/"training" is inspired (!?) by Dazai shooting Akutagawa right in the face // womanizing Dazai is canon both in BSD & IRL.

- the ‘Dazai names Chuuya’ scene in ch16 has Dazai saying that he has a research project + spending a lot of time re: the name – which is Dazai referring to him hunting down Chuuya’s remaining family (&lying to Chuuya about it);

- apparently the French translations don’t show up when you hover while in mobile? translation for “Reste près de moi et ne t’en vas pas, j'ai peur de te perdre” = “Stay close to me and never leave; I am afraid to lose you.”

- oh, and one more thing. a "friendly" (?) reminder that dazai hints that the mafia is likely to execute chuuya under the slightest suspicion of helping him out (y'know, just before he asked chuuya to do an ojou-sama impression). sooooo if dazai & chuuya had a good, working partnership, chuuya would have been under immediate suspicion of being involved in the betrayal. not unless they parted in a way that obviously sets them on opposite sides. . . . .

- one last thing - if you've survived until the end of this chapter - thank you so very much for giving this fic a chance! stay strong, my dears :)♥
Chuuya is sleeping peacefully.

It’s enforced peace—but it’s better than nothing.

Most people would probably complain about pumping patients with so much sedatives to achieve rest for recuperation, but most people don’t have such a beautiful and powerful patient to look after. They don’t have Chuuya lying in their bed—rightfully so.
Nobody else in the world can say that they’ve had Chuuya sleep in their bed—Kouyou-anesan’s strict in enforcing bonding moments between her charges, but she draws the line in bed-sharing. Chuuya’s previous roommate in the courtesan house has already been taken care of; same case with the transient housing that Chuuya and his mother had inhabited on their travels across Europe. He’s made certain that this remains the case even during the two years that he spent mostly drinking and rolling about in his futon uselessly, during the first two years of his tenure with the Agency, during the time that they’ve seen each other face-to-face while on separate sides. He’s sure.

He’s the only one who’s seen Chuuya breathe in and out peacefully, fingers trembling every few minutes or so while he’s visited by nightmares, nose twitching every time he fails to stop himself from pressing a soft kiss against the other’s forehead.

Chuuya is sleeping peacefully.

When his phone vibrates against his hip – prolonged vibration, so it’s a call – he rejects the call without actually looking at the caller ID. He considers just shutting it off entirely, but he’d rather make it easier on himself when he gets the urge to look at his sizable collection of pictures and videos.

And he’s waiting on word about the exact delivery time for the imported artillery he ordered, supposedly to be transported tomorrow night right under the government’s nose. He also uses his phone to check on the status of the offshore accounts he arranged on Chuuya’s behalf – he’d rather not use any of the money he’s saving, but he’d like some insurance that his suppliers will not go back on their word even if he’s not really paying for his order.

…but mostly it’s because it’s only a few clicks until he sees the slideshow of Chuuya’s pictures, really.

The phone rings again and he considers shutting it off – or maybe chucking it outside the window. They’re currently in one of Chuuya’s barely-used properties (it’s something he had abandoned two years ago, when he was running around from house to house due to an unspoken fear of being haunted – though it’s just because he has a very determined watcher, not that he’s admitted that to Chuuya). It’s something under a different name so it should be pretty safe from people dropping by to visit Chuuya.

…He shouldn’t throw the phone. It’s the number that Chuuya has memorized – a number that he remembers even though he’s drunk enough to forget his name and his hatred, a number that he used to call while angrily ranting about being left behind, mispronouncing names and sprinkling French every other word – he’s remembered to bring an audio recorder with him so he doesn’t miss out on such gems.

He sets the phone on mute while disabling vibrate, sets it atop the bedside table, just short of knocking it against the empty vials of sedatives. Hmm, he should start to clean up a little bit. But that means that he has to stand up and leave his vigil by Chuuya’s bedside. He considers it for a second – but he decides not to, clutching Chuuya’s right hand with both of his instead, feels the dry coolness of the airconditioning making sure that there’s not a drop of sweat in Chuuya’s body, despite spring starting to make its way to summer.

He—he’s so close to getting everything he ever wants in his hands. He—he’s made a lot of missteps along the way, but it’s all paved his way forwards. He—he’s so very close.

He can’t allow Chuuya to slip from his hold.
He—

Chuuya will receive the proof of his devotion, even if it’s not proof of him never leaving ever again.

Chuuya will respond to his proposal while they’re at Yokohama Marine Tower.

Chuuya will wear an engagement ring – a simple band made from the golden ingots they managed to retrieve from *The Setting Sun*; *reste près de moi et ne t’en vas pas, j’ai peur de te perdre* inside the band in tiny but unmistakable inscription – he’ll accept it with a brilliant sunset on his background, the gold warm on his finger, the *jadeite* on his neck contrasting against the longer curls of red.

Chuuya will go with him to Paris – to a flat that he will purchase, built on the same plot of land where Chuuya was taken before he was sold to human traffickers. It will be the beginning of him helping Chuuya rewrite over the unsavory parts of his life – and they will hold a private wedding there.

If Chuuya agrees to leave the Port Mafia, they can start over there, adopt a kid they’ll spoil terribly so Chuuya can prove to himself that he can rise from whatever influence is left over from his despicable parents. If Chuuya wants to postpone retirement, that’s also fine – they can postpone adoption, because it’s not like there’s a shortage of people needing Chuuya’s guidance in Yokohama.

Chuuya will have a house in Yamaguchi too – one can’t have too many vacation houses – and it will be a place where Chuuya can override the remaining marks of the *Nakahara* family in the area.

Chuuya will give him the chance to teach him how to love himself as much as he deserves.

Chuuya will be with him forever.

He—

He will not allow anyone to get in the way.

☆ ☆ ☆

The moment someone stops outside the door, Dazai whips out the gun from the bedside table with his right hand, keeping his left hand on Chuuya’s.

“Good afternoon, Dazai-kun.” Ango wisely enters the apartment briefcase-first, receiving the bullet that Dazai releases with the folders of papers inside. “Though I doubt it is such a good afternoon if you’re greeting your guests like this.”

“You’re not welcome at all, Ango-kun~~~♫”

Ango raises an eyebrow as he surreptitiously surveys the person lying peacefully in bed. Dazai
stands a little straighter, hiding Chuuya’s face from their unwelcome visitor.

“I heard you carried him out of your home,” Ango relays the gossip with hardly a shrug. He does position his already-shot briefcase a little higher, closer to his chest. “…Bridal style. Are you practicing?”

Dazai snarls, showing off his teeth, the gun still trained on Ango. “Delete all the information about Chuuya’s apartment.”

“Your payment? I was under the impression that you’ve allocated a lot of funds already.”

“You’re asking for payment, Ango-kun?” Dazai grips Chuuya’s hand tighter. “Your life should be a pretty good payment, I’d say.”

Ango sighs, but Dazai knows that it’s within the other man’s expectations. “You can’t keep him asleep forever, Dazai-kun.”

“Then I suppose that means you all have to work harder to close the issue.”

Ango stares for a moment – looks like he’s about to say something, but thinks better of it. Dazai raises an eyebrow – knowing that there’s something unsavory there, while also knowing that Ango isn’t the type to start nasty confrontations.

“…I’ll delete the information from your previous home.” Ango sighs again. “But I can’t promise anything about this place.”

Dazai doesn’t say anything, merely nods, keeps the gun on Ango’s direction until the man leaves. Chuuya continues to sleep peacefully.

☆ ☆ ☆

The phone continues to ring.
Dazai continues to ignore it.
Chuuya continues to sleep peacefully.

☆ ☆ ☆
Anything I would never want to lose is always lost.
It is a given that everything that is worth wanting will be lost the moment I obtain it.
There’s nothing worth pursuing at the cost of prolonging the suffering.

—Chuuya’s the exception.

He will not lose him – not to himself, not because of their time as *soukoku*, not to *Corruption*, not to anything else.

☆ ☆ ☆

“Kouyou-anesan,” Dazai greets their newest disturber with a very placid smile. “…and you brought in friends.”

“Dazai,” Kouyou’s greeting sounds like a scolding, but Dazai doesn’t care. He barely acknowledges the people huddled behind her elaborate *kimono*.

“I don’t remember inviting you to intrude in our space.”

“We won’t stay long. We’re just here to remind you to answer Mori-han’s calls.”

“I’m not interested in dealing with him.” Dazai drapes the blankets higher on Chuuya’s prone form, covering him until his chin. “Or anyone else, for that matter.”

“Fyodor Dostoevsky has made his demand.” Kouyou doesn’t rub a hand at her face, but it’s close. “He wants to speak with Chuuya first before he reveals any information about the plans to return Abilities to the world.”

“…Why?”

“We don’t know either. He’s confident that Chuuya will agree though.”

Dazai snarls as he catches the suggestion in her voice.

“I won’t allow it.”

“You’re not Chuuya’s *owner.*”

Dazai doesn’t reply, merely raises an eyebrow at her and Hirotsu, Yosano and Motojirou hiding behind her. In a way, he’s glad that they’re all worried about Chuuya. More importantly, he wants them gone from here, before Chuuya’s sleep is disturbed.

They leave eventually.

Dazai continues to ignore Mori’s calls.

Chuuya continues to sleep peacefully.
He feeds Chuuya via IV.

He keeps Chuuya’s lips moisturized so that it continues being plump and full, patting it every couple of minutes with a damp towel.

He gives Chuuya a sponge bath every day, checks the IV, checks his pulse and blood pressure.

He watches Chuuya sleep, peaceful with his mind forcibly kept quiet, so that he’ll stop hearing the whispers of Corruption in his sleep.

By the end of the first week, he crawls into bed with Chuuya, because his back already hurts from sitting the entire time.

By the end of the second week, he considers grabbing the phone and yelling at someone, anyone, everyone, to light a fire under their asses for moving so slowly in capturing the group responsible in the attempt to revive the Rats in the House of the Dead, which then apparently wants to return the Abilities to the world.

By the middle of the third week, Dazai’s mouth is a permanent presence against Chuuya’s bare knuckles.

Before the end of the third week:

Nakahara Chuuya wakes up to Dazai Osamu.

Chapter End Notes

- reminder that this is a double-update~ [ch 17] [ch 18]

references!

- as with the previous chapter, in case the French doesn’t show up on hover – it’s “Reste près de moi et ne t’en vas pas, j’ai peur de te perdre” =“Stay close to me and never leave; I am afraid to lose you.”

- “Anything I would never want to lose is always lost.” spiel is c/o Dark Era!Dazai;

- comments/feedback/violent reactions are always welcome and appreciated! :D

- next chapter? winter fyodor is coming;;;
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

“Unhand me, you crazy asshole.”
“I will never.”
“You shouldn’t be so proud of being a clingy, crazy asshole.”

Chapter Notes

many, many, many rewrites later, here’s the next chapter!
i’ll keep this short - i hope you enjoy this chapter and thank you so very much for your patience with me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

★ ★ ★

[June 19]

“If you’re about to ask a rhetorical question, let me posit a rhetorical answer: I am here because you wished it so.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky should be locked up—he was in prison just yesterday, Chuuya was there—he shouldn’t be here—but here he is, standing in the middle of the apartment that belongs to Chuuya by name, but has been so infested and infected by Dazai that it reeks, it makes him reel and makes him sick—and Fyodor shouldn’t be here.

Chuuya’s mouth is just gaping uselessly, because he’s just arrived, just been pardoned out of prison, the same prison that Fyodor should still be in.

“So this is your home? Very… quaint.” Fyodor looks around, June’s summer not deterring him from wearing his winter outfit, hands gloved and fur coat around his person.

Chuuya’s just arrived (and he shouldn’t even be here, because this is home, but also not, because this is where Dazai has lied so many times to him and Chuuya still—) and he hasn’t even had a chance to arrange his mail—and Fyodor’s walking towards his coffee table, gloved hands easily tearing through the package he’s received, uncaringly dropping the contents back to the table.

And in a way so different—yet so similar—to the way Dazai’s presence in his apartment feels, Chuuya’s throat goes dry and sticky at once, a lump that’s impossible to swallow, once he sees the
contents of the package.

It’s just two small, insignificant things.

Dazai’s old phone and old pendant.

He’s not—

Fyodor makes a curious humming sound though his eyes remain hollow and blank, curiosity for curiosity’s sake, as he pries open the pendant. It fails, the thick gloves making it difficult, so he simply chucks the pendant hard enough at the table—and for a guy who claims to have a weak physical constitution, it’s a pretty solid throw—and Chuuya can only watch, frozen in his place, as the pendant cracks and locks of reddish-brown hair spills out, leaving only a familiar picture inside —

“Have you thought about my offer?” Fyodor doesn’t look like he minds that his conversation partner is struck speechless by the fact that there’s an escaped criminal in his living room.

And Chuuya tries to make his mouth work, tries to answer, tries to deny, tries to accept, tries to do something, anything. Instead, Chuuya hears a hiss that wells up from deep inside his heart.

“Let him pay for disgracing us—he can’t disgrace us—don’t let him touch it—we will not be held back, we will not be disgraced any longer—”

★★★

[May 22]

Chuuya wakes up with an IV hooked to his wrist, a niggling sensation worming underneath his skin. The space beside him is still faintly warm—it must be mere minutes since Dazai has left, presumably to relieve his bladder. There’s a stale smell in the room, a sterile chemical scent mixed with the distinct odor of unwashed hair. A quick sniff tells him that his hair and his body smells surprisingly fine, if not a little too fruity.

Well. There’s only so much he can stare at to stall the inevitable. Chuuya takes a deep breath before he meets Dazai’s stare head-on.

And because Dazai is Dazai, the man leaps over the scant distance between them, ignoring things such as propriety and inertia, causing the bed Chuuya’s on to skid a couple of meters from the force of it. Chuuya doesn’t even get a chance to yelp and complain and worry about his IV being tugged out unceremoniously—because Dazai does something that Chuuya would never have been able to predict, with or without Flawless surely.

“I missed you so much,” is what Dazai probably says—or sobs out, rather. It’s a little difficult to understand, given that Dazai’s practically molding their bodies together, his mouth babbling words around Chuuya’s neck that’s steadily growing damp.

It’s almost enough to make Chuuya relent on his decision.

Almost.
“Unhand me, you crazy asshole.”

“I will never.”

“You shouldn’t be so proud of being a clingy, crazy asshole,” Chuuya rasps out once he finally takes stock of himself. Thankfully, Dazai’s neurotic enough about planning for worst-case scenarios, so the IV pole is attached to the bed and therefore didn’t get yanked out from his dramatics. Not that thankfully, because Dazai sobbing to his chest gives him mixed feelings (he’s definitely regretting the fact that his phone is nowhere near his person and he’s therefore unable to record this moment for posterity) and gives him an itchy nose. “Also, did you not take a bath for two weeks!”

“Three,” Dazai corrects him with an uncalled-for confidence. Very uncalled-for, because when Dazai finally lifts his face—it’s. It’s really, really bad for Chuuya’s heart. There’s tears on his eyes and everything.

“That is very disgusting.” Chuuya swallows and very carefully keeps his arms pinned to the bed. “You are very disgusting.”

Dazai only grins at him, looking very helpless against an onslaught of emotions.

That’s the only reason why Chuuya swallows down his plan to burst Dazai’s bubble by telling him that despite his nearly comatose state for the past three weeks… he wasn’t fully unconscious and he had overheard quite a number of things.

★★★

Going to John and Francis’ wedding is hardly within the acceptable limits for someone who just woke up from a coma, but Chuuya’s body is hardly normal.

(He’s hardly normal. He’s an entire solar system away from normal. He’s—)

But a promise is a promise. Granted, he hasn’t actually promised John anything about his attendance, but an RSVP is pretty important and solid and he’s not the type of person who said one thing and did another. That’s more of Dazai’s specialty, really. Chuuya bites his lip as he mulls about that. In any case, the wedding is rife with scandals and paparazzi, not only because Fitzgerald is a ruthless businessman who actually leaked inside scoop to the highest bidder, but mostly due to the fact that Fitzgerald’s previous spouse (may her soul rest in peace) was a female media darling.

It’s a compromise, Chuuya remembers John telling him before. I tolerate his worst so I can enjoy his best.

John makes it sound so easy, when everyone knows it’s anything but. It’s not even just their philosophies in life clashing terribly—but they’re getting married in a couple of days.

Chuuya bites his lip until it bleeds.

★★★

Going to the wedding without alerting Dazai is an exercise in patience and extreme luck. It’s difficult, given that Dazai’s acting like some juiced-up touch-starved leech pretty much 24/7. While he’s had years of experience of dealing with octopus-arms-Dazai, it’s somehow nothing compared to the present.
He bides his time, because no matter what anyone else (read: Dazai) says, he’s actually very good when it comes to patiently waiting out his target. He doesn’t always compromise missions because of impatience (read: after that fucker had left, there was no room for error for him and his missions, if he wanted to hold onto being an Executive; before that fucker had left, there was no room for error for him, if he wanted to hold onto the youngest Executive in Port Mafia history).

Chuuya doesn’t lash out or swat Dazai’s hands away or kick the bastard’s skull in. In return, Dazai hums and doesn’t comment on how fishy Chuuya’s docile behavior is.

It’s an exercise in waiting.

Almost as if there aren’t any lies between them, Chuuya smiles at Dazai. All the while, waiting for the signal that a certain man gave him when he had visited while he was still unconscious—an ability that suits the other’s secrecy just fine.

It doesn’t matter.

Chuuya’s had plenty of practice when it comes to waiting, after all.

★★★

[May 24]

“…so how does this work, exactly?”

“Hmm, one of the things we agreed on is that I will not reveal the full extent of my capabilities in exchange for assisting you.”

Sakaguchi Ango keeps his eyes on the road as Chuuya quickly changes clothes at the backseat of the car, tinted windows providing privacy from any peering eyes from the pedestrians and other cars. While Chuuya prefers travelling at less busy hours, the traffic and the general commotion afforded by the city works to their favor. A grand escape on an empty road is just an invitation for Dazai to show off his nauseatingly fast driving skills.

“Funny that, I don’t remember actually agreeing.”

“You being here is enough of an agreement, I reckon.”

“You could be a little nicer to me,” Chuuya squints over the glasses that complete his disguise. Great, now he has the same owl-like look as his abductor. Is it still abducting if it’s all according to plan? Does it even matter? “I’m doing you a great favor, after all.”

“It’s not like you’re not benefiting from this escape as well,” Sakaguchi doesn’t sound bothered at all. In fact he kind of sounds amused, as though helping someone escape Dazai’s clingy octopus arms provides great comedic value. “And it’s not like you’ll not end up saving the world.”

Chuuya scoffs as they switch lanes so they’re on track to the airport. While it’s probably too obvious a move, there’s no point in delaying their leave of Japan by going on several highways and losing any tails by travelling over water.

“I’m a Port Mafia Executive, saving the world is pretty low on my list of priorities.”
“But you don’t mind humoring Dazai-kun.”

“And that time is over,” Chuuya says with as much finality he can muster. It’s not like it matters – Sakaguchi doesn’t look like he’s the type to believe someone easily.

“Escaping to go to a wedding without letting him know personally sounds like you’re still humoring him.”

“Not letting him know is humorous to you, huh?” Chuuya squints at the man that’s one of Dazai’s previous drinking buddies. It’s at times like this that Chuuya somehow feels… hollow, that he hasn’t made an effort to know more about the Flawless Oda Sakunosuke. It’s not like it would have changed anything, but at least… It doesn’t matter. “Figures that someone who tolerates Dazai mixed with alcohol has a pretty warped sense of humor.”

Sakaguchi laughs – almost like Dazai’s, really. It’s creepy, in a very eerie manner, like Dazai’s ghost is here, even though he’s pretty much alive (and probably fuming about being fooled). “You’re sending him on a goose chase, a case that has very little clues, with very high stakes, with many unpredictable variables involved. That’s not even considering that it’s involving you. Isn’t that the best type of present for someone so bored with the mundane?”

Well.

When it’s put like that…

Chuuya bites his lip as he kicks the back of the driver’s seat instead. “If my chauffeur is this talkative, I won’t be surprised if we end up on a traffic accident.”

“You do share the same trait of being unable to be honest…”

“I so do not want to hear that from someone like you.”

★ ★ ★

[May 25]

As expected of a wedding that involves Fitzgerald, it’s blindingly bright. There are diamonds everywhere and Chuuya feels an abject horror that there are no imitation gems in a one-hectare radius. It’s been a long time since he’s worried about his financial status, but there’s something about being surrounded by so much wealth that actually makes his stomach cramp with acid.

He glances at his date, but he draws his eyes away immediately. Sakaguchi’s glasses are glinting way too much. Chuuya fervently hopes that the glasses that he’s wearing provides some protection against too much brightness.

There’s a certain honor (and bewilderment) that he’s actually seated on one of the main tables, sharing it with John’s siblings. Chuuya doesn’t know what he’s done to be considered close enough to John’s family, but he’s pretty sure that kicking John on the face isn’t it.

But then again, compared to… let’s say Dazai, this wedding is fairly happy. And normal. Dazai would probably have a very deranged wedding, with an equally deranged partner. Chuuya idly remembers telling Atsushi about nooses and time bombs involved; that’s still solid in his
assumption of a Dazai Osamu wedding debacle.

“They’re just happy because they get to eat more food and buy more books,” John’s voice cuts into his musings. Chuuya fixes his facial expression to something more jovial. John doesn’t look like he’s buying it, but he also looks pretty done with a number of things. His eyes are twitching—but then again, it's probably due to the cameras clicking non-stop. “You haven’t introduced me to your last-minute date, Chuuya.”

Chuuya sighs at that, tugs at Sakaguchi’s sleeve. While he’s thankful enough that Sakaguchi agreed for this detour when his escape is purely as a bargaining chip against Dostoevsky’s demands… Chuuya’s not blind enough to not see the ulterior motives. After all, despite the lack of Abilities in this world (and probably even more because of their threatened return)... this new shape of The Guild is enough to raise the hackles of any self-respecting control-freak organization.

(Chuuya wonders if it’s because Sakaguchi has spent time with Dazai, if that’s why he’s marginally easier to read than other manipulative bastards in his life.)

“John, this is Sakaguchi Ango.” It’s not like the two of them don’t know of each other already, but whatever. “Sakaguchi, this is John… Fitzgerald. Wow, congratulations.”

“I know, I’m still reeling from it,” John says with a grin that’s genuinely happy, even though he’s crushing Sakaguchi’s hand in their handshake. “And thanks. It’s nice to meet you.”

Chuuya gestures to both himself and Sakaguchi and hopes that John will not make any more quips about Dazai’s conspicuous absence. “We should go and congratulate your husband.”

“Nah, it’s fine, he’s busy preening in front of the cameras.”

“Which ones,” Chuuya dryly says, because there’s an actual section and queue for all the photographers.

“All of them.”

“Sounds tough.” Chuuya raises an eyebrow at John’s younger siblings, all looking too innocent for a paparazzi-filled life. “How are they faring in the adjustment?”

“Well, Fitz can’t remember names all that well…” John shrugs as though it’s a cutesy shortcoming, when there’s probably another line of people pissed off by that guy’s attitude. “So it’s a relief that we’re married now so he can just call me ‘husband’ in case he forgets.”

“Haaaa.” Well. At least, despite Dazai’s extremely long list of shittiness, forgetting his name will probably never make an appearance. “So your siblings are… ‘husband’s family’ or something?”

“He’s been addressing them like that even when they’re alone.” John smiles and tugs Chuuya and Sakaguchi close for a picture when someone asks them to smile. It’s almost instinctive now, when Chuuya knows that John loathes all this display of wealth. Is this what true love does to people? Turns them into actors with photoready smiles? “My family thinks it sounds royal. They’re stupid about it, really.”

“It’s probably not a good idea to call them stupid.”

“Not like they can hear me,” John gestures to the lot of them, busy with stuffing their faces, but delicately, using the proper cutlery order and everything.

Sakaguchi clears his throat and Chuuya knows that the time for chitchat is over.
“Well. Congratulations – we won’t keep you from your mingling duties.”

John wordlessly sets him off with a clap to his back, eyes shrewd. Chuuya feels the littlest bit judged.

Before Chuuya can warn Sakaguchi about being too obvious when it comes to gathering information about the Fitzgeral...
Chuuya snorts, “I’m sure. Undo that shit that you just did, you—”

“Will you listen to my offer? It will help with your dealings with your Dazai Osamu, after all.”

Chapter End Notes

because i can't have an update w/o a long AN:

i really have no words for my tardiness! thank you to all those who’ve read this, who commented, who bookmarked, who kudos’d and just generally remembered this fic’s existence. you're all such angels, thank you ♥♥♥

here's the rundown of the upcoming chapters:

:: CH20 – covers May 26, the full length of the Fyodor/Chuuya talk/chapter
:: CH21 – covers May 27, the Dazai/Chuuya airport reunion chapter
:: CH22 – covers May 23, Fyodor’s POV + June 18, Fyodor’s prison escape chapter
:: CH23 – covers June 19

revised estimate of chapters is 31 chapters, including epilogue! the plotty bits should end by CH24/25, which should give ~6 chapters for Dazai & Chuuya to be back to the fuwafuwa loveydovey relationship :)
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

“Oda-san… he doesn’t… didn’t completely understand Dazai-kun, not entirely at least, I think, but he did understand that Dazai-kun was lonely.”

“Lonely isn’t a word I would use to describe Dazai.”

“Because he’s pretty happy when he’s with you, right?”

Chapter Notes

• some parts have been posted on my twitter before, but there have been some changes to the dialogue, so please don’t skip anything! :D

• a lot of references to CH15 during the Fyodor/Chuuya chat & CH2 (the Chuuya/John date) so it might be helpful to have those chapters handy!

• feedback/screaming is always welcome!!! :D i hope you’ll forgive me for being super late to replying (...still...backlogged...) but please do know that i treasure every single one of your comments! & re-read them at least 10 times i swear, you’re all so sweet *v*♥

• also, i’d like to blame thank chomra, gab & senren for reminding me to update this before i get too distracted by looking @ trip itineraries for chuuya lmao ♥ ♥

• lastly, chapter is divided into 3 parts - part 3 might induce screaming so pls be warned accordingly;;;;;;; that said, i hope you enjoy & happy friday! ♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

★ ★ ★

[May 26]

“—schedule is a bit tight.”

Chuuya hums as he examines the contrite expression on Sakaguchi’s face from the mirror. He’s never been all that great when detecting lies, usually preferring to take people at their face value. He closes his eyes as he gives up on trying to read the other man – or rather, he only manages to read sincerity, which, because Sakaguchi is someone who’s actually been friends with Dazai, isn’t all that trustworthy.
(But then again, that’s a little unfair, isn’t Flawless—? But then again, that’s probably why he’s flawless like his Ability’s name. Managing to remain pure and untarnished by a mafioso’s lifestyle even if it doesn’t make sense.)

“It’s fine.” He replies, anyway. In a way, Sakaguchi was his date, even for such a small time and for such a farce. “I was the one who wanted to go to John’s wedding.”

“Those two… are quite possibly more different than—well.” Sakaguchi clears his throat, sounding unsure whether it’s okay to proceed. The road they’re currently on is smoothened by a sheet of ice, the car ambling along without any bumps. As if in contrast, Dazai’s friend or not, Sakaguchi is still lacking in finesse when it comes to subtle manipulations on conversations.

John’s family, upbringing and beliefs. Fitzgerald’s previous family, upbringing and beliefs. They couldn’t be more different, and yet—

“They come from wildly different backgrounds, but they managed to ignore their differences and their worst parts so they could enjoy each other’s bests.”

Sakaguchi’s tone isn’t sly, but that only shows his cunning. “While you and Dazai-kun have the same backgrounds, but have managed to pursue wildly different paths?”

“There’s a reason the wedding I came from is John’s.”

‘And not mine’ is unsaid, but it hangs in the air, frozen despite the car’s heating cranked up high to combat the seemingly-eternal winter around them.

“And that I was your date instead of Dazai-kun?”

Chuuya grits his teeth and kicks at the seat, which should jostle Sakaguchi a bit, but not to the point that his driving will veer off-course and kill the two of them in a freak accident.

“You know…” Ango’s conversational tone is also pretty annoying, all things considered. “Dazai-kun disliked talking about you, even in the safety of Sensei’s bar.”

Chuuya’s eye twitches. He’s not particularly excited to meet with Dostoevsky, but he’s starting to wish that he’s with the Russian instead of this guy. “Hmph. That bastard probably enjoyed talking about, what, the newly-released Pocky flavors at the time? About the ladies that he broke the hearts of? About this or that game that he beat the high score of?”

“You’re actually right.” Sakaguchi coughs to cover his laugh, but not quickly enough that Chuuya couldn’t hear. He kicks the back of the driver’s seat again. “He liked talking about superficial stuff. Things that wouldn’t get him in trouble. Things that wouldn’t let anyone peek into his heart.”

“There’s nothing but coal there,” Chuuya retorts, but it sounds weak, even to his own ears. He understands what Sakaguchi is getting at, somehow, an amorphous shape that seems to spell out that Dazai considered him as some kind of weakness that would chink his armor. It shouldn’t be a compliment and it should be an annoyance, but given that Dazai is Dazai… It shouldn’t make Chuuya pleased, so he stomps down on that feeling.

“I didn’t really get it before, but he’s quite lonely, isn’t he?”

“If he was a more decent person, he’d have a better social life.”

“Dazai-kun’s personality… hmm, it’s pretty bad, isn’t it?”
"What are you softening the blow for, you could just say it’s fucking terrible."

"His mind is pretty twisted," Sakaguchi agrees. "Ever since he’s young, he’s been really smart, right? He’s smart enough to understand humans, knows how their minds work. He’s smart to know that there’s a lot of terrible people."

"He should be smart enough to know enough not to add to the terrible-ness."

"Isn’t that what he did?"

Sharp inhale, then: "Haaaaaaaaaaaaaa, I’m pretty sure I didn’t sign up for a ‘Dazai is an Angel’ Talk, Pastor Sakaguchi."

"But you need to hear this, I think."

Whiplash-quick, "You thought wrong."

"Oda-san… he doesn’t… didn’t completely understand Dazai-kun, not entirely at least, I think, but he did understand that Dazai-kun was lonely."

"Lonely isn’t a word I would use to describe Dazai."

"Because he’s pretty happy when he’s with you, right?"

Chuuya doesn’t answer, only keeps his eyes closed so he doesn’t see the expanse of snow blanketing everything around them. And so he can’t have eye contact with the person chauffeuring him to the prison currently holding Dostoevsky.

After a couple of seconds, Sakaguchi continues, when it’s obvious that Chuuya will not deign to respond to that. "You both ended up pursuing different paths… but didn’t you end up on the same one, in the end?"

"Dazai isn’t on his way to meet with the demands of Fyodor Dostoevsky, is he?"

Sakaguchi doesn’t point out that it’s Chuuya who escaped from Dazai in the first place. Or that Dostoevsky has expressly requested to speak with Chuuya, not anyone else. Or that Dazai was dealing with Dostoevsky up until a couple of weeks ago. Instead, "I’m fairly certain that he’s on his way to follow you."

"I can handle an imprisoned criminal, without an Ability, mind you, on my own."

"And Dazai-kun needed to handle becoming a human being on his own." Sakaguchi doesn’t a miss a beat when he adds, "And so did you, right?"

Chuuya doesn’t talk to him for the rest of the ride.

★★★

Mori-san’s first words to him, after a long time of not seeing each other face-to-face: “Good job in escaping from Dazai-kun’s clutches.”

Chuuya’s body is confused, for a moment, because he wants to instinctively bow to Mori-san, yet
he doesn’t want to acknowledge the other’s words. He ends up being frozen there, in the hallway three doors away from the special cell holding Fyodor Dostoevsky.

There have been numerous transfers in the past couple of weeks, because of the resurgence of The Decay of Angels and Rats in the House of the Dead. It’s not a secret that they plan on getting Dostoevsky out – it’s one thing when Abilities are still present and Dostoevsky’s plans have accounted for being imprisoned. It’s another thing entirely to have an entire organization flopping around like a headless chicken, seeking out its brain.

The current prison they’re at is thirty minutes to the north of Korsakov, which should make it easy to transfer Dostoevsky after to the special underground holding cell in Hokkaido. The next cell is special and solitary, which would make visiting very difficult. Now’s the best chance to find out what Dostoevsky wants to gain by talking with Chuuya. There’s a chance that it’s just a statement, a more socially-polite fuck you to Dazai who has supposedly denied Dostoevsky that vein of negotiation.

Well, whatever it is, Chuuya’s here because he wants this to stop. He already has a lot going on in his life, he doesn’t need the whispers of Corruption growing louder and threatening to break open from his ribs. (And if he’s able to stop Dostoevsky, the Demon that even Dazai couldn’t defeat alone... well, that's another matter entirely.)

“Dostoevsky’s ready?” Chuuya knows it’s impolite, but he doesn’t make further small talk or ask about Fukuzawa-san. Mori-san and Fukuzawa-san have been supervising the transfers and have therefore been spending the past couple of months joined at the hip. Chuuya really has a lot going on in his life, he doesn’t need his mind broken by gross old men being gross together.

“He’s been harassing the guards, asking after you.” Mori-san looks at him with the same-old calculating look that has made him so terrifying. It looks like he’s trying to dissect Chuuya alive, infinitely curious about why the Demon is looking for someone like Chuuya. “The guards would appreciate the reprieve.”

Chuuya nods as he listens to the security briefing. Dostoevsky’s entire floor is being handled with extra caution – neighboring cells are empty, because he’s driven them to suicide just by the power of his suggestive words. Chuuya’s not scared at all, because he’s been with Dazai for so long. Cutting words can’t make him bleed—not anymore.

Fyodor Dostoevsky’s demand is to speak with Nakahara Chuuya first, in a room with just the two of them, before he reveals his intel on the plans to return Abilities to the world. Dostoevsky has agreed to audiovisual surveillance via the security cameras surrounding his cell and the hallway beyond it – almost as though it’s part of his demand, when in reality it’s non-negotiable to begin with.

Chuuya clears his mind of anything that can be used as a weakness against him. He’s here so he can get information from Dostoevsky. If he’s not able to read Dostoevsky right, Mori-san, Fukuzawa-san and Sakaguchi are on stand-by, watching the video feed. He can do this. He takes a deep breath and nods to the head of the prison security so that he can be ushered inside the requested ‘room’. It’s basically Dostoevsky’s cell with the man inside, the two empty cells flanking his, the empty hallway.

The door closes with a heavy groan, leaving Chuuya alone with Dostoevsky within a space of a few square meters.

Chuuya goes on offensive first, “—not so dead, this house of yours, hmm?”
Fyodor Dostoevsky stands in the middle of his modest cell, looking like he’s undisturbed and faintly enjoying his capture. He then spreads his hands as far as the chains will allow, clinking sounds in Chuuya’s ears. Despite his prison uniform and the general shabbiness of his surroundings, Dostoevsky still looks commanding and imposing, like the chains can actually crumble with just a word.

And then, it actually does.

The chains crumble to the ground and the overhead lights suddenly blink off, and—

Chuuya doesn’t even get the chance to run away from the prison cell when the walls start coming down, supposedly to halt any advance of escaping prisoners. But instead, it only effectively locks Chuuya in an enclosed space with Dostoevsky, effectively separated from Sakaguchi, Fukuzawa and Mori-san just beyond the walls.

“You—!”

“Yes, that is my doing.” Dostoevsky tilts his head and exposes the pale skin of his neck – or at least, the small part that’s not covered by his prisoner attire. “But do not fret – I only did it so we could have real privacy.”

Chuuya snorts, “I’m sure. Undo that shit that you just did, you—”

“Will you listen to my offer? It will help with your dealings with your Dazai Osamu, after all.”

Chuuya feels his heartbeat trip and fall to a crawl. Stuttering, struggling to recover. And then it beats, hummingbird-quick, as Chuuya tries to make his mouth work. His throat feels like he’s being strangled right now, even though Dostoevsky is still behind bars and there’s nobody else around.

He—

He needs to do this.

He can verbally spar with Dostoevsky. He’s not afraid of cutting words. He can stall for time until the people outside can work this out.

“…he isn’t my Dazai Osamu.”

“Your lengthy pause and your blushing face renders your statement false.” Dostoevsky smiles though, like they’re friends, when they’ve only met once, and that was under pretense. “But please do excuse me – I had a lot of thoughts of what I should first say to you and I ended up not being able to say any of them.”

“Well, do pardon me that I haven’t devoted any time at all to thinking about you.”

“Apology accepted,” Dostoevsky smoothly says, happily missing his sarcasm. “I couldn’t wait to meet you again, Nakahara Chuuya.”

“Somehow, I didn’t think that Yokohama was that big.” Chuuya shrugs, but his back is against the wall, to maintain the farthest distance between them, given that Chuuya can’t actually run for the hills at this point. “Not that I actually wanted to see you.”

Dostoevsky’s smile doesn’t falter. “You didn’t wonder why a powerful Queen was kept away from the frontlines?”
Chuuya bristles, because the memory of being the Acting Port Mafia Head and being sucked inside an Ability still stings, even after all these years. “I fucking hate chess so if you’d please stop with the metaphors?”

“Japan’s Demon is a quite competent strategist, after all.” Dostoevsky’s smile widens, like he has sniffed out something delicious. “I’m certain that it was no trouble for him to manipulate you into being backed to that situation.”

“If you wanted to trade stories about Dazai’s assholishness, you should have told me ahead of time,” Chuuya frowns as he tries to think about why Dostoevsky is going for this topic. “I could have brought some embarrassing pictures.”

Dostoevsky continues though, with a serene expression on his face: “And so even though my hands were all over Yokohama, I was unable to reach you. I have to admit that was clever – vexing, but clever.”

“So, what, you’re saying that Dazai planned for me to get captured by that Ability so we couldn’t meet?”

“He wanted to make sure I couldn’t take you away with me,” Dostoevsky’s face suddenly morphs into something colder, as if to match his surroundings. “An unforgivable man, really.”

“I have zero plans in joining your squad of crazy.” Chuuya raises an eyebrow. “With or without Dazai’s supposed meddling.”

“You wouldn’t have to lift even a finger.”

“Ha, so you know my Ability. Previous Ability.”

“I know you, Nakahara Chuuya. I would like to get to know you further.”

There’s a leer there, buried underneath the calmly-spoken words. Chuuya needs to regroup, divert things a little bit.

“I seem to remember you touching me that time.” Chuuya hates remembering that time, really, but if it will help… “Did you read my mind or something back then?!”

“I knew that you’re unlike anyone else.” Dostoevsky’s expression smoothens back to the previous neutral one—no, this time, there’s a pleased tilt to his smile. “No wonder Japan’s Demon is very… protective of you.”

“Haaaaaaa, Dazai being protective! That’s so funny I could cry from laughter.”

Dostoevsky’s still smiling.

“One of the members of Rats in the House of the Dead is a Truth Ability-user. If you cooperate with me in making Abilities return to the world, he can help you interrogate Dazai Osamu so you could find out the truth for yourself.”

“…is that supposed to be your recruitment pitch?”

“It’s supposed to make you think about your circumstances,” Dostoevsky corrects, still with that ever-present smile that Chuuya wants to slap out of his face. It’s infuriating and it reminds him of Dazai, which is more than enough reason to hate it. “Dazai Osamu saved his favorite toy from being cannibalized by his surroundings’ – don’t you want to know if that statement holds true?”
“I don’t need an Ability to tell me that.”

“Don’t need, huh?” Dostoevsky walks around his cell, an even, gentle pace. It’s almost as if he’s just sightseeing or something. It rankles at Chuuya, at how someone so certifiably evil and insane can be so at peace, when it’s taking him all his might just to feel the slightest bit normal.

Chuuya needs to be firm. “I really don’t.”

“There is a list of the world’s most powerful Abilities – ones capable of destroying the world.” Dostoevsky walks closer, until his forehead is touching one of the vertical metal bars. “One of them doesn’t have a name, rather, a description. So powerful that only glimpses of it have been witnessed, you see. The description is this: Tainted One. Do you follow?”

Chuuya bites his lip as he swallows, his mind tugging at the Spider’s Thread being dangled in front of him. Some sort of salvation is being offered to him, if he pursues this conversation. But he knows that the offer is from a Demon, and so—

Even so—

Deeming the silence as enough of an answer, Dostoevsky continues, “I had wanted to recruit The Tainted One, long ago. Especially once I’ve learned that the Ability has been passed to a child – it’d be easier to… influence a kid’s decision to pursue a path not tainted by sin, after all.”

“So, you wanted to recruit a kid who didn’t know any better?” Chuuya crosses his arms over his chest, not caring anymore that it’s a universal sign for defensiveness. “Were you involved in that—”

“Unfortunately, I was still building my network back then. Therefore, I wasn’t involved in the events leading you to be sold to the human traffickers.”

“And that’s unfortunate?!”

“It is, indeed. It led you to meeting Dazai Osamu first, didn’t it?”

“Hmph, so your plan didn’t work out, what a sad, sad, thing.”

“More vexing than sad, really.” Dostoevsky corrects him again. “After that, all traces of The Tainted One have been removed from all records. Even though you were picked up by the Port Mafia, you didn’t exist in their records until you were eighteen. Even though you were part of the well-known soukoku, your existence was completely hidden.”

“Because I was a liability.”

Dostoevsky smiles at him with something approaching benevolence. “Because you were Dazai Osamu’s weakness.”

“—that can’t be.”

“If nobody knew about you, if nobody knew about your strength, if nobody knew you were important, then you couldn’t be hurt. Such a romantic notion, isn’t it? It can almost drive one to madness.”

“You’re lying. This is all just a bluff, just—just a steaming pile of bullshit.”

“Well, that’s true.” Dostoevsky shrugs like he didn’t just drop all this information upon Chuuya’s
unprepared hands. “It’d be great if there was a way for you to find out the truth, wouldn’t it?”

“Pffft, so this is just a ploy to rile me up into helping you escape from here?”

“Tell me – do I still remind you of Dazai Osamu?”

Suddenly, there’s an odd sound, like the walls are being scraped against industry-grade sandpaper. The overhead lights dance again, a dizzying disco that irritates Chuuya. He feels like he’s about to throw up – it’d be great if he can hurl right into Dostoevsky’s shoes. Chuuya tells himself that it doesn’t matter—that the reasons don’t matter, because in the end, Dazai decided to lie to him over and over again. Chuuya tells himself that and hates Sakaguchi and Dostoevsky so much that he could scream.

Hates Dazai so much that he could only see red.

“You can give me your answer next time.” Dostoevsky’s smile looks almost deranged, satisfaction and victory and promise all etched in that serene background. “We’ll see each other again, I’m certain of that, Nakahara Chuuya.”

Above all, he hates himself so much for never being able to hate Dazai enough to erase the temptation to accept Dostoevsky’s offer.

Fyodor Dostoevsky’s smile and laugh – acid bubbles over a placid field of ice – rings inside Chuuya’s mind.

★★★★

[May 27]

Chuuya’s beyond exhausted from all the travelling – even though he used a private chopper from one of Mori-san’s connections that brought him from Dostoevsky’s current prison in Korsakov to the nearest airport. It’s rare to have direct flights from Sakhalin Island directly to Tokyo, so he’s at least thankful that there’d be less transfers and less jetlag.

He’s among the last ones to disembark when they finally land on Narita, a briefcase in hand along with his travel suitcase. Most of his other things – suits, bigger souvenirs and some presents from John – will be shipped separately so that they don’t get crushed and wrinkled.

Come to think of it, he’s not sure if the others are already aware that he’s alive and kicking? The thought of sending a group message still feels a bit strange – it feels weird to just, out of nowhere, send a message about his whereabouts? Also, he’s half-expecting Dazai to have blown up already so everyone probably knows already?

Just to be safe, he slinks towards the shops that sell imported chocolates. It’s not like his trips were for pleasure, but it also feels wrong to come back empty-handed… And chocolates are generally loved by everyone he knows, so it should be a good choice since his head is too heavy to think specific preferences at the moment.

Chuuya’s signing for his purchases as the cashier bags the chocolate boxes, when there’s a sudden sigh from the cashier in front of him. She looks fairly young and impressionable – the starry-eyed look making it easy to guess what’s about to happen next.
“It’s just like you, Chuuya.”

Despite Chuuya already sort-of *expecting* it, he still feels the slightest lick of surprise, to the point that he fumbles with the pen as he returns it to the slack hands of the besotted cashier. After all, Chuuya’s spent an inordinate amount of time thinking about Dazai during his trip, no thanks to the revelations from Sakaguchi and Dostoevsky.

“How about this?” Chuuya says in response, leaving the chocolates on the counter for the moment, turning around to face Dazai.

“Yakutia Airlines, Seat 3B, arrival time 13:50,” Dazai rattles the facts about his flight as though it isn’t creepy and a breach of so many fucking laws to hack the websites of different Russian airlines. “And you’ll think about buying smaller souvenirs so you’ll drop by the most expensive store that sells imported chocolate so that there’s less people and zero queue.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes so hard they almost feel like they’re going to tumble out of his face. “Yeah, whatever, so I’m that predictable.”

“It’s part of your charm.” Dazai says this as he looks at Chuuya like—he’s an even more expensive chocolate, one of those gold-dusted chocolate balls. Like Dazai would like to devour him whole. “…Mori-san told me that you got locked in with that Demon.”

“Of course, you two gossip like kids, why am I not surprised?”

“Hmm, that’s rich, coming from Chuuya?” Dazai taps a finger against his lips, acting as though he’s having trouble remembering his next set of words, when Chuuya knows it’s a big, fat lie. “I’m pretty sure that you talked about me with Ango-kun.”

“And Sakaguchi told you that?”

“There’s no need—I know Ango-kun is a meddlesome person.” Dazai doesn’t look amused by that, not in the least. “He probably warned you off from me, ne?”

*It’s actually the opposite*, but Chuuya doesn’t find satisfaction in catching Dazai on his incorrect predictions. Sin begets sin and evil expects evil, after all.

“I don’t need warnings from anyone to know you’re bad news.” Chuuya takes great care not to cross his arms over his chest, so as not to appear defensive. “I’ve known that since the first time I’ve met you.”

“And yet, you still stayed with me.”

“And yet, I stayed.”

*Even when you left.*

Dazai sighs, like he’s infinitely tired, even more exhausted than Chuuya. It isn’t immediately obvious, given that on the surface, he always looks so calm and collected, like it’s simply effortless to exist in this world. But there are dark circles under his eyes, lines of fatigue drawn over his cheeks, heavy weights taut around the droop of his shoulders.

Dazai probably went overboard in trying to find him and fretting about him.

“I’m not your responsibility, you know.” Chuuya’s not someone that needs protection or hovering, certainly not from someone who can’t even get his own life in order. He’s not someone to be a part
of some checklist, not someone to be accomplished and accomplished well. He may be a monster or a human being or something else entirely, but he isn’t some burden that Dazai must bear.

“We’re partners,” Dazai says with so much conviction, that Chuuya almost believes it, this time.

But he shakes his head, because there’s a difference.

“We’ve never been partners.”

Because partnerships imply equality. And they’ve been standing on wildly different worlds ever since the beginning.

“Chuuya—”

And Dazai is speechless, breath cut off there, like he’s being gutted right in front of Chuuya’s eyes.

Chuuya looks at Dazai, really looks at him, at the man who has no sense of propriety that he stalks someone’s flight details, that he corners someone in some really cramped chocolate store so that he can’t run away without knocking down a couple of displays. At the man who hunted down the people that made his childhood hell, at the cost of hurting Chuuya more. At the man who has apparently wrapped him in cotton and locked him inside a box, so that nobody else can even know of his existence, not knowing that he’s suffocating inside. At the man who apparently loves him back – has loved him back – since before he even understood what love was.

And because Chuuya is looking at Dazai, he sees it.

A particular shine.

A particular glint of a gun’s barrel.

It’s a cramped area, hardly any space to run away.

For a moment, Chuuya is reminded of his final date with John.

—“Why did you decide to stay in The Guild when moneybags left? If you hated it so much, why did you decide to rebuild it?”—

Back then, his failure to notice that there was a sniper trained on John. Back then, his thinking that he lacked sufficient instincts for bloodlust and danger. Back then, his misunderstanding about Dazai’s motives.

Right now—

He sees it, a man standing in the middle of a relatively-spacious corridor, given the hour of the day and the price range of the shops around. A man wearing a wig so that most of his face is practically covered by hair. A man confidently training a gun at the back of Dazai’s head.

Right now—

He sees it, in crystal-clear quality. Sees the possible trajectories of the shot if it’s deflected, sees the damage that it could do to the shop and to the innocent civilian inside, sees the fact that he’s short enough that it will be dead-center to his forehead if he takes Dazai’s place. Sees a future of Dazai slumped on the ground, head bleeding.

Rejects it.
—“Why are you training to be the Port Mafia’s Boss when your partner left you?” —

Right now—

—“Whether you decide to join me or not, Abilities will return to this world, Nakahara Chuuya.”—

It’s not even a decision.

Facts, laws, theories.

Truth.

He cannot bear to have Dazai die.

It’s a simple fact.

Opposites attract.

It’s a simple law.

Based on the statements that Dostoevsky had made and the haste with which everyone else acted regarding his demands—

It’s a simple theory.

And then, at the last split-second, the gun’s trajectory shifts, so that it’s instead pointed straight at Chuuya’s forehead and if Chuuya moves, it will either hit Dazai or the cashier behind him instead. So Chuuya freezes on the spot instead.

It’s not even a decision.

But before anyone else can react, there’s a bullet leaving the barrel and then—

There’s Dazai crossing the distance between them, lightning-quick despite being a fucking weakling compared to Chuuya.

Dazai’s heavy, knocked unconscious, slumped over Chuuya, bleeding all over Chuuya’s clothes.

And after that, it’s chaos.

Chuuya moves before his mind can even catch up to his body. He doesn’t even have the time to say the usual chant out loud, his left hand quickly tugging the glove away from his right, exposing his palm under the bright, fluorescent lights.

_O acquaintances, grantors of dark disgrace, do not wake me again!_
_I will endure my solitude, arms seeming already useless._

Right now—

—“Why are you training to be the Port Mafia’s Boss when your partner left you?” —

Monster or not, disqualified as a human being or not, normal or not—

Not being with Dazai is infinitely more painful than getting hurt by Dazai.

Nakahara Chuuya is in love with Dazai Osamu.
Since back then, 
Right now, 
Always. 

Corruption’s whispers about disgrace turn to screams of rage. 

Monster or not, disqualified as a human being or not, normal or not— 

Chuuya can’t simply stand by seeing Dazai get hurt. 

“Let him pay for disgracing us—he can’t disgrace us—don’t let him touch it—we will not be held back, we will not be disgraced any longer—”

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading!!!

now, before you all have me arrested, pls make sure that i have my laptop w/me in my jail cell so i can write the next chap by next week LOL please let me know what you think :)

references!

• the Truth Ability User has always been part of the plan, so i’m happy to know that it’s actually canon asdfghjkl
• Spider’s Thread reference because (a) it’s a very interesting imagery; (b) it’s a short story written by IRL Akutagawa; (c) and IRL Akutagawa was inspired to write this after reading IRL Fyodor’s The Brothers Karamazov
• sound of person’s laughter telling you about the person’s personality is a quote © IRL Fyodor’s Crime and Punishment… along w/the smiling/laughing no matter what’s happening (as they say, you can’t spell slaughter without laughter… but that’s
not a Fyodor quote;;;;;)
• ‘Grantors of dark disgrace…’ © *Sheep Song*; ‘Love poems…’ © *Exhaustion*; both by IRL Chuuya
• *Yakutia Airlines* actually don’t have flights from Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk to Narita on May 27, 2018 (sold out, I think) but for the sake of making it a smoother trip for Chuuya (and the timeline holding without bursting my sanity…) let’s just assume that there is an available flight on that day okay hahahaha
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

• Fyodor escapes from prison & meets Chuuya in Yokohama
• Dazai’s marriage proposal to Chuuya
• Chuuya’s response

It's 6,666 words but I promise it's a chapter befitting White Day! ♥

Chapter Notes

• Hello there again! Thank you for dropping by!!! Ahhhh, I really am sorry for my delay in replying to comments & for the delay in posting;;;; I got distracted by the Dead Apple/LNs... but at least I have something now! This chapter marks the official end of all the Angst. The Fyodor plotline will be resolved and Dazai finally gets to propose to Chuuya properly... enough of my blathering though, onward to the chapter!!! ♥♥♥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

★ ★ ★

[May 27]

The most annoying thing about all of this isn’t even the fact that he’s surely been had. No, the most irritating thing about this is the fact that he’s still very much exhausted and still very much jetlagged and now he’s very much imprisoned. His clothes feel heavy with dirt and grime. Going from a wedding teeming with celebrities to a prison teeming with evil to an airplane teeming with weary businessmen to a prison teeming with criminals... his past two days have certainly been wild. He hasn’t been able to take a shower or freshen up, at least.

He had to resort to calling Sakaguchi to get him to move his manipulative ass and bail him out here. Of course, he could have called Hirotsu-san or Ane-san, but Sakaguchi is a direct line to the government so he’s simply cutting out the middleman.

He’s not worried about Dazai. Sure, he’s bleeding out from a gunshot wound, but there’s the airport medical services...

Oh, who the fuck is he kidding, of course he’s fucking irritated about not being able to make sure that the stupid bandage bastard doesn’t welcome death from gunshot wound with open arms.

To be honest, Chuuya’s not entirely sure what it means, to have been able to call upon Corruption at will. Abilities should have been completely erased from this world... did that mean that
Dostoevsky had actually started with his plan even though he’s still in prison? Plus, to call it ‘at will’ is a bit… It didn’t feel like willpower. It felt more like an utterly absurd truth – the fact that he couldn’t allow anyone to live after daring to hurt Dazai.

Chuuya sighs and looks down at his gloved hands, hoping for answers. Of course, they’re just gloves, so nothing comes forth. He shifts, sitting more comfortably on the very uncomfortable steel bunk bed. There’s only one bunk bed in a room holding ten prisoners, but all the other prisoners are huddling together on the opposite end of the tiny cell, as though they’re being pushed back by some invisible forcefield surrounding Chuuya. Normally, he’d be the slightest bit offended by that kind of treatment (he doesn’t look mean or scary, does he?!), but having more space as he tries to ponder what’s happening is definitely welcome.

There are Public Endangerment charges against him for using Corruption in public. Since the removal of Abilities have become known, all sorts of public destruction are treated in the same playing field, after all…

Chuuya sighs again.

This really sucks.

★ ★ ★

[May 28]

“You could have been much faster,” Chuuya complains, but it sounds half-hearted. He’s just really glad to be out of prison that he even doesn’t feel that angered upon seeing Sakaguchi’s mug.

“You’re really pushing for that stereotype about government workers, aren’t you?”

Sakaguchi smiles, a little teasing. “Did you want to try the solitary? We can still drop by there before we leave.”

“I’ll kick your glasses and where will you be?”

Before Sakaguchi can respond (probably something about having spare glasses anyway), Hirotsus-san coughs, as respectfully as possible when he’s holding a handkerchief over his nose. “It took quite some time because of some complications.”

“Great, just what I wanted to hear.”

Sakaguchi doesn’t even have the decency to look apologetic over ruining his day before it even properly starts. “The Rats had successfully broken Fyodor Dostoevsky out of prison yesterday.”

“What.” Chuuya’s hands are lifting Sakaguchi by his collar before he even knows it. “That’s—! That’s not just some complication—!”

“We… managed… to recapture him…”

“What.”

“We managed to recapture him.”
“I heard you the first time,” Chuuya spits out, dropping Sakaguchi to the prison’s long hallway lined by cells. “Lead with that next time, will you?!”

“The point is we’ll prevent a next time.”

“Don’t be a smartass.”

Hirotsu-san interrupts again, with a louder cough and a more pointed-slash-disapproving look at Chuuya’s state. “We’re going to cooperate with other… organizations so we can ensure that the subsequent transfers for Dostoevsky don’t have any other close calls.”

Sakaguchi recovers, adjusts his collar and his glasses, so that said glasses are practically glinting at Chuuya when he speaks. “We also have to make sure that Dostoevsky doesn’t have any moles working for him.”

Chuuya snarls, thinking about the shower he needs since two days ago, thinking about the fact that he still hasn’t ascertained with his own eyes that Dazai’s going to be just fine. “You better make sure you know what you’re talking about before you say your next words.”

“Shortly after you’ve spoken with Dostoevsky—in privacy, if I may add—you have regained some use of an Ability, which is supposedly impossible.” Sakaguchi’s glasses are still glinting. “Isn’t it such a great coincidence that Dostoevsky is also involved in the plan to return Abilities to this world? Isn’t it such a great coincidence that at the same time that you had activated your Ability, The Rats had managed to break Dostoevsky out, almost as though your Ability’s activation was a signal? Isn’t it such a great coincidence that Dazai-kun got incapacitated at the same time?”

Chuuya breathes in deep.

“If you’re accusing me of being a mole for that Russian fucker, you better have solid evidence, not just coincidences.” Chuuya breathes in again, then decides: fuck this. “Also, you think I planned for that bandage asshole to get shot?”

Before he can even grasp the reins of his body, Chuuya’s already kicking Sakaguchi, the impact making Sakaguchi fly to the other end of the prison’s hallway.

“I don’t give a crap if you want to insult me,” Chuuya doesn’t even know why he’s revealing this much, but it’s spilling out from him, years of emotions that he hasn’t been ever able to properly control. If this is what happens to him when Dazai gets shot, he’s going to do his best to make sure that bastard doesn’t ever get so much as a papercut ever. It doesn’t bode well for his sanity. “But don’t you ever insult my feelings for that asshole.”

There’s silence, for a beat.

Then clapping and jeering from the other prisoners who have been paying rapt attention to the drama. Then laughter from Sakaguchi, even though it sounds faint and gurgly. Then… giggling?

Chuuya slowly turns so he can glare at Hirotsu-san. More importantly, at the phone that Hirotsu-san is holding, which is suspiciously tilted so that it’s recording Chuuya properly.

“…I didn’t think this day would come,” Hirotsu-san says, without remorse whatsoever. “After all those years of complaints and whining from Dazai-kun, I’ll be finally released from my duty.”

Chuuya sighs, exhausted once again. There’s no winning against Hirotsu-san, is there?

“Just make sure he doesn’t know about this,” Chuuya makes some vague gesture around himself,
towards Sakaguchi’s still-slumped-against-the-wall form. “I’d rather be the one to tell him, face-to-fist.”

Hirotsu-san’s lips twitch, before he bows his head. “As you say, Boss.”

★ ★ ★

[May 29]

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you’re the gunshot wound victim here.”

Chuuya sits up straighter in the plastic chair that has been permanently dragged to Dazai’s bedside. His laptop is half on the bed, his two phones are on the bedside table. Dazai’s IV stand is on the other side of his bed. Near the IV stand is a bigger table, a small fridge tucked underneath it. Chuuya’s seated so that he’s facing Dazai’s still-unconscious mug, sunshine spilling from the bulletproof window behind him. A couple of steps beside the door is the closet, where Chuuya’s travel suitcase is. Near the closet, there’s another door that leads to the bathroom with shower. It’s almost like any of Chuuya’s hotel rooms when he’s out of the country for a mission, the only difference is that there’s only one bed and there’s an unconscious idiot in it.

“Yosano-san.” Chuuya closes his laptop and places it on top of the bedside table, arranges it so that his two phones lie on top of it. “Thank you for visiting. Would you like something to eat or drink, perhaps?”

“Pffft, a gentleman bocchan even now, huh?” Yosano drops a couple of books on the bigger table, follows it up by opening the fridge and placing a bottle of wine inside. “I can stay for three hours today, help babysit when Ranpo-kun and Poe-kun visit.”

Chuuya laughs a little bit. “I’m sure this offer isn’t because you want to help me consume the wine you brought.”

Yosano waves a hand. “We can properly get drunk once that guy wakes up.”

“Doctor’s orders?”

“I would give you doctor’s orders, but there’s no cure for lovesickness.”

“…Hirotsu-san?”

“Everyone already knew,” Yosano says, a little kindly. “But we won’t tell him, don’t worry.”

“I thought everyone already knew?”

Yosano laughs, in that graceful and implacable way of hers. It’s sort of nice, to see that there’s someone unfettered by all the things happening around Yokohama and beyond. “He hasn’t received that face-to-fist confession yet, has he?”

“So it’s Hirotsu-san—!!!”

★ ★ ★
Chuuya traces veins, imaginary and otherwise, on Dazai’s right hand. There’s barely a twitch there, but there’s some kind of warmth, some stirrings of a pulse. It’s something that he’s been prone to doing for the past couple of weeks of practically living in the hospital suite offered by the government.

It rankles at him – still, even though they’ve been here for weeks now – that they’re under the eye of a couple of suits and who-knows-who-else. But Dazai’s an important resource when it comes to developing plans that can go toe-to-toe with Dostoevsky’s – and an even more important resource if Abilities would indeed be returned to the world.

And Chuuya—

He’d like to say that he’s here solely because he’s invested in Dazai’s well-being, but that would be a lie. He’s here mostly because it’d be an even bigger pain in the ass getting tailed around by those who suspect him to be an accomplice to Dostoevsky.

After all, on top of Sakaguchi’s teasing jibes from the last time they saw each other, Dostoevsky’s apparently been not cooperative in providing actual useful information. Oh, he provides information all right. But they most lead to nowhere. Dostoevsky apparently has been murmuring his name at random intervals, even while he’s supposedly asleep.

Chuuya knows that Dostoevsky’s faking it. If Dostoevsky is even 1% like Dazai, he’s definitely faking it. He’s not sure about the end goal – annoy Chuuya into joining his faction? Just take Chuuya out of the picture? But it definitely can’t be anything good.

At least, while he’s here, watching over Dazai’s unconscious form, he can have some control over the people he interacts with. He doesn’t accept visitors that he hasn’t spoken with before. He’s not about to be turned into some goddamn puppet by some fucker who doesn’t even know him. Having it done by Dazai before is enough.

(And if Corruption gets activated again, if Corruption escapes his will, if Corruption ends up eroding him—isn’t it better if he’s far away from anyone he could hurt? Yes, but isn’t it much better if he’s able to be with Dazai before the end? It’s all jumbled and messy thoughts and Corruption doesn’t whisper to him again, but it feels like it’s just there, simmering underneath the surface of his consciousness, like it’s just waiting for that one moment so it can spill out of his fingers, pour out of his mouth, leak out of his eyes. He’s ready for it. He’s ready to face Corruption again, even if Dazai is sleeping the sleep of someone who had been shot a poison bullet whose antidote is still being developed.)

In the mornings and afternoons, there’s a steady stream of visitors that are there for both Dazai and Chuuya. There’s a couple of books that get added to the slowly-tilting pile, of different genres, because the contributors have wildly different tastes. The fridge is always full of different desserts from Kyouka and Lucy. There’s always an overflow of snacks and biscuits from Kyusaku and Elise. There’s always warm, home-cooked meals from Akutagawa and Atsushi, even though more than half the time, the actual cooks were Higuchi and/or Gin. There’s a terrifyingly huge smart TV set installed thanks to the Fitzgeralds. There’s always a fresh set of clothes and toiletries because of Ane-san and Hirotsu-san. Kunikida, Yosano and Tachihara have some sort of shifting schedule to ensure that there are babysitters and peacemakers available should Motojirou and Ranpo visit at the same time. Poe brings Karl to visit, sometimes at the same time Atsushi brings in his cat.
In the evenings, when it’s only him and Dazai inside this room, Chuuya removes his gloves and holds Dazai’s hand, skin-to-skin contact that helps ground him. He thinks of all the things that happened between them, of all the things that happened to him because of Dazai, of all the times that his heart has been futilely caught inside his blood-and-flesh-and-bone, when all it wanted was to flow into Dazai.

Thinks of the video games, the breakfasts, the useless knickknacks, the unpublished poems, the chores effortlessly divided, the warmth amidst a life-long winter, the steady tick-tock of his tell-tale heart that knows nothing aside from one thing and one thing only, the scent of apples, the splash of red, the gentle caresses, the sound of his name in the other’s singsong, the taste of home.

Thinks of Dazai being the poison apple that he can’t help but wanting to know, to covet, to taste—the gravity that has once pulled it down, the gravity that solidifies their attraction.

Thinks of his desire to be normal, to be accepted.

Thinks of Atsushi and his effortless way of sneaking into people’s hearts; thinks of Akutagawa and how he’s so like the senpai that he has admired for so long; thinks of Kunikida who embodies order against chaos; thinks of Fitzgerald and his flashy suits; thinks of John and his compromise and his unfettered love.

Thinks of Kyouka and her desire to bask in the light; thinks of Lucy and her strength to put her beloved’s happiness above all; thinks of Higuchi and her earnest honesty; thinks of Gin and her strength to stand with her own feet; thinks of Naomi and her distaste of hiding her love; thinks of Yosano and her grace under pressure; thinks of Motojiro and his relentless pursuit of tangible truth; thinks of Ranpo and his unhindered view of the world; thinks of Poe and his unwavering feelings.

Thinks of Tachihara—who surely deserve better than someone who doesn’t even notice his feelings until now.

Thinks of Ane-san—who had provided him with the kind of love that he hasn’t really received from his blood family. Thinks of Hirotsu-san—who had always looked after them tirelessly. Thinks of Mori-san—who had shown him leadership and how to take hold of the things that he wants.

Thinks of Corruption and the blood on his hands.

Thinks of Sakaguchi and the things that Dazai had never said.

Thinks of OdaSaku and the past that he can’t compete with—the past that he shouldn’t compete with.

Thinks of Fyodor—who is threatening to break all of this fragile peace.

Chuuya thinks of Chuuya, of Dazai, of Chuuya-and-Dazai.

The cloying scent of ripened apples, the arterial spray of their love bleeding into their everyday life, the touches and the kisses that are so light but carry the weight of years of emotions, the sound of their laughter promising forever, the taste of home.

Chuuya holds Dazai’s hand with his right hand, just as his left hand picks up the phone when it rings.

He could stay here, by Dazai’s side, wait until tomorrow rolls into another tomorrow into another, into another—
“I’ll be there. Book my flight.”

But he will not.

The doctors and the people surrounding him—they have their responsibilities. And he has his. Bearing the suspicious glances, bearing the possibility that he isn’t the first one to see Dazai wake up, bearing his feelings for just a little bit longer.

“I’ll make sure that damn Dostoevsky gets to his permanent prison.”

★ ★ ★

[June 19]

Chuuya hasn’t screamed in frustration since he was a teenager, but now seems like a good time to start doing it. But he’s here, practically rooted in place, mouth is just gaping uselessly, because he’s just arrived, just been pardoned out of prison (again—can’t they get it into their skulls that he’d rather die a thousand times than help Dostoevsky?!), the same prison that Dostoevsky should still be in.

“If you’re about to ask a rhetorical question, let me posit a rhetorical answer: I am here because you wished it so.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky should be locked up—he was in prison just yesterday, Chuuya was there—he shouldn’t be here—but here he is, standing in the middle of the apartment that belongs to Chuuya by name, but has been so infested and infected by Dazai that it reeks, it makes him reel and makes him sick—and Dostoevsky shouldn’t be here.

Hours away from the special underground cell engineered to hold a certain person permanently—Fyodor Dostoevsky is here.

“So this is your home? Very… quaint.”

Dostoevsky looks around, June’s summer not deterring him from wearing his winter outfit, hands gloved and fur coat around his person. It’s the same sort of outfit he wore when he was originally imprisoned. It fits him so well, the prisoner’s uniform a far cry from this walking, breathing wasteland.

Chuuya’s just arrived (and he shouldn’t even be here, because this is home, but also not, because this is where Dazai has lied so many times to him and Chuuya still—) and he hasn’t even had a chance to arrange his armful of mail—and Dostoevsky’s walking towards his coffee table, gloved hands easily tearing through the package he’s received, uncaringly dropping the contents back to the table.

And in a way so different—yet so similar—to the way Dazai’s presence in his apartment feels, Chuuya’s throat goes dry and sticky at once, a lump that’s impossible to swallow, once he sees the contents of the package.

It’s just two small, insignificant things.

Dazai’s old phone and old pendant.
He’s not—

Dostoevsky makes a curious humming sound though his eyes remain hollow and blank, curiosity for curiosity’s sake, as he pries open the pendant. It fails, the thick gloves making it difficult, so he simply chucks the pendant hard enough at the table—and for a guy who claims to have a weak physical constitution, it’s a pretty solid throw—and Chuuya can only watch, frozen in his place, as the pendant cracks and locks of reddish-brown hair spills out, leaving only a familiar picture inside—

“Have you thought about my offer?” Dostoevsky doesn’t look like he minds that his conversation partner is struck speechless by the fact that there’s an escaped criminal in his living room.

And Chuuya tries to make his mouth work, tries to answer, tries to deny, tries to accept, tries to do something, anything. Instead, Chuuya hears a hiss that wells up from deep inside his heart.

“Let him pay for disgracing us—he can’t disgrace us—don’t let him touch it—we will not be held back, we will not be disgraced any longer—”

“I do not understand why you do not wish to assist me.” Dostoevsky continues, seemingly unbothered by the fact that black and red are pumping into Chuuya’s veins. “It is to your benefit, after all.”

Corruption hisses louder, grantors of dark disgrace unimpressed with the lack of bloodshed. Chuuya grits his teeth, tries to keep it at bay. “It’s hardly any citizen’s benefit to aid and abet a terrorist.”

“It is disheartening to hear you lump yourself amongst the normal citizens of Yokohama, no matter how interesting they could be.”

Chuuya removes the gloves on his right hand, fixing his fighting stance to something less beastly, something more human.

“It is wonderful though, to see you attempt to reign over your Ability.” Dostoevsky’s eyes are bright with his praise, even though his lips are nearly black with evil intentions. “However, you should take care to rein it in. It might cause poor Dazai-kun to never wake up, after all.”

Before Chuuya can retort to that, demand clarification, snarl at the threat—Dostoevsky continues: “Now, why don’t we take a stroll around Yokohama? I haven’t had the chance to properly enjoy this city’s tourist spots. Won’t you indulge this request of mine, O Tainted One?”

★ ★ ★

“Isn’t this nice?”

Chuuya grits his teeth as he gestures with his free hand towards the queue outside MUTEKIROU. “That’s the best French restaurant in Yokohama.”

There’s a tug on his left arm, as though to physically prevent him from losing himself in the crowd. Fyodor Dostoevsky is strolling with him across all the romantic spots in Yokohama, a list handily provided by the internet. Of course, the action that looks sweet and harmless to an outsider is actually a warning to Chuuya, the gun pressed against his stomach hidden by their clothes and their
uncharacteristic closeness.

“I think we’ll have more fun passing on food for now, hmm?”

“Right.”

Chuuya has been allowed to make one phone call before he got whisked away on this ‘date’. It was a tough choice, to pick the one person who would calmly and logically make a decision as to how to track Chuuya down and prevent Dostoevsky’s plans. Normally, it’d be Dazai, but given that the bastard’s still unconscious… Mori-san is probably still in the plane back to Yokohama, given that he stayed later than Chuuya in Hokkaido.

No.

He trusts Kunikida.

He’d be able to make everyone cooperate, without letting himself be swept away by emotions.

Chuuya’s not afraid of getting shot, but he’s not certain that he can control Corruption when he’s dying from bloodloss… and if it’s true, that Dazai’s involved in removing the Abilities before… Chuuya can’t risk it. He’ll play along, until they all get a clearer picture of this plan.

“Should we go to Chinatown next?”

“Aren’t you laying it on a little thick?”

“It is good to enjoy these kinds of dates.”

Chuuya rolls his eyes, as the two of them start to walk towards Chinatown, passing by a couple of shoppers who giggle at them. “You don’t look half-bad, I’m sure you could get dates without the threat of a gun.”

“But will I be able to get Nakahara Chuuya on a date that way?” Dostoevsky’s tone sounds only the slightest bit curious. “I don’t think so. Maybe I should join the Port Mafia and then betray you, no?”

“Ah, now I know why you need a gun for your dates.” Chuuya tries not to let the rage take hold of him, as the two of them stroll like lovers who can’t bear to be apart. “Your humor is in bad taste, demon.”

“I would think my humor is better than Dazai-kun’s.”

“So you admit that it’s shitty?”

“It’s the same kind of humor that would chop off a beloved’s hair then have it as a keepsake, after a betrayal orchestrated by one’s own hands.”

“…still in bad taste.”

“Tell me, did you find it romantic? That he has been keeping a lock of your hair close to his heart all along?”

“I found it unhygienic.” Chuuya aims for airiness in his tone. “I wasn’t exactly fresh from the bath when he took it from me.”

“You do find it romantic,” Dostoevsky declares, as bland as the announcement of checkmate.
“Since you do remember when it was taken from you.”

“Given that I’m far from the usual age for senility…” Chuuya tries to shrug, but the pressure on his left elbow tightens. Ah, so he can’t move that much then, huh. “And it was a pretty memorable day, too.”

Despite the fact that it’s a Tuesday, the Motomachi Shopping Street is pretty busy. Chuuya presses himself closer to Dostoevsky’s side. He might be irritated (biggest understatement of the year and it’s not even halfway over) by getting forced to stroll around with a terrorist, but it’s even worse if he somehow manages to lose track of the demon.

But eventually, they manage to reach Chinatown without additional mishaps. Chuuya dutifully points out the different shrines, preventing himself from retorting about how everything he says is on the website that Dostoevsky checks every now and then anyway.

Of course, he knows that going on this… ‘date’ has its uses. He’s being paraded around as an accomplice to Dostoevsky. Even if Kunikida is able to dispel any suspicions about him, it could still affect the split-second judgment of whoever will be sent to tail him and apprehend Dostoevsky.

…he has to buy some time.

“Let’s go to the Sankeien Garden next.”

“…Oh? You’re showing interest in this rendezvous?” Dostoevsky’s smiling, like he’s pleased. “Did you finally realize that you need to stall for time?”

Chuuya grits his teeth again. “There’s an 800-year-old legendary love story there. It’s the epitome of romance.”

“I’m afraid that’s not the type of romance I’m interested in.”

“And by that you mean…?”

“Let’s go to the Yokohama Marine Tower instead.”

Disbelief and incredulity colors Chuuya’s face. “—?! You?! W-Why are we going there?!”

“The travel guide says that the tower has a 100% success rate when it comes to proposals.”

“You plan to—?!” Chuuya blinks a couple of times. Dostoevsky’s half-dragging him towards the Marine Tower. “I’m not going to accept!”

“Is that so? It’d be a pity to sully the landmark’s record.”

“I’m not gonna agree just because of a damn record!”

“That is fine.” Dostoevsky’s smile is still in that pleased curve. “If you reject me, I’ll simply push you off the Tower.”

“—?!”

“And then, Corruption would surely activate.” Dostoevsky’s tone starts to turn a little dreamy, like he’s enjoying this grim fairytale. “It would certainly be enough to tax Dazai-kun, no? It could be your gift to him – the double-suicide with someone beautiful that he’s always wanted.”
“And if that bandage bastard croaks, all the Abilities in the world will return?”

“Exactly.” Dostoevsky’s dreamy tone gains an almost-feverish longing in it. “And then I can go ahead and punish Ability users their sins.”

“…Why even bring back Abilities to begin with, if you hate it so much?”

“Ah. But just because the Abilities are not able to be activated by their owners, doesn’t mean that the users’ sins have been absolved, no? Dazai-kun’s efforts in helping seal Abilities is simply turning a blind eye to the root of the problem.”

“And your problem is that Ability Users are evil?”

“Ability Users must be punished for their sins,” Dostoevsky corrects, the jut of the barrel pressing even harsher against Chuuya’s stomach.

“And you’re the best judge for that, huh?”

“Of course. I am Crime and Punishment, after all.”

★★★★

“Oh, isn’t this such a wonderful surprise,” Dostoevsky says, like he’s discussing about how water is wet. “Looks like we have an additional witness to my proposal, hmm?”

It’s—

Not a wonderful surprise at all.

Dazai—

Dazai, the absolute fucking bastard of a madman, is there. He’s tied up, a noose around his neck, ready to be tightened. He still has some bandages around his torso, around his head. He looks like he’s death warmed over. He’s here.

He definitely snuck in to be here, definitely not under Kunikida or anyone’s orders, ahead of the rescue team, because he’s Dazai who is always one step ahead.

There’s a guy behind him, someone wearing a mask. The guy is holding onto a mouse-shaped device, a red blinking light on it. The guy waves at Dostoevsky, which is acknowledged by a shallow nod.

Without the need to hide the gun in-between their linked arms, Dostoevsky points the gun at his temple instead. Chuuya keeps his breathing shallow, even as the masked guy comes closer and ties his hands with rope. Chuuya waits until the guy takes a step away before he tries to wiggle his fingers, tests the give of the restraints. It’s going to hurt a lot, but he can get free. He carefully doesn’t look at Dazai.

“Nakahara Chuuya, will you listen to my proposal?”

“You mean all that talk earlier wasn’t enough?” Chuuya shrugs – or at least, tries to look like he’s shrugging. He loosens the restraints a little bit more. He carefully doesn’t look behind him, at the
It’s a choice.

It definitely doesn’t feel like one—damned if you do, damned if you don’t—but it’s a choice nevertheless.

It feels heavy, cloying and poisonous. Like his entire lifetime is narrowed down to this point in time, to this very moment. Like all the other choices he has made, he has failed to make, he has neglected to make—like all of them will cease to matter as long as he gets this one right.

Chuuya swallows and looks at the man across him, at the man who has a similar noose wrapped around his neck. He needs, wants, to get this right.

In between them, there’s the demon and the man promised to him. A Faustian contract—and now, it’s endgame. The one thing Chuuya needs so badly so that he can deal with Dazai on a fair, even ground, as partners. The promise of guaranteed honesty—it’s something that Chuuya needs (needed) so badly.

“…no way in hell.”

“Is that so?” Dostoevsky doesn’t sound surprised at all. “It is disappointing, but I do not make jokes.”

Chuuya tries to shrug again, but Dostoevsky’s ally is approaching him, pinning a ticking bomb on his chest. There’s something odd about it, shaped like a mouse, an arrhythmic ticking. Dostoevsky’s ally moves away from him and the ledge separating Chuuya from certain death. The ticking sound beeps regularly, but—oh. It doesn’t match the slower rhythm of the beat against Chuuya’s chest. He resolves not to look at Dazai or at anywhere else.

“Ne, Chuuya.”

Dazai being Dazai, without a care about interrupting life-changing decisions, calls out to him. And Chuuya being Chuuya, a fool in love with a bastard, actually looks up and acknowledges the other hostage.

Dazai wriggles in place, making it seem that he’s futilely trying to break free of his restraints. But Chuuya knows that Dazai’s been free since five minutes ago.

There’s just a couple of meters between them.

If Chuuya chooses to, there could be the same gap between their hearts.

In his mind’s eye, he remembers the words spoken a while back:

“There are nooses everywhere. There’s a ticking bomb strapped to the unfortunate spouse. The ceremony’s held at a skyscraper about to fall down. Meteors will rain down on Earth as punishment for allowing such idiotic thing to happen.”

“I plan to be a plague on your side, until you’re thirty, until we’re both old men who can’t walk properly.” Dazai smiles at him, ignoring the sarcastic warning by their captor about making sure they can’t walk at all if they continue to misbehave. “I’ll take care of you even if you suck at
“For as long as you want me to be… I’ll be whoever you want me to be.”

Dazai’s smile is—

It’s both accepting and resigned, both hopeful and desperate.

It’s a sort of honesty that Chuuya doubts any Ability can ascertain.

“Will you marry me, Chuuya?”

Chuuya swallows and—

—his heartbeat drums to the beat of the bomb’s timer ticking down near his chest—

—**O expectations, stale and dismal airs, leave, leave this body of mine! —**

—As one, as partners, as two people who have never stopped being intertwined, Dazai and Chuuya break free of their restraints, reach for each other and *jump*.

—**O acquaintances, grantors of dark disgrace, do not wake me again!**—

And Chuuya chooses, his first real choice, his first choice made solely for himself, because of himself, for what he himself wants and needs.

As two bodies fall from Yokohama Marine Tower, two others look on from above, attempting to trigger a bomb that has been deactivated already. As two bodies fall from Yokohama Marine Tower—

Dazai has his just-freed arms wrapped around Chuuya—

And Chuuya’s own arms are wrapped around his choice—

And Chuuya’s own answer of *forever* is swallowed by the rush of adrenaline and free-fall, underscored by Corruption’s own silence of forever.

★★★

“I told you they’d be fine and lovey-dovey!” Edogawa Ranpo’s voice is the first thing Chuuya hears from his afterlife. He keeps his eyes closed, not fully prepared to face hell yet. “Why didn’t you listen to me? I told youuuuuuu!”

Poe’s voice is next, that combination of awestruck and fond: “That’s right, Ranpo-kun.”

“We couldn’t have just left them behind!” Kunikida’s voice sounds harried, like he’s the one who actually jumped off a hundred meters down the Yokohama Marine Tower with an absolute madman. “And now, they’re not moving. Are they dead?”
There’s a cellphone ringing. Kunikida picks it up immediately. “How is it? Did you capture Dostoevsky? Did everything go well? Did—”

Atsushi’s voice, excitement clear even over the phone’s loudspeaker. “YES, IT’S OK!!! DID YOU SEE IF THEY KISSED ALL THE WAY DOWN?”

There are sounds of squabbling, before Akutagawa says a loud, embarrassed ‘Atsushi!’ which presumably ended Atsushi’s life prematurely, because it’s Akutagawa who’s on the loudspeaker after. “Mission has been accomplished. Mori-san had called and advised that he, Fukuzawa-san and Sakaguchi-san had apprehended the members of the Rats hiding in Hokkaido.”

Throughout it all, Chuuya keeps his eyes squeezed shut, his right ear pressed over the steady beat of Dazai’s heart. Dazai cushioned his fall; both of their falls cushioned by the heavy-duty trampoline that Dazai had somehow prepared in-between Chuuya going up the Tower with Fyodor and their subsequent fall.

“They’re not moving!” Kunikida again.

“Come on, Kunikida-kun, use your head a little, obviously they’re still reeling from the Suspension Bridge Effect and are probably hiding the fact that they’re aroused—”

“WE ARE NOT!” Chuuya yells, sitting up abruptly. He keeps his eyes closed though, still unwilling to see anything yet in this new life of his.

Ranpo’s voice is smug. “See, they’re just fine.”

“Let’s… come on, let’s give them some privacy…” Poe’s voice is muffled, but there’s some noises of assent, with Atsushi’s yelling from the background, until there’s nothing much left, aside from the pounding of Chuuya’s heart and the steady breathing from the guy underneath him.

“…They’re gone.” Chuuya sighs, then adjusts his position, so that his knees are caging Dazai’s hips, his body bent over Dazai. He can’t allow any of them running away from this conversation, after all. “I should start.”

Dazai doesn’t say anything, so Chuuya continues. His hands move so that one of it is on top of Dazai’s heart, while the other is loosely cupping the curve of Dazai’s neck. Not to strangle Dazai, but to feel the other’s pulse. They have no need of the Ability User who can detect truth, this way.

“You—”

I love you.

I love you so fucking much.

I love you so much that I feel like I’m going to die if I stop.

I love you—the you who can see the corruption and accepts me anyway—even before I met you.

“You—”

I love you, he practices in his mind.

“You’re a fucking bastard.” Chuuya exhales, then continues. “You’re selfish, manipulative, a waste of bandage, a demon, a goddamn prodigy, a traitor, a guy who does his own thing without caring if people get hurt, too petty, too childish, zero design sense, condescending, annoying, hogs all the
blankets, too clingy, clingier than an octopus, doesn’t have self-control when it comes to gossiping, worse than a goddamn terrorist, you—you—you—you’re one hell of a goddamn fucking asshole, you know?”

Dazai doesn’t respond, but his breath hitches slightly, his heartbeat going faster. Or is that Chuuya’s? It doesn’t matter, does it? Dazai doesn’t respond, but Chuuya thinks he knows why. _Knows why._

“You have all these plans and strategies and you don’t trust me, not anyone, sometimes not even yourself. And it’s annoying as fucking hell. How the hell am I supposed to be a good partner to you, if you don’t… And then—and then, you! You leave me behind in the Port Mafia when it’s your fucking fault to begin with that I’m there?! How inconsiderate can you be?!”

Chuuya’s punching Dazai’s heart, but Dazai doesn’t protest or stop him. It almost feels like he’s crying, but he can’t be. He still has so many things he has to say, after all.

“And then—you, you waltz into my life again, letting me date everyone else while you’re just what, pouting in the background?! Casually moving in with me?! Without telling me?! You think I enjoyed thinking about being with someone else other than you?! You’re such an inconsiderate asshole!”

Chuuya’s other hand is tugging at Dazai’s hair, almost out of his own will. “And I find out you’re the one who fucking cut off my hair, did you know how mortifying that was?! Did you know how many hangovers I got because of you?! And I find out that you’ve been basically stalking me and acting like some fucked-up silent protector?! Why won’t you trust that I’m strong enough to stand for myself?! If you wanted to keep an eye on me, you could have just not left me behind, you fucker! Or you know, you could have just taken me with you! Or better yet, why not just tell me your plans?! Do you think I’m narrow-minded enough to stop you from wanting to give your life meaning?! I may not be as pure as that Oda, but I still would have understood!”

Ah. It’s no good. He’s going to cry, isn’t he?

Dazai’s hands, both of them, rise to cup his cheeks, thumb poised under his eyes, as though he’s saying that he’s ready to accept his tears. It’s fucking irritating.

“You’re the actual worst,” Chuuya finally breathes out, spent. But he takes another deep breath, because he can’t run away. “You’re the actual worst and I love you.”

“…Chuuya.”

Chuuya shivers. He’s expecting that his name is going to be the first word Dazai will utter, but to have it become reality is still a bit mind-wrecking.


“What,” he says, feeling his face flush. “Don’t just repeat my name, you asshole.”

“I love you, Chuuya.”

“Urgh, that’s not what I—”

“Does this mean that you agree to marry me?”

Chuuya feels his cheeks burn even more, but he wrenches his eyes open, Dazai’s face the first thing he sees after that fall. He looks like a mess, really, still a bit pale and blotchy. But it’s a view
greater than some billion-dollar masterpiece. A view for Chuuya alone.

“Did your brain cells get obliterated by the fall? Weren’t you listening to me? I told you—pffft.”

Dazai tugs Chuuya down forcefully to his chest, trapping him there. It’s a new cage of sorts, but this time, Chuuya’s voluntarily handing the key to Dazai.

A love that is not normal. A love between people who are not normal. An extraordinary type of love.

Chuuya can’t wait to experience it.

Chapter End Notes

they FINALLY reached this stage after 84 years (&105k words later);;;;;; well, it's not completely smooth from here on out, because even though they're engaged, dazai still has to work on making it up to chuuya.... but we finally reached this stage i'm not crying T﹏T

- references/symbolism stuff here!
- Itinerary for Fyodor/Chuuya’s… “date”
- Yokohama Marine Tower boasts a 100% success rate for proposals ;)
- My guess for this fic’s Fyodor’s Crime and Punishment is discussed @ ch15
- Suspension Bridge Effect!
- June 19 = Dazai’s birthday

see you next water time! i’m super excited for the fuwafuwa domestic soukoku again i;m---
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

+ Dazai & Chuuya’s first day as engaged dorks

Chapter Notes

+ Thank you, thank you, thank you for tuning in!!!!!! ♥ ♥ ♥ I’m a donut who’s super slow at replying to comments, but they’re all dear to my heart, thank you so much for all of your love and support for this fic!!!!!! ♥ ♥ ♥ I hope you enjoy this next arc, which should be full of sweetness and humor and just Soukoku being domestic and adorable as they build their lives as Actually In A Relationship Dorks together. Thank you very much ahhhh ilu all ♥ ♥ ♥

+ This chapter in particular is dedicated to my dearest Gab (advance happy birthday & tysm for everything!!!) & chomra (ganbatte to your exams!!!!!!!!!!!).

+ Even though they don’t read this, thanks to Kei & Jullia for helping me brainstorm about date ideas/first kiss ideas hahahaha ilu ♥

+ Now, to the fic!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chuuya wakes up and stretches—tries to, anyway. He only manages to open his eyes and wriggle his toes, but further movement is arrested by the sight that greets him: Dazai smiling softly at him—like he’s irreplaceably precious, like he’s a gem that will only be mined once in every ten thousand years, like he’s going to disappear the moment they cease contact with each other.

It’s an entirely new type of desperation, but it’s also softened by the fact that both of them know that they’re committed to making this work. Or at least, that’s what Chuuya supposes must have happened in-between now and him opening his eyes to a whole new world and an entirely new life yesterday, then practically crashing head-first to the remains of his apartment and slightly-dusty bed.

He’s not too surprised or shaken to realize that he’s practically nestled into the warmth of Dazai’s body, an arm wrapped around him like he’s being bundled in so much affection, his own blanket tucked near his neck, too much warmth and coziness in one setting.

The curtains are drawn; his view of his bedside table’s clock is blocked by Dazai reclining against the headboard with his phone in hand. Brown hair looks soft and mildly wet from a shower, the scent of apples and the warmth making him think of apple pies. With the way the blanket is drawn over Dazai’s body—oh, they’re sharing the blanket—he’s able to see the navy blue robe loose around Dazai’s chest, no bandages peeking out from the space above the topmost button. Long, oversized sleeves nearly cover Dazai’s fingers as he focuses the phone’s camera at Chuuya’s face.
He looks comfortable and sleepy. Looking at Dazai, surrounded by Chuuya’s things, by the dim glow of his bedside lamp, even in such an imperfect setting, dust motes floating about—the sight makes him feel boneless, sated. Nevertheless, it’s also enough to quickly rouse his heartbeat from its sleepy state.

“Good morning, Chuuya.”

Dazai says it so simply, like it’s absolutely normal for the two of them to wake up cuddling in bed, like it’s normal for him to spend god-knows-how-many minutes watching him sleep.

Chuuya’s cheeks burn where they’re pressed against Dazai’s thigh, and they burn even more when Dazai reaches down and tucks a stray lock of hair behind his ear, before following that movement and leaning down as well, pressing feather-light kisses to trace his hairline from his ear to his forehead.

They’re… moving forward. Dazai’s fingers are warm from his shower as they cradle Chuuya’s face, points of contact that tell Chuuya a number of things, ranging from apologies to confessions. Chuuya still has a long list of misgivings, but—like this, being together with Dazai like this, is almost enough to make him forget every single one of their still-unresolved problems.

He can have this, right…? It’s okay to want this, right…?

Chuuya doesn’t quite realize that he’s biting his lips as his mind starts to reboot as well, becoming aware of things in the world aside from cuddling with Dazai and exchanging soft nuzzles with each other. At least, he doesn’t quite realize it until he feels Dazai pressing his index finger against the fullness of his bottom lip, pressing against the edge of his teeth until he stops biting it. Chuuya’s cheeks burn even more, if it’s possible, when he meets Dazai’s eyes, at point-blank range.

Bending down like that must hurt like hell for Dazai’s spine, so Chuuya slides upwards, his right hand lightly pushing back at Dazai’s shoulders so that Dazai’s back to leaning back against the headboard, Chuuya following the shape of his body by swinging a leg over so that he’s seated securely over Dazai’s lap instead, the blanket bunched in-between their chests.

“…you too, Dazai.”

Chuuya’s left hand traces the smile on Dazai’s face, feeling it widen instead of disappearing, feels the soft ridges from the other’s lips. The muted lighting plus the apple-cinnamon smell makes him feel both hungry and satiated at the same time; he squirms as his stomach flip-flops upon feeling Dazai’s arms wrap around his waist so that they’re locked in tight together, their clothes, the bed, the world practically melting into nothingness.

“…The taste of honey in the air, nothing substantial but enough to eat & live from.”

Chuuya feels his own lips twitch, the gravity between their hearts feeling less like a drowning suffocation and more like oxygen that he needs to exist.

“I told you time and time again: stop messing around with my poems,” is what Chuuya replies to the quote that Dazai has shamelessly stolen from his poem collection.

“I’ve long memorized them,” Dazai confesses, rather shamelessly still, as he bestows soft kisses on each of Chuuya’s exposed fingertips. Then, a beat. “…I think I’m going to sick from all this dust, Chuuya.”

And there, in the first morning after their new life begins, surrounded by dust as Chuuya’s apartment hasn’t been cleaned in months, wrapped in messy blankets, crumpled bedsheets and each
other’s limbs, trying not to sneeze and wheeze, chuckling about the situation they’re in—it’s there that Chuuya feels that everything will be alright between them.

☆ ☆ ☆

It’s almost as if they’re really starting over. Chuuya scrunches his nose at the sputtering water pressure for his shower, but it more-or-less manages to see him through his entire bathroom routine without being interrupted by Dazai waltzing into his personal space. When Chuuya comes out of his bath, a damp towel draped around his neck to catch the wet droplets from his hair, it’s to the smell of his favored Guatemalan coffee and heated cream-cheese bagels.

Dazai’s pouring orange juice to a glass, but he stops halfway, leaves them on the counter, before meeting Chuuya so that he can tug Chuuya closer by the ends of the damp towel, their legs bumping together. Dazai then combs through Chuuya’s still-messy hair using his fingers, fluffing his hair up—it’s too sweet, that Chuuya feels his throat choke a bit. Of course, it isn’t the first (or even hundredth time) that they’ve been close like this, but it’s the first day of the rest of their lives, of the two of them being this close while knowing and understanding what they really mean to each other.

Dazai then tugs at the longest portion of Chuuya’s hair, pulls it forward so that he’s kissing the tips of the red-brown locks, whisper a shameless “…Itadakimasu.”

“You are so not eating my hair.”

Dazai’s eyes light up, brighter than the morning sun streaming to the room. “I would rather eat something else, Chuuya.”

“You—!” Chuuya rolls his eyes and tries, half-heartedly, to untangle himself from Dazai’s embrace. “We’re supposed to be busy today, stop saying such things!”

“So if we weren’t busy then…”

It’s strange to talk about such things so overtly, but Chuuya gulps and nods, before collapsing forward against Dazai’s chest, hiding his burning face. It’s a comfort to find out that Dazai will catch him, even if it’s incredibly embarrassing.

“I could always just ditch them,” Dazai murmurs to the top of his head. “I don’t even like Mori-san, after all.”

“Be responsible, idiot.” Chuuya rolls his eyes and punches Dazai’s chest lightly. “It’s your job, right? And think of it as your wedding gift to them.”

“I still can’t believe that they’re getting married before us…”

“They’ve known each other for decades,” Chuuya reminds him, even though it’s a statement that applies to them too. “And they’ve planned the wedding for a longer time.”

“Mori-san just wanted to upstage me…”

“I’m pretty sure you ranked fairly low on his priorities when picking the wedding date,” Chuuya comments with a laugh, peeking up to see Dazai’s pout. He leans up, almost on his tiptoes (okay fine, he really is on his tiptoes), and rubs Dazai’s pout away using his forehead. “Stop pouting already.”

“Mm, only if it means I get to kiss Chuuya’s forehead lots.”
“You’re already doing it…”

“Mm, but I kind of want to see if Yuri-chan’s recommended breakfast pastries are half as good as Chuuya…”

“How is she, by the way?” It’s been ages since Chuuya’s seen the nosey cashier from the nearby coffee shop, after all.

“She’s been asking for updates about our love life, actually.”

“Is that why you’ve been taking pictures of me earlier?!”

“Chuuya – do you think I’ll be so easily satisfied by pictures?” Dazai says the word ‘pictures’ like they’re some low-level trash. “Of course I took HD-videos!”

“What is so fun about videos of my sleeping face?!”

“Ah, is Chuuya interested to know?” Dazai moves their entangled bodies closer to the dining table, where Dazai’s phone is. “We could watch the videos together as our movie night!”

“…the videos are long enough to last an entire night?”

“…no.”

“Fuck.” Chuuya squints at the flush on the bridge of Dazai’s nose, feels his belly flutter with ravenous butterflies. “It’s longer than one night?! Do I even want to know?!”

“If Chuuya really wants to know…”

“…we’re going to be honest with each other, right?”

Not just when it comes to questionable hobbies, not just when it comes to their feelings for one another.

“Total recording length of Chuuya’s sleeping face is at 158 hours, 43 minutes, and 19 seconds—”

“Noooo, I don’t want to hear it anymore!”

☆ ☆ ☆

Breakfast over, Chuuya watches Dazai’s back as he washes the dishes dutifully, like he’s some sort of househusband—no, no, no, it’s not the right time to think of such things! It’s—it’s kind of exciting though, to feel free and unhindered in thinking about spending every morning like this, with Dazai doting upon him, spoiling him with light touches that manage to be equally binding as heavy chains.

But mornings all must end to give way to the rest of the day, so Chuuya absent-mindedly plays with the contents of the décor salad on their dining table (Dazai seems to have added a couple more to the mix – some keychains, marbles, fridge magnets) while his other hand scrolls through his phone for mail and daily reminders.

It’s… surprisingly empty though?

He double-checks his internet connection and refreshes all of his apps, but it’s still showing him a free day.
There’s a mild flick against the furrow in his forehead, before Dazai’s fingers that smell faintly of dishwashing liquid rub at the spot. “I asked Hirotsu-san to give you some rest.”

“Taking over my leave schedule, again?”

Dazai shrugs, not denying it at all. “You’re going to be busy with fixing your living arrangements, right?”

Chuuya looks around the apartment that has seen the two of them through the rollercoaster of their newfound relationship. It feels unthinkable to leave it behind, but just like all the homes that Chuuya has found and left during his life, he ends up with Dazai every single time anyway, that it feels like his actual home lies with Dazai anyway.

…Oh.
…Oh.
…Oh.

So that’s—

Chuuya blinks and sees Dazai’s face blurred.

He blinks again, twice, thrice, in quick succession, but the blurriness is still there. His eyes feel hot, burning embers, but it’s nothing compared to the way his veins are singed, with affection drugging him on overdrive.

“Eh?! Chuuya—why are you crying?! What—did I do something—I’ll make them pay, wait, is this because I asked Hirotsu-san to give you a day-off? I’m sorry, Chuuya, let me call him and cancel—oh, now you’re laughing while crying, you look cute, wait, no, I’m getting distracted, ah, Chuuya, your tears, I’m—”

Seeing and hearing and witnessing Dazai panic like this, with no lives at stake, just the two of them acting like idiots in front of each other—it makes tears well up in Chuuya’s eyes even more. He reaches up both hands, so that he’s holding onto Dazai’s hands that are frantically wiping the tears off his cheeks. It’s been a long, long journey, but—

“I’m home, Dazai.”

A sight he’s never seen before.

Dazai’s eyes being equally blurry, as he replies, with a boyish grin that looks so innocently in love.

“Welcome back, Chuuya.”

Chuuya’s heart pounds, like it’s trying to burst out of his ribs and meld with Dazai’s, and it feels like the moment, for him to finally feel the same lips that have hurt and loved him in almost equal measures against his own mouth that have also hurt and loved Dazai in equally unbearable measure—

But of course, Chuuya’s phone chimes like an alarm, a declaration of war. He remembers placing his phone on mute, with the only person who’s not blocked in his notifications being his Boss.

With an almost-apologetic smile, Chuuya smiles and dips his head a bit, before stating the obvious. “Mori-san must have been trying to contact you non-stop.”
“I blocked his number for a reason,” Dazai complains. “He really is sabotaging me.”

“Maybe you should have answered his calls earlier.”

“And miss my chance to be lovey-dovey with Chuuya?! No way!”

With flushed cheeks still with some tear-tracks, Chuuya says, “…we still have lots of chances in the future.”

Dazai blinks, before his entire expression becomes serious. “I really should ditch them.”

“Do your job.”

“Chuuya’s so strict… So you’ll be setting up your new place?”

“Since we’re… you know… I was actually expecting that we’ll look for a new home together?”

“I really am ditching them.”

“Putting Dostoevsky behind bars for real is more important,” Chuuya tries to be as stern as possible, but even he knows it’s a lost cause, given that he’s getting lightheaded from all the blushing. “And making sure that Abilities are gone forever… those are very important jobs.”

“I’d rather do Chuuya—”

“Shut your mouth.”

“Ah, feisty.” Dazai knocks their foreheads together, his arms sliding downward so that he’s loosely holding Chuuya. “We can schedule house-hunting next week?”

“Okay.” Chuuya hums as he returns Dazai’s loose embrace, rubbing at the shirt over his bent back. “Also, don’t even try to pretend that you haven’t started marking down places.”

“…I have ten places on short-list.”

“I don’t care how well you know my tastes—”

“—we’ll start from scratch and look together, I know.”

“…I don’t want to waste the short-list. We can look at them first.”

Relationships and compromise go hand-in-hand, after all.

“Chuuya’s spoiling me. I really am lucky.”

“Luck has nothing to do with it,” Chuuya says, because luck is nothing in the face of the things they’ve experienced, both together and apart. “It’s just because I love you.”

There’s a silence, Dazai’s limbs stiffening.

“O-Oi, don’t tell me you got a stroke from that, you overdramatic asshole!”

Still silence, and Chuuya tries to look up and witness Dazai’s face, but Dazai’s hold is stiff and unrelenting and Chuuya can only see a brilliant red, before he’s being squeezed tight, too tight.

“I take it back, I just said it because you need to get going unless you want to be dragged from here via a helicopter, let me go—”
“Nuh-uh, no takebacks!”

“Urgh, let me go—”

“Never!”

“I can’t fucking breathe—”

“I love Chuuya so much, he’s so cute, so adorable, the most beautiful, so much—”

“Can’t… breathe…”

Dazai finally lets him go, a little bit, eyes shining and cheeks suffused with red. “Then, maybe you can live with Atsushi-kun in the meantime?”

“You want me to disturb their just-moving-in-together honeymoon phase?”

“It would be fun to tease them every now and then!”

“You mean you want to punish them?”

“I know you want to, too~~~♪

“…you’re evil.”

“As long as you love me!”

“Geh.”

“I love Chuuya, after all!”

“Shut up.”

“The most!”

“ASDFGHJKL—!”


☆ ☆ ☆

“…So that’s why I’m here.”

Atsushi blinks at him.

“So you’re here because if you can’t get laid, then neither can I?”

“THAT’S NOT—!!!” Chuuya blinks, then, frowns at Atsushi seated in front of him. “…You got laid already?!”

“Chuuya-san, I’ve been sleeping with Ryuu ever since he cooked breakfast for me while wearing nothing but… an… apron…”

Chuuya rolls his eyes as he rummages through the first-aid kit that he packed with him. It’s a good thing he always maintains a packed first-aid kit, because he has a feeling he’ll be going through bandages and gauze wraps and tissues a lot during his one-week stay with Atsushi. He dabs a
sterile tissue against Atsushi’s nosebleed.

Though…

“I can’t believe it… I haven’t even kissed Dazai yet…”

He isn’t worried at all – that he, Nakahara Chuuya, 26 years old, still hasn’t had his first kiss. It’s not like it’s a must, right? Plenty of people have gone through their lives without being kissed. It’s not a cause for concern. Even if Atsushi and Akutagawa have apparently been sleeping together for months already…

“You’re blushing just thinking about it though,” Atsushi sasses like the not-so-secretly disrespectful little shit that he is. “Why don’t you just wait for Dazai-san to take your virgin lips on your wedding night?”

“That’s—!”

“You’re even more embarrassed than Ryu… are you sure you guys are really part of the Port Mafia?”

“Do you want the full dossier detailing our kills?”

“Ryu has already shared his with me.” Atsushi sounds inordinately smug while sporting a bleeding nose, a superpower that’s apparently granted to thirsty idiots who get laid on a regular basis. “One kiss per crime that he’s done.”

“Disgusting.”

“Don’t tell me that you’re not planning to have Dazai-san do something like that to you.”

“I don’t—plus, that bastard’s crimes are practically never-ending!”

“Must make for a wild honeymoon, huh?”

“You—!!” Despite his words, Chuuya dutifully writes down a list of dating ideas and locations that he wants to do with Dazai. Of course, the list started out as something like – Wedding Gift Ideas for Mori-san’s upcoming wedding with Fukuzawa-san, but they got distracted by actively not thinking about those two being in any situation that borders more-than-platonic. “Have you always been this shameless?”

“It’s because Ryu is so easily embarrassed… I have to say what I want in a very straightforward manner.”

“That fucking Dazai is influencing you the wrong way.”

“No offense, Chuuya-san, but if I moved at your pace, I wouldn’t get to Ryu’s pants until we’re forty.” Atsushi flips the page in the magazine that he got from Gin, who got it from Higuchi, who claimed that she got it from her sister. “And I don’t want to be like Fukuzawa-san and Mori-san. At all.”

“I take full offense on that!”

“Yes, so please don’t tell Dazai-san about it, he’s going to make my life hell.”

“I’ll make your life hell, you little shit—!”
“Chuuya-san, you’re still dabbing your tissue at my nose, you’re definitely not about to make my life hell.”

“Summer isn’t good for nosebleeds, you don’t have regeneration anymore!”

“Exactly my point.”

“Are you going to be like this the entire time I’m here?”

Atsushi laughs at him. “If you’d rather me talk non-stop about Ryuu…”

“I’m fine with this, thanks.” Chuuya pats Atsushi’s nose, satisfied that no further blood seems to be dripping down from his nose. “Plus, he didn’t have to leave.”

“If Ryuu is here, we’d definitely end up making love every night. And before going to work. And —”

Chuuya thumps his head against the desk and his notes. “This is all Dazai’s bad influence, isn’t it…”

“All I’m saying is that, I don’t really want to let Chuuya-san hear about Ryuu being cute. Or have Chuuya-san accidentally stumble upon Ryuu after his bath.”

“And you think Akutagawa’s safe if he’s living with Gin and her roommate?”

“Higuchi-chan’s losing all of her blood from staring at Gin-chan’s beauty, apparently.”

“So her weakness is the Akutagawa family genes, huh.”

“And if Higuchi-chan got too thirsty, Kyouka-chan said that it’s fine if Ryuu lives with them for a bit.”

“Akutagawa under Ane-san’s care? Do you want him to die?”

“They promised to send me pictures if he gets to be all dolled up in courtesan make-up…”

“You really are a better fit for Dazai’s subordinate.”

Atsushi frowns for a moment, before his expression smoothens out. “And Ryuu’s been saying that he thinks that you’d make a really wonderful Boss.”

A beat.

“…you asked him to move out for a bit because you’re jealous of me?” Chuuya blinks, then bops Atsushi’s forehead, as though it’s enough to right his head. “Are you an idiot?!”

“Buuuuuuut, he hasn’t praised anyone like that! Not even Dazai-san! Or me!”

“You’re impossible.” Chuuya bops Atsushi’s forehead again. “You’re the only one who hears his cute noises right?! That should tell you something!”

“That I should lock him up in a soundproof room?”

Chuuya flicks Atsushi’s forehead hard enough that he’s knocked backwards.

“An idiot of the greatest level…”
“I don’t want to hear that from Chuuya-san, of all people…”
“And what does that mean, huh, jinko?”
“It means, chibikko, that you’re super dense!”
“Don’t call me that!”
“Don’t call me jinko!”
“Don’t tell me that’s his petname for you?!”
“S-S-So what?! It’s hot!”
“An idiot!”
“Person with shit taste in men!”
“Men?! I only like Dazai!”
“Gaaaaaaaaah, that’s too sweet, I can’t believe you’d say it out loud—!”
“Ha?! Your text messages about Akutagawa are barely literate! You’ve got it worse!”
“If you’ve seen Ryu in an apron, I’m sure you’d have the same reaction!”
“I doubt it! Plus, if you’ve seen Dazai demolish an entire organization by just bossing people around—”
“Ha?! You doubt it?! Are you denying the cuteness of Ryu in an apron?!”
“Why would I want to screw him senseless if I see him in an apron? I’m not in love with him!”
“But Ryu, in an, apron, best, I—”
“…you’ve got a nosebleed. Again.”
“Plus, that means that you’ve thirsted for Dazai-san since then? Really?”
“Don’t look at me with pity, damn it!”
“You really should just kiss Dazai-san and be done with all the weird sexual tension.”
“Just…what are we even talking about, we haven’t gone further in our list for Mori-san’s wedding.”

Atsushi looks down at their meager list (it’s empty) for gift ideas.
“…Let’s try harder…”
“First person to bring up their significant other has to treat the other to dinner?”
“You’re on, Chuuya-san!”
A suggested trip to Yamaguchi – the hometown where Chuuya’s mother’s family used to live, the ancient home that’s been burned down like a setting sun laid to rest – is equal sorts surprising and expected. It’s part of Dazai’s plans to make everything up to Chuuya, Chuuya knows that. It’s part of Dazai paying homage to a traditional sort of courtship, where one asks for the family’s permission for their child’s hand in marriage.

Chuuya stands in Yokohama Port, watching Dazai tinker with the controls of the boat that he has somehow managed to pilfer from Sakaguchi, because apparently it’s great to try to travel by water during summer. Yamaguchi is nearly 12 hours away, after all, if one drives; even longer if one sails, but they’re slated to travel over the weekend.

At least, that’s Dazai’s plan.

It’s raining though, bursts of summer rain, and the weather forecast for the weekend looks bleak. Still, Chuuya stands there, an umbrella over his head as he watches Dazai try to calculate if they can make it out alive if they force their sailing plans.

Fifteen more minutes, before Dazai steps away from the boat and into the space of Chuuya’s umbrella.

“Looks like a lovey-dovey cruise isn’t in the cards for now…”

“It’s fine.” Chuuya shrugs as he pats Dazai’s cheeks to rid them of the raindrops. He’s been wearing his gloves less and less, even when he’s outside; he catches glimpse of the scars on his hands and he doesn’t flinch. “We don’t need to ask permission from them.”

“Are you sure?”

“We can visit them…” Or rather, the remains of the destroyed home, their unmarked graves. “But we don’t need to ask permission. I’m with you and I’ll be with you based on my will.”

“I had thought that you’d be more traditional…”

“If you really need to ask permission from my family… ask yourself.”

Dazai squeezes him tight, causing Chuuya to lose grip on the umbrella, exposing the two of them to the rain that’s steadily growing heavier.

“…Chuuya says the most romantic things.”

“You didn’t let me finish,” Chuuya whispers directly to Dazai’s ear, because his voice is getting drowned by the heavy beat of the rain. “Ask yourself, as well as Ane-san, Hirotsu-san and Mori-san. And—”

“Your entire harem, I get it.”

“Why would you include Mori-san on my harem, are you nuts??”

“Why are you not protesting about Hirotsu-san or Kouyou-anesan??”

“Are we really going to argue about that in the rain?!”

“Ah. We have something more important to do, ne?”

Chuuya rolls his eyes, feels raindrops cling to his eyelashes. He’s getting thoroughly soaked, but it still feels blissfully warm inside Dazai’s embrace. It defies logic and common sense. “Like get the
“hell out of here, I don’t want to get a cold.”

“Before that…” Dazai says, before smoothly sliding away from Chuuya, only to kneel down on the dirty ground. “I have a question that only Chuuya can answer.”

Chuuya’s vision is blurred from the heavy rain, but there’s no mistaking the intensity and intention in Dazai’s figure. He can barely manage a nod, realizing that Dazai must have planned to do this while they’re in Yamaguchi, probably while they’re standing on top of the graves of the people that rejected Chuuya. Because of the rain, Dazai’s doing this now, in the place where their paths first crossed.

“When I saw you back then, I wasn’t expecting to see a unique, unexpected miracle – finding someone that I’ll love so much, beyond how much I hated the world and my life and the thing that I have become. When you had called me a rotten apple back then, when you had endured everything and flourished under everything the world could throw at you, when you were too drunk to get your ass in place but you looked at me and called me your home—”

Dostoevsky might have broken Dazai’s pendant, but right here, in front of Chuuya, is the only proof of devotion he should need.

—A simple band made from the golden ingots they managed to retrieve from The Setting Sun; reste près de moi et ne t’en vas pas, j’ai peur de te perdre inside the band in tiny but unmistakable inscription.

“For as long as you want me to be, I’ll be whoever you want me to be, Chuuya.” Dazai presses a kiss to the engagement ring, before taking hold of Chuuya’s left hand, sliding the ring home. “Stay close to me and never leave, Chuuya. For the rest of our lives, let us be each other’s homes.”

The summer rain continues to pour and Chuuya shivers, but not from the cold.

“…you didn’t even give me a chance to answer.”

“Eh?! But Chuuya—”

“Give me your ring,” Chuuya orders, tugging Dazai up so that they’ll be both standing on equal ground. Dazai hands over a similar ring, with the same inscription in it. Chuuya whispers his words against the ring, feeling the cool metal against his lips. “Dazai Osamu. We’ve always had the keys to each other, we were just too stupid to see it. And you were too much of an ass to appreciate it. But—I love you anyway. And since I’ve loved you even when you were a pain in the ass, you shouldn’t be worried that I wouldn’t be able to keep on loving you when you’re trying to make amends, you dummy.”

With those words, Chuuya then finds Dazai’s left ring finger and slides the ring in.

Only—

“Fuck, stop shaking, damn it!”

“Eh?! Isn’t it Chuuya who’s shaking?!”

“Stop trembling, I can’t put the ring in!”

“You’re the one who’s—”

They’re both shaking – from the cold and from their proposal – and Chuuya sighs, and reaches up,
stands on his tiptoes, so he can kiss Dazai, because damn it, he’s waited for so long and there’s no better moment to make him realize again and again that he’s really in love with this idiot, than failing to give him his engagement ring.

Dazai seems to have read his mind, like always, but because they’re both shivering, Chuuya’s lips land on the bow on Dazai’s upper lip first, so they adjust, the rainwater practically sizzling on their skin as they press their lips properly together, years upon years of longing burning inside them, Chuuya licking off some of the liquid from Dazai’s mouth. Chuuya licks at Dazai’s lips again, enjoying the lightning-hot pricks of pleasure that run up and down his spine at the action, both of his hands sliding up so that he can bury them in Dazai’s messy hair, so that he can tilt Dazai’s head downward and make the angle easier on his toes. Dazai’s arms are vice-like around his waist, one of Dazai’s hands landing on Chuuya’s ass; Chuuya jumps so that his legs are around Dazai’s skinny hips instead, the two of them swaying, dizzy and drunk in love, under the rain.

Chuuya’s ring snags against Dazai’s hair and the two of them breathlessly laugh into each other’s mouths, before Dazai’s skinny-ass capacity is maxed out and the two of them end up falling to the ground, Chuuya rolling them mid-air so that he gets the brunt of their fall, Dazai’s hand flying out so that he’s covering the back Chuuya’s head.

“Ah… That does hurt.”

“…Why haven’t we kissed before this?” Dazai asks, almost in wonder, kissing Chuuya every other word.

“We’re idiots,” Chuuya replies, welcoming Dazai’s weight practically blanketing him, despite the fact that the ground is really wet, hard and dirty.

“We’re idiots who’ll get a cold soon.”

Chuuya laughs in response, before tugging at Dazai’s left hand – more specifically, at the ring finger that now has a band of gold around it.

“So Chuuya’s first kiss is because he wants to distract me?”

“Are you actually complaining, you ass?”

“No,” Dazai says, dropping another kiss against Chuuya’s lips. “I just wish you distracted me like this before.”

Chuuya smiles, feels Dazai smudge his smile with butterfly kisses. “Shameless ass. We have lots of time in the future.”

“…Really shameless. Should I report you guys for public indecency?”

Chuuya blinks as he feels the raindrops cease battering his face. There’s Akutagawa above, holding an umbrella over him. Atsushi, the one who interrupted their moment, is beside him, with an umbrella of his own.

“Dazai-san asked us to record the entire thing.” Akutagawa’s expression is like a kid who’s trying to get out of punishment by throwing others under the bus instead.

“…Of course, he did.”

Dazai laughs, presses his face against Chuuya’s neck. “I told you, Chuuya, videos are important!”
Chuuya ends up laughing as well, even though he’s starting to feel the cold seep in.

“…I really am in love with you, aren’t I, Osamu?”

A beat.

“…Ah. Dazai-san’s KO’d.”

Chapter End Notes

+ “The taste of honey in the air, nothing substantial but enough to eat & live from.” is from Never to Return © Nakahara Chuuya
+ first scene of this chap is callback to ch9
+ sskk moving in together + fukumori getting married in june are from ch14
+ sskk first meeting in the port harbor is from ch16
+ dazai’s engagement plans (that didn’t come true, at least not 100%) are from ch18
+ “reste près de moi et ne t’en vas pas, j’ai peur de te perdre” = “stay close to me and never leave, i’m afraid to lose you”

+ thanks again for reading & see you next water time! :D♥

End Notes

• comments / feedback / kudos / any sort of reactions = always welcome ♥

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