

Two Minutes Late to Love (And Everything Else)

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Two Minutes Late to Love (And Everything Else)

by [LindtLuirae](#)

Summary

Location: Tokyo Penthouse, Minato Ward

Salary: ¥650,000/month + room & board in luxury penthouse

Hours: Full-time, flexible schedule including weekends and holidays

Duties: Comprehensive household management, specialized cleaning, meal prep, guest coordination, and personal assistance to employer

Atsumu is twenty-five, broke, chronically five minutes behind, and one existential crisis away from snapping. The last thing he needs is a mysterious job offer, a trench coat-wearing cryptid, or Sakusa Kiyoomi offering him a ride home. But here we are.

A story about burnout, bizarre jobs, and falling in love somewhere between the coffee runs and breakdowns.

Notes

Disclaimer: I'm chronically bad at long fics, so I'll make it a point to wrap up every chapter without any cliffhangers, *just in case*.

Way too much research has gone into this, but here's another quick disclaimer: I'm not a med student.

Without further ado, enjoy my contribution to the DILF Sakusa Kiyoomi tag.

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Not Enough Hours, Not Enough Yens

Atsumu is running late. Again.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he mutters, rounding a sharp corner—only to nearly barrel into an old man. “Sorry!”

He hears a grumble: *Kids these days.*

That old man has no idea how lucky he is not to be born in Atsumu’s generation, Atsumu thinks darkly, sprinting across the front yard of his university.

He’s twenty-five years old, working two jobs, picking up the occasional side hustle, and still can’t make ends meet. Despite saving on rent by sharing a cramped apartment with his brother, student loans keep eating every last yen in his pocket.

“Miya,” Fukuda-sensei sighs as he barrels into the lecture hall. “Nice of you to join us.”

Atsumu cringes. “Sorry sensei, I got held up—”

“I’m not interested in your excuses, Miya. You know the rules. If you’re more than fifteen minutes late to my class, you sit the lecture out.”

Fuck. “Sensei, please, I swear—”

“I don’t want to hear it. You’re disturbing my class and students who actually care about being here. Out.”

Atsumu clenches his jaw and sucks in a steadying breath. If he causes a bigger scene, he’ll only give Fukuda-sensei more ammunition—and she’s not above docking his grades for talking back.

He has no choice but to leave the classroom.

Frustration wells in his chest. Sixteen minutes. He was just *one* minute over. And because of that, he has to sit out a three-hour biochemistry lecture that’s absolutely going to fuck him sideways to catch up on.

He crouches against the wall, knuckling at his eyes to keep the angry tears from spilling. *Fucking Fukuda-sensei. Fucking student loans.*

All it took to derail his entire day was one argument with a customer who wanted extra whipped cream in his coffee but refused to pay the additional fee.

Atsumu is missing a class worth *seven thousand yen* over fucking whipped cream.

He bites down on his fist to stop himself from screaming.

He's already delayed graduation by two years, taking fewer classes just to be able to afford tuition. And now this.

For a solid fifteen minutes, Atsumu just sits there in quiet despair, seriously contemplating dropping out.

He's going to have to quit his job at Mayu's Coffeeshop and begrudgingly admit the working hours don't suit his schedule, which will leave him with just his job at the local library.

And that's *not enough*.

So it's back to job hunting. Again.

Osamu is home when Atsumu returns.

"You're early," Osamu says without looking up from his laptop.

"I was late," Atsumu spits out as he kicks his shoes off and throws his bag in the genkan. "Fukuda-sensei refused to let me attend the class because I was a minute too late."

Osamu looks up, glasses sliding down the bridge of his nose to give him a wide-eyed look. "The fuck? Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously." Atsumu is still so angry, it's practically radiating off him in waves. "And the worst part is that I was held up by an asshole who won't pay a few extra yen for whipped cream and wanted to speak to my manager. As if it's me deciding the rules! Fucking asshole."

Osamu winces in sympathy. "As much as I wanna be there for you, I have to submit this paper before midnight and I'm nowhere near done."

"Ugh," Atsumu says, grabs a beer from the fridge, and retreats to their bedroom.

You'd think working two jobs would buy him a little more dignity than a shared bunk bed with his brother. But unfortunately, this is all they can afford. Osamu's health science degree is just as costly as Atsumu's, and neither of them is willing to give up on their dream of a higher education.

Atsumu pops open his beer with a savage click of his teeth, his dentist's future concerns be damned.

At this rate—with deadlines nipping at his heels, one too many sleepless nights under his belt and an atrocious diet to boot—he doubts he'll live to see forty.

His phone buzzes with a text but he ignores it.

If it's Daishou asking him to cover yet another shift at Mayu's after partying all night, Atsumu is going to strangle him with his beloved guitar string.

What Atsumu needs—aside from something stronger than beer—is a long, scalding shower and, if the gods are feeling merciful, a coma. Preferably one that lasts the next decade.

But honestly, at this point, he'd settle for two hours of uninterrupted, nightmare-free sleep.

Is that really too much to ask?

He quits his job at Mayu's the next day.

Daishou cries.

Atsumu walks out with the swagger of a man who's just taken control of his life. That swagger lasts five minutes and thirty seconds. Then he remembers rent, tuition, and the fact that instant noodles aren't actually free. By the time he hits the crosswalk, he's Googling "high-paying jobs no experience no dignity."

Maybe it's time to sell feet pics. Dignity is a social construct, and honestly, his arches are kind of elegant.

Still, the crosswalk holds a different kind of promise. He locks eyes with an oncoming Prius and thinks, *do it*. Maybe he gets lightly maimed. Maybe the driver is a remorseful tech CEO with a guilt complex and a blank check. Maybe Atsumu wakes up in a hospital bed with his tuition paid and a fruit basket the size of Hokkaido.

He wonders if he should just lie down and manifest it.

The Prius comes to a courteous stop, as if personally offended by his fantasy.

Ugh.

Atsumu crosses safely, unfortunately, and glares into the void.

So much for divine intervention via bumper.

The rest of his walk to Fukuda-sensei's class is spent tempting every car and truck to put him out of his misery, only to be met with offended honks and, in a memorable twist of events, the shrieks of an ambulance that's regrettably not on its way to pick up his maimed body.

"Miya," Fukuda-sensei peers at him over the rim of her moon-shaped glasses. "Looks like last week's punishment worked. A whole ten minutes early. Keep this up and you might even pass this semester."

Atsumu holds back from snapping something that'll get him kicked out from the program altogether and finds a seat as far from that evil hag as the classroom allows.

Two seats down, Kuroo directs a pitying look his way.

Whatever.

Atsumu doesn't need anyone's pity.

He unlocks his phone, ready to bitch to Osamu for the next ten minutes—only to be greeted by a listing for a live-in maid, courtesy of a forgotten Google search.

If asked, Atsumu wouldn't even know where to begin explaining why he clicked on it.

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Applicant Requirements:

- Absolute discretion and professionalism required at all times
 - Strict adherence to employer's guidelines and schedules without exception
 - Willingness to perform tasks to exacting standards, including use of specialized cleaning agents
 - Prior experience with luxury household management preferred
 - Must respect boundaries and privacy protocols strictly enforced within the residence
-

Unbidden, Atsumu's mouth spits out, "What the fuck?"

Kuroo snorts. Fukuda-sensei shoots him a glare.

He scrolls up again, sure he must've hallucinated the salary. But nope—there it is: a whopping *six hundred and fifty thousand yen* a month.

For context, Atsumu works two part-time jobs, takes four classes instead of the recommended six, and still struggles to cover his ¥185,000 in monthly expenses.

Is it a typo? But would a hotshot CEO really make such an embarrassing mistake?

Worse—if it's not an error, what horrors await the applicants on the other side of this listing? Atsumu can't imagine why anyone, even a CEO, would dish out the equivalent of a worker's biannual salary in a single month.

His thumb hovers over the apply button.

This is ridiculous. Tsumu, ya wanna be a live-in maid for some snotty CEO? The voice in his head sounds suspiciously like Osamu. Then again... didn't he abandon all traces of dignity earlier today?

Fuck it. Atsumu clicks the button, attaches a PDF of his CV, and hits submit.

Not that it'll go anywhere. There's zero chance he's getting a call back. He's got no experience managing luxury households—unless scrubbing puke off bar counters counts as “hospitality.”

His résumé? A rolodex of minimum-wage stints: barista, library front desk, pub bartender straight out of high school, youth gym coach, and the occasional handyman gig when someone's sink made a weird noise.

Fukuda-sensei cuts through his inner monologue by switching on the projector and killing the lights in the lecture hall. “Settle down. It's imperative that we cover...”

Atsumu hurries to boot up his shitty ten-year-old MacBook Pro. Job applications will have to wait. Either that, or he'll spend the rest of his degree-less existence working crappy part-time jobs until he dies and donates his useless brain to science.

Later that night, Atsumu squints at his laptop screen like it personally wronged him. The cursor blinks mockingly at the top of a half-finished lab report titled “*The Effect of pH on Enzyme Activity.*”

It's due at midnight.

It is, in fact, 11:07 PM.

He's already rewritten the introduction three times. Nothing sounds right. He tries again.

“Catalase is an enzyme commonly found in living organisms that—”

Delete. Too boring.

“Catalase is that one protein that helps break down hydrogen peroxide so your cells don't explode—”

Delete. Too honest.

He groans and lets his head fall to the desk with a dull *thunk*. Somewhere to his left, his coffee's gone cold. Somewhere to his right, his lab notebook is open to a page stained with what may be soy sauce.

The data table is a mess. His samples were contaminated, his spectrophotometer readings were suspiciously identical, and he's pretty sure he swapped test tubes halfway through the experiment without noticing.

And yet, he has to write a coherent results section. With graphs.

“Figure 1: Chaos, visualized.”

He wonders if that would fly. Probably not.

The assignment brief keeps taunting him from the tab he keeps refusing to read in full:

Submit a 1000-word report analyzing the impact of pH variation on catalase efficiency, including a detailed discussion of enzyme kinetics, experimental error, and implications in biological systems.

He types:

“This experiment was a goddamn trainwreck.”

Backspace, backspace, backspace.

He’s never hated proteins more in his life.

On and on it goes.

He hits submit at exactly 11:59 PM, crouched in a stuffy corner of their living room smelling like cup-ramen and despair.

Atsumu half-assed it. Quarter-assed it? Completely assed it?

Moral of the story: what he submits is ass. Ass-squared, times five, to the power of 10.

He crashes on the couch soon after, in a hoodie three days past its prime, setting an alarm several hours before his library shift to finally tackle their mountain of laundry—and maybe even take a much-needed shower.

Six hours later, the 6 AM light bursts through their curtainless window, stabbing his eyelids awake.

“Fuck,” Atsumu groans, reaching blindly for his phone only to almost knock their lamp off the coffee table.

6:03 AM. An *hour* before his alarm is scheduled.

He lets out a mournful cry. Running on five hours of sleep is hell as it is—but pairing it with laundry, a brain-numbing library shift, an organic chem lecture, and *more homework*? That should be a crime against humanity.

Atsumu rolls off the couch, missing one sock and his reading glasses, with the intention of using up all the hot water in the shower, Osamu’s wrath be damned.

But alas, that'll have to wait—because right then, Atsumu's phone starts shrieking with electronic rage.

He dives for it before it could wake Osamu up and put an end to his showerly scheming.

“Hello?” He wheezes out, half bent over the couch.

“Miya Atsumu? This is Mr. Sakusa's office. He's expecting you for an interview tomorrow at 9 a.m. sharp.”

There's a pause.

“Please be punctual.”

Atsumu stares at his reflection on the TV screen. His hair looks like a failed science experiment.

Interview where? Who? What job did I even—oh no.

“Miya-san?”

“I—yes! Yes, ma'am, I'll be there. 9 AM sharp. Can ya just, uh, send me the office location?”

There's another pause.

His phone pings with a text notification. “Sent. Make sure to drop your ID off at the security desk on the ground floor. And Miya-san, Sakusa-sama expects all applicants to wear suits.”

Suits.

Suits?

Does Atsumu even *own* a respectable suit?

“Yes, ma'am,” he says dumbfoundedly.

Suit.

A suit.

Fuck, a suit!? For a live-in maid position!? “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Tsumu, what're ya muttering about?” Osamu grumbles from the doorway to their bedroom and *fuck*, there go his dreams of a shower from hell.

They tackle the laundry together.

“How many pairs of fuckin' socks do ya own?” Atsumu snaps, holding up yet another armful. “Fifty?”

Osamu smacks him upside the head. “At least I don’t own a hundred fuckin’ boxers.”

“Forgive me for wantin’ my ass in clean underwear!”

They manage three quick loads in their mechanical washing machine before Atsumu loses the time war. With only twenty minutes to spare, Atsumu steals the world’s fastest, most disappointing shower and hits the door running.

Tokyo’s Central Library looms into view two blocks down. 10:05 AM.

He takes the stairs three at a time, barreling through the grand front doors and skidding to the desk—and Jesus Christ, there’s already a man waiting five minutes past opening.

Atsumu plasters on his best customer service smile, calves on fire from his impromptu sprint. “Hi there, how can I help you?”

Only a med student would come in this early. Or a psychopath.

Judging by the askew shirt, stony face, and dirty shoes, Atsumu’s betting on the latter.

The man leans in, voice low and deadly serious.

“Where’s your restricted section?”

Atsumu blinks. “Our—our what now?” He squints. “Sir, this isn’t *Hogwarts*.”

Dead silence.

The man doesn’t even flinch. “I’m looking for books on how to disappear. Like, permanently. Any edition is fine.”

There’s a full beat of silence where Atsumu contemplates calling security. Or HR. Or a priest. Or maybe his mom.

Instead, he smiles tightly. “Right. So. Self-help is aisle four. Next to the tax guides.”

The man disappears behind a row of books like the human embodiment of a late-night Reddit thread that got prematurely restricted.

Definitely a psychopath.

Or at least someone who should be on a government watchlist—if not for the request, then for the appearance: mid-thirties, maybe, hair in a suspiciously DIY cut, trench coat indoors.

He scribbles out a quick SOS on a yellow sticky note and slaps it to the inner edge of the desk:

Trench Coat Guy came in at 10:05 AM. If I disappear, he did it.

Y’know. Just in case he makes the morning news.

Devastatingly Well-Hung Young Man Meets Untimely Demise on Aisle Four.

But hey—at least he'd go out with a bang.

Shaking his head in amusement, he pulls out his laptop and busies himself with finishing off some readings before his Organic Chem lecture at 2 PM.

Haraguchi-sensei might not be a hardass like Fukuda-sensei—who eats missed deadlines for breakfast like some academic Grim Reaper—but he still expects genuine effort.

That's all well and good... if the assigned readings even made sense.

Two pages in, and Atsumu is ready to end his laptop's ten-year reign via defenestration.

He allows himself a pause to grab a coffee from the library's only saving grace: a vending machine. If he's going to do this without chugging battery acid, he'll settle for the next best thing—a litre of caffeine, give or take. It all depends on whether he burns off the coffee, or it fries his arteries first.

Atsumu vs Coffee

287 : 0

The odds are in his favour.

He returns to the front desk with some of his optimism restored. His laptop is where he left it, *Organic Chemistry: A Short Course* open in one tab.

He skims the first two pages again.

That goes about as well as his first try.

He squints, rereading a sentence for the *third* time and underlines "inversion of configuration" like that'll magically implant the knowledge in his brain.

He's trying to focus on a paragraph explaining the stereospecificity of SN2 reactions, but all he's getting is:

nucleophile go bonk → carbon do flip.

Trench Coat Guy comes briefly into view; still roaming ominously around aisle four, muttering gibberish under his breath. Atsumu is half-sure he's trying to summon the devil.

Discreetly, he adjusts his chair so he's got a clear line of sight to both the fire alarm and the closest blunt object (a hardcover medical dictionary).

That'll do. It brains Atsumu via telepathy on a regular basis. He's sure that, in a fight between Trench Coat Guy and the Medical Dictionary, the Medical Dictionary will lobotomise Trench Coat Guy and come out victorious.

Atsumu is so consumed by his musings that he misses the exact moment Trench Coat Guy returns to the front desk—until a hardcover book thunks against the wood, nearly sending his coffee into his lap.

He jolts upright, bangs his knee on the underside of the desk, and scrambles to catch his falling pen. He's not sure what he expected when he accepts Trench Coat Guy's selection—but it sure as hell isn't **Vanishing Acts: Magic and Illusion from Stage to Street**.

Trench Coat Guy doesn't blink once while Atsumu scans it. Actually, Atsumu isn't sure if the man's planning a Vegas audition or the most dramatic felony Japan's seen in a decade.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he makes a mental note to Google *signs your customer might be a sleeper agent* during his next break.

The rest of his shift passes quietly. No one can top Trench Coat Guy's dramatic presence.

On his way to Organic Chem, Atsumu shoots Bokuto Koutarou—his friend from high school—a quick text: *hey hey bok-kun! do you happen to have a suit stashed somewhere for a rainy day? i'll pay in cash!*

If not, Sakusa-sama or whatever his name is will just have to deal with Atsumu in casual wear.

Nodding with determination, he pockets his phone and starts running toward uni.

If he takes two shortcuts, he might even have fifteen minutes to crunch down a protein bar.

... Hopefully.

In answer, foot traffic blocks his path in a cosmic ***fuck you, Miya Atsumu.***

Probably not, then.

Corporate Hazing, But Make It Elegant

Chapter Summary

“Very well,” Sakusa says, already rising to his feet.

He circles the desk with a tablet in hand—and Atsumu braces himself, not sure what’s coming, but he definitely doesn’t expect a *pop quiz*.

The screen reads: *Scenario-Based Aptitude Testing*.

“Please answer as concisely and honestly as possible. Points will not be awarded for humor—unless I laugh.”

Oh, *now* Atsumu is certain Sakusa is screwing with him.

Chapter Notes

Wow! Thank you guys so much for the lovely reviews the first chapter received, it inspired me to finish up this one sooner than I expected.

I will admit though my arms are about to fall off from typing all day 😊

Without further ado, please enjoy our favourite clown going in for an interview!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Atsumu stands before the towering glass facade of Sakusa Industries, one stiff breeze away from quaking in his shoes. He’s so far out of his depth, he might as well be gasping on a dock somewhere.

It’s 8:45 AM, but he’s been up since six, agonising over Bokuto’s borrowed suit and the way the jacket draped off his frame like it had given up. Osamu had taken one long look at him before cackling that he looked like a scarecrow at a job fair.

In the end, Atsumu gave up the blazer and settled for neatly pressed slacks and a plain white dress shirt. The tie was a lost cause. He wouldn’t know how to knot one even if his life depended on it—and knowing his luck, he’d probably just strangle himself trying.

He draws a steadying breath and steps through the towering glass doors into the sleek, refrigerated hush of the lobby.

It's all clean lines and calculated intimidation: gleaming marble floors, cold-toned steel accents, a massive geometric sculpture angled just aggressively enough to make him feel judged. Every detail screams wealth, precision, control.

He falters.

Tsumu, yer gonna embarrass yerself to hell and back with this one, mental-Osamu offers dryly.

Shut up, Samu.

He'd debated not coming at all. The potential for embarrassment here ranks somewhere just below mistaking a stranger for a staff member and asking them where the cereal is.

Inner Tsumu—a menace with a talent for catastrophising—whispers that this hotshot CEO probably scheduled the interview just for shits and giggles.

But here he is anyway: wearing a suit a size too big, clutching his laptop bag like it might float him out of danger. There's no going back.

He squares his shoulders and heads to the receptionist desk, where the security guard gives him a slow once-over that makes Atsumu feel *naked*. He glances down, just to make sure he hasn't actually forgotten to zip his pants.

Nope. The fake Calvin Kleins are still safely undercover.

"ID," the guard says flatly.

Would it kill the guy to say *please*? Atsumu fights the impulse to bare his teeth like a toddler. He'd prefer not to be escorted out by security before 9 AM.

When he passes over his ID, the man gives him another scan—then, in a move that nearly makes Atsumu choke, taps the edge of the card on the counter and says, "I see you've discovered toner."

Are you fucking kidding me?

"Uh..."

The security guard finally flicks his hand in a vague direction.

"The elevators are to your left," he says, deadpan.

"R-right. Thanks."

Atsumu finds the elevator without further incident—and immediately begins reevaluating every life choice that's led him here. This might be the most unhinged thing he's done since

volunteering for his high school's production of *Romeo and Juliet* without having acted a day in his life.

A woman—Sakusa's assistant, he assumes—appears the moment he steps out of the lift, like she's been haunting the hallway in anticipation.

"Miya Atsumu?"

"Yes, ma'am." He straightens instinctively.

"Follow me."

She's a short woman with a deceptively youthful face—if you ignored the stray greys woven into her neat bun. Maybe she is young. Or maybe working for Sakusa ages a person ten years. Atsumu's heard horror stories about CEOs.

He's abandoned outside a sleek glass door.

"Wait here."

She vanishes down the hallway without another word.

Inner Tsumu: He's going to laugh in your face.

Atsumu: I'll laugh in his.

Inner Tsumu: Just wait until Osamu hears about this.

Atsumu: Samu scrubbed dishes in a Midwestern diner for three years. He has zero room to judge.

The office door reads: *Sakusa Kiyoomi — CEO.*

Through the frosted glass, Atsumu can just make out a figure seated at a desk, unmoving behind a sleek black screen. A digital clock glows on the wall above: 8:59 AM.

He watches the seconds crawl toward 9:00.

On the dot, the man stands. In one fluid motion, he walks to the door and slides it open with the kind of precision that could sterilize a surgical suite.

"Miya," he says, voice calm, but carrying an unmistakable weight. "Right on time."

Atsumu blinks, heart lurching in his chest. "I—I was early."

"You were early enough to be five minutes late. Come in."

Atsumu checks his watch—he's early, actually. He's ready to joke about Sakusa operating in some alternate time zone where "early" means "late," but the moment he sees the man, the joke fizzles right out of him.

No freaking way.

He stares, momentarily stunned by the *audacity* of a rich CEO also being this ruthlessly handsome. As if *that* was fair.

“Come in,” Sakusa repeats. The man’s hair is artfully tousled, curling at the ends, glossy despite the dusting of silver at his temples. Honestly, how *dare* he make grey hair look like a fashion statement.

Sakusa resettles behind his desk and gestures to the guest chairs with elegant finality.

For the first time in twenty-five years, Atsumu is at a complete loss for words. Those eyes—sharp, charcoal-dark—might as well be dissecting him.

“Have a seat.”

Atsumu sits by sheer muscle memory. “Uh... thanks. It’s nice to meet you, Sakusa-sama.”

“-san will suffice,” Sakusa replies with a flick of his hand. “I’ve reviewed your résumé... It’s rather eclectic.”

Eclectic? It takes everything in Atsumu not to choke out a surprised laugh—because seriously, who talks like that? This man sounds like a book character. And not the chemistry textbooks that haunt Atsumu’s nightmares, either—the *fun* kind he hides from Osamu under his mattress.

He offers a sheepish smile. “You gotta do what you gotta do when you’re a broke uni student in this economy.”

His teeth snap shut a second later. *Right*. Interview. Not a casual catch-up over coffee. He resists the urge to glance longingly at the window.

Maybe if he throws himself out of it, he can land somewhere near the last shreds of his dignity—right there on the sidewalk where he left them.

Sakusa doesn’t bat an eye. He glances down at what appears to be a printed version of Atsumu’s résumé. “You’ve bartended. Can you do layered cocktails, or just basic pours?”

The question catches him off guard. “Uh—I can do cocktails. Is that... relevant to the job?”

“It’s not required,” Sakusa replies, clipped and unreadable.

He sets the résumé down and folds his hands over it like he’s preparing for an interrogation. “So. Why do you think you’re a good fit for this position, despite your lack of experience?”

Wow.

He might as well have chucked that polished glass paperweight at Atsumu’s head. Atsumu fights the urge to fire back with: *Then why’d you call me in, huh, pretty boy?*

Instead, he swallows it. Barely.

He scrambles for the version of himself his mum raised—the one with manners, poise, and more than one working brain cell. Atsumu’s pretty sure that guy still exists somewhere beneath the stress and sleepless nights.

“Uh, well... I mean, I don’t have much experience managing luxury households. Unless scrubbing puke off bar counters counts? Probably not the same thing...” He winces. “But I guess I’m good at thinking on my feet? And I’m... reliable-ish? Mostly?”

Sakusa raises a single brow. His expression remains unreadable, like his face had been carved out of marble—by a pair of very judgmental, very talented hands.

Atsumu mentally facepalms. He sounds like a high school dropout trying to sell gum outside a train station.

“Look,” he tries again, straighter this time. “I know I’m outta my depth here. But I’m the kind of guy who learns fast. Like, really fast. And I bartend like a pro, so at least your drinks won’t suck.”

Sakusa leans back in his seat. There’s the faintest twitch at the corner of his mouth—maybe a smile, maybe a muscle spasm. Atsumu can’t be sure.

“Bartending skills noted,” Sakusa says. “Considering the chaos that sometimes finds its way here, that might prove useful. But managing a household isn’t just about handling messes or mixing drinks. It’s about foresight. Discretion. Timing. Qualities you’ll need if you want to keep up.”

Okay. Atsumu can work with that. Probably.

“Keeping my head when everyone else is losing theirs?” He shrugs, forcing a crooked grin. “Sounds like bartending all over again—except without the tips. I’m not perfect, but I know when to step up or step back. And if I don’t know, I ask. So yeah... I think I can handle it.”

“Very well,” Sakusa says, already rising to his feet.

He circles the desk with a tablet in hand—and Atsumu braces himself, not sure what’s coming, but he definitely doesn’t expect a *pop quiz*.

The screen reads: *Scenario-Based Aptitude Testing*.

“Please answer as concisely and honestly as possible. Points will not be awarded for humor—unless I laugh.”

Oh, *now* Atsumu is certain Sakusa is screwing with him.

Scenario 1: You find a single long black hair in my white sink. It is not yours. What do you do?

Atsumu blinks at the screen. Then at Sakusa.

He decides: screw it. If this man wants his morning entertainment, Atsumu will give him a full goddamn show.

(Internally, he concedes that he is, in fact, a clown on a side-quest.)

He puts on his best deadpan. “I find a long black hair in your white sink that’s not mine or yours? Step one: check for signs of a haunting. Step two: bleach the sink so hard it forgets what hair is.”

They stare at each other.

Luckily for Atsumu, he grew up with a twin and has mastered the art of the blinkless stare.

He adds, after a beat, “Unless it *was* yours, in which case—my bad. I probably panicked and burned a hole in the counter.”

A muscle twitches in Sakusa’s cheek.

If Atsumu walks out of here with nothing but a reluctant smile from this statuesque CEO, he’ll still consider the interview a win. Might even slap it on his résumé.

Additional skill set: clownery so potent it cracked a stone-faced CEO.

Never say never.

Atsumu reads the next scenario aloud, partly to himself, partly to confirm it sounds just as ridiculous out loud as it does in his head.

“Scenario 2: My meal delivery arrives but the soup appears to have oil separation. What is the appropriate course of action?”

Who even *writes* this stuff?

He summons his inner Osamu—equal parts deadpan and resourceful.

“Whisk it like my GPA depends on it. If that fails, I call the chef and pretend I’m you... Unless impersonation’s a deal breaker. In which case, I’ll ‘express concern with tone and vocabulary appropriate to your station.’”

Another twitch at the corner of Sakusa’s mouth.

Atsumu very nearly pinches it. Just... reaches across the desk and gives it a tug.

He restrains himself. (Heroic, really.)

Instead, he channels every ounce of psychic energy into manifesting a real, actual smile from this man. He has a snowball’s chance in hell of landing the job—but dammit, he *will* win the smile.

“Scenario 3: The cat from the neighbouring balcony somehow enters the apartment. You find it sitting on my cashmere throw. What is your reaction?”

Okay, this is just getting ridiculous now. How would a cat even get into a penthouse?

“Bribe it off with tuna...? If that fails, gently yeet it—with affection.”

Sakusa blinks. *Twice.*

It occurs to Atsumu that a thirty—forty?—year-old man might not be familiar with internet lingo. But then again, if Sakusa’s hellbent on making him feel out of his depth, Atsumu will return the favor.

“Scenario 4: You’re preparing a drink for a foreign diplomat with dietary restrictions you weren’t warned about. You have 60 seconds before they arrive. What do you do?”

Atsumu sighs. “Sixty seconds? That’s just dirty. I guess I’d make a panic smoothie—coconut water, ice, two safe fruits, and a dash of charm.”

With a grin, he adds, “Then I smile real pretty and pray they’re allergic to nothing but bad service.”

There’s now a ghost of a smile on Sakusa’s lips, and Atsumu can almost taste victory. He barrels on, spurred by the thrill of cracking Sakusa’s armor.

“And finally: A vase falls and shatters. I hear the sound and ask what happened. You...”

Atsumu takes a breath and stares Sakusa dead in his stupidly magnetic, dark eyes to deliver the final blow:

“Your vase spontaneously achieved enlightenment and transcended material form.”

It takes a second. Maybe two.

(Okay, more like a solid five seconds and a staring match.)

But Sakusa lets out a sharp exhale—close enough to a laugh that Atsumu counts it as a win.

“Ha!” Atsumu grins, triumphant. “I made ya laugh.”

Sakusa quickly recovers. “You did no such thing.”

Atsumu leans forward, grinning wide. “Nope, no—I *earned* that laugh. It’s mine. I worked hard for it!”

For a moment, he wonders if Sakusa’s going to throw him out. But instead, the man calmly rounds the desk, sits, and starts typing.

“I’m going to draft you a contract. You will study it. You will make notes. You will make your way to a local shrine, seek divine judgment, and think thrice before you decide to sign it.”

Atsumu blinks. *Wait, what?*

“I know you’re a university student. Please email me your class schedule.” Sakusa slides a slip of paper across the desk.

Atsumu takes it, staring like it might bite him. “I’m sorry—*what?*”

Sakusa glances up, brows furrowed. “What? Surely you kids still use email...?”

“No—no, not that—I meant—I—yer... offering me the job? After everything?”

Now the frown deepens. “You applied, but you don’t want the job?”

Atsumu nearly falls out of his chair. “No! I meant—I just— I wasn’t expecting to be considered.”

Sakusa sighs, leaning away from his screen. Atsumu panics. *Oh no. Am I talking myself out of a job?!*

“Let me be very clear,” Sakusa says, voice flat, cool, and suddenly all business. Atsumu straightens like he’s been summoned to attention.

“You will be in my personal space. Frequently. Do you understand the distinction between being present—and being a presence?”

Atsumu nods. Dumbly. Mutely. Absolutely.

“Good.” Sakusa’s says. “I’ll print and email you the contract. It outlines my expectations and your responsibilities. And Miya—I mean it. Read it carefully.”

“Yessir,” Atsumu mutters, scrambling to pull out his laptop. “Uh—how long do I have to go over it? I’ve got class in half an hour.”

Sakusa waves a hand, still typing. “Take the rest of the week. Use it to decide if you still want the job.”

That... doesn’t exactly inspire confidence. Atsumu swallows hard, sneaking a glance at him. “You say that like you expect me to back out.”

Sakusa hums, finally pausing in his typing. “Do you know what happened to my previous housekeeper, Miya?”

Atsumu shakes his head, wary.

Without a word, Sakusa leans back, opens a drawer, and pulls out a folded newspaper. He lays it flat on the desk and slides it over like a dealer revealing a bad hand.

The headline punches him in the face.

Live-In Maid Sues Sakusa Industries' CEO for Hostile Work Environment

CEO Sakusa Kiyoomi faces a civil suit from a former employee alleging harassment and the creation of a hostile work environment. The suit claims he routinely ignored labor regulations and pressured staff to use 'unconventional methods' to meet his standards...

Atsumu stares, blinking.

Then looks up from the paper, bewildered, only to find Sakusa watching him with infuriating calm.

“So I repeat, Miya. Study the contract. And only sign it if you’re up to following every clause to the iota. I won’t have a repeat of that mess.”

This man is going to give him whiplash.

But Atsumu still manages a nod.

“Now, send me your schedule. I wouldn’t want you to miss your classes.”

Atsumu scrambles to obey, yanking up his files and firing off the email—only to realise, a second too late, exactly *which* version of his weekly itinerary he’s just sent.

“Oh my god,” he mutters under his breath, horror dawning. He sent the one with color-coded blocks and personal notes. There’s literally a three-hour slot on Saturday labeled ‘*cry (optional, but likely).*’

He doesn’t dare look Sakusa’s way.

If Sakusa comments, Atsumu will have no choice but to jump out the nearest window and let the embarrassment kill him on impact.

Mercifully, Sakusa stays silent. Just clicks once, twice, then says, “I see Mondays and Wednesdays are non-negotiable for you. I’ll need coverage Friday mornings. Can you speak to your professor about moving your review session?”

“Uhm—yeah, I can ask.” Atsumu hunches over his laptop. “How many days off do I get?”

“Two, unless there’s an event.”

Atsumu thinks for a moment. “Maybe I can take Mondays and Wednesdays for classes, then work through the weekend?”

Sakusa nods once. “That’s manageable.”

Sakusa's printer whirs to life, spitting out sheet after sheet. He gathers them with precise efficiency, tapping the edges into a neat stack before stapling them. "I've emailed you the contract. Here's the printed version."

Atsumu accepts it with both hands like it might explode if he holds it wrong. "Thank you, Sakusa-san. I, um—I'll get it back to you as soon as possible."

But Sakusa shakes his head. "Take the full week. I'll see you back in my office next Wednesday. Nine A.M. sharp."

There's a quip forming about how Sakusa's version of "on time" comes with a margin of terror, but Atsumu keeps it to himself.

He scrambles to pack up, now very aware that he's running late, and offers a quick bow. "Thank you for considering my application. I'll email you if I have any questions."

Sakusa barely looks up, already focused on something on his screen. "Do that."

Atsumu grabs his bag and bolts.

He only has twenty minutes to make it to his Medical Ethics class, *and* he's wearing a suit.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," he mutters as he bursts out of the elevator—only to screech to a halt, pivot, and dash back to the front desk.

The security guard holds out his ID, amused. "I take it we'll be seeing you back here again?"

"Not if I can help it!" Atsumu grabs the card and sprints toward the revolving door like a man possessed.

A bark of laughter follows him out.

Five Blocks Later

Atsumu bursts into his lecture hall like he's outrunning divine judgment, untucked shirt flapping, hair windswept, clutching a contract that looks like it doubles as bedtime reading for demons.

He collapses into a seat with all the subtlety of a grenade.

The girl next to him raises an eyebrow. "Did you just come from a courtroom?"

He frowns at her, breathless. "Worse. A job interview."

She glances at the stack of pages in his lap. "Did you win?"

"...Still unclear."

Chapter End Notes

Employment: Questionable. Vibes: Immaculate.

If Found Running in a Suit, Please Return to Sakusa Industries.

Pending Terms, Pending Doom

Chapter Summary

In which a contract is negotiated and a murder incident is avoided.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for 180+ kudos! 🙏

This was a bitch to format, it's 3 a.m. and I'm very much done. Please enjoy (or I'll cry)

It's an unreasonably hot afternoon when Atsumu trudges into Tokyo's Central Library. Not for work. Not for fun.

Worse. For required reading, generously inflicted by Saito-sensei.

The online translations are, of course, a mess. So the professor insists on the “university-approved edition.” Naturally—for maximum suffering.

Atsumu walks into the blissfully air conditioned building and heads straight for aisle 12.

“Immanuel Kant, Immanuel Kant,” he mutters, scanning spines row by agonising row— until he sneezes into his elbow, choking on years of disuse.

“Kant,” he sighs, locating the book with a second stifled sneeze. “I barely ‘can’.”

The Doctrine of Virtue (1785) in hand, Atsumu beelines to the deepest, most secluded corner of the library to have any potential existential crisis away from prying eyes.

Kant's wisdom may still be relevant, but the man writes like a brick wall. Atsumu's head throbs just looking at the page.

Cue case in point:

To annihilate the subject of morality in one's own person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world.

According to Saito-sensei: This emphasizes the idea that taking one's own life contradicts the duty to preserve oneself as a rational being.

So, respectfully, Atsumu feels justified in wanting to cry. Because:

1. Reading a book from the 1700s most certainly violates his duty to preserve sanity
2. Said book might directly cause his untimely demise

And as he continuously reminds Osamu who's his long-suffering one-man audience to 3 a.m. discussions of panpsychism:

Loving to debate philosophies \neq enjoying academic assignments about said philosophies.

Atsumu rereads the passage three times before he's distracted by an ominous prickling sensation at the back of his neck.

He turns, only to nearly jump out of his skin—Trench Coat Guy is bent at the waist, reading over his shoulder like a librarian-turned-ghoul.

“Eek!”

Trench Coat Guy tilts his head with eerie curiosity, now inches from Atsumu's face.

Atsumu scrambles back, nearly falling out of his seat. “What the hell, dude!?”

“Weird book,” Trench Coat Guy says without a shred of inflection, then straightens up.

With that, he turns on his heel and leaves.

Atsumu clutches his chest, certain he's either going into cardiac arrest or defying the laws of biology by growing a full head of grey hair in the span of a minute.

“Whatthefuckwhatthefuckwhatthefuck.”

He can already see the headlines:

Cryptid Haunting Local Library — Uni Student Sacrificed in Devil Summoning Ritual

He snaps a few photos of the pages and bolts.

Not today, Trench Coat Guy, not today.

Atsumu finds refuge in his second-hand study desk. He's dripping sweat—like a pig in a suit too big—but collapses into his crooked roller chair with a sigh of relief.

So much for spending the afternoon studying at the library.

His desk is buried under textbooks and half-drunk coffee cups. But at least it's not trying to kill him. So, yeah—decent substitute.

He unzips his laptop bag—and pauses. The contract Sakusa handed him that morning stares back. He hasn't even glanced at it yet, partly because he's terrified one of the clauses might

mercilessly destroy his last hope for financial stability.

Resigning himself to fate, Atsumu clears a patch of desk and unfolds the contract. Better to read it now before his hopes inflate like a parade float headed for disaster.

Atsumu's experience with contracts mostly involves selling his soul to minimum wage, higher education, and student loans.

Still, something about the tidy stack on his desk tells him this contract's going to be different.

"Here goes nothing," Atsumu mutters. "Let's see what the devil has in store."

SAKUSA RESIDENCE: DOMESTIC CONDUCT AGREEMENT

Resident Employee: Miya Atsumu

Effective:

Welcome to the Sakusa household. In accepting this position, you are agreeing to uphold a standard of cleanliness, discretion, and routine suitable for a public-facing figure whose work requires both precision and privacy.

I. ENTRY PROTOCOL

1. All outside clothing (including shoes) is to be removed immediately upon entry.
 - Shoes are to be placed on the second shelf of the genkan cabinet. Not the floor. Not the first shelf.
2. A designated laundry basket for used clothes will be provided inside the hallway cupboard.
3. Resident Employee is to shower immediately upon arrival on-site.
4. Clean loungewear will be available in the second drawer of the guest room dresser.
 - This set serves as your designated indoor uniform. Each item is intended for single use only before laundering. To minimize confusion, garments will be labeled with the corresponding weekday.

- Do not wear indoor attire outside the residence unless fleeing a fire or similarly dramatic emergency.

II. GUEST POLICY

1. No guests without express permission. This includes relatives, “study buddies,” “bros,” and any form of Tinder match.
2. Violation of this rule is grounds for immediate contract termination.
3. Exceptions may be made during official functions hosted at the residence, for which you will receive briefing instructions.

III. SCHEDULE OF DUTIES

Daily Tasks:

- General tidying of common areas (living room, kitchen, home gym)
- Preparing evening tea and light snack (as per rotating preferences; tea must steep for exactly 3 minutes)
- Watering indoor plants
- Bathroom sanitation (toilet, sink, surfaces, mirror, shower enclosure—yes, *all* of it)
- Emptying trash and sorting recyclables into Sakusa-approved bins
- Visual perimeter sweep to ensure no rogue socks, wrappers, or disasters remain unaddressed
- Dusting, tidying, and vacuuming of primary bedroom (i.e., Sakusa’s room—with respect, precision, and zero disruptions)

Weekly Tasks:

- Liaise with meal prep service to confirm and update weekly menu choices
 - You will be given a standing list of acceptable proteins, vegetables, and spice levels (spice level: 0.5)
 - Do not attempt to freelance meal selections. There was an incident with bell peppers.
- Grocery inventory for non-meal-service items (e.g., oat milk, cotton swabs, scented candles—lavender only)

- Full sweep of secondary areas: vacuuming, dusting, and sanitising surfaces not covered in daily tasks (e.g., hallways, entryway, storage)
- Dry-cleaning drop-off/pick-up
- Sorting physical mail—yes, the paper kind. Flag and hand-deliver anything not obviously junk.
 - Do not open anything labeled “confidential” unless explicitly instructed.

Monthly Tasks:

- Deep-cleaning of kitchen appliances and under-sink area
- Organizing wardrobe rotation
- Light assistance during hosted functions (e.g., greeting guests, coat storage, bar setup)
- Monthly dusting and re-organization of the personal library (shelving order must be preserved; any deviation will be noticed)

IV. COMMUNICATION & BOUNDARIES

1. Sakusa Kiyoomi does not micromanage—he delegates. When tasks are assigned, handle them autonomously.
2. Noise levels are to be kept minimal between 10 PM and 7 AM unless the house is on fire or the apocalypse begins.
3. Do not enter Kiyoomi’s home office unless instructed otherwise.

V. COMPENSATION & AVAILABILITY

1. In recognition of your class schedule:
 - Mondays & Wednesdays: Designated time off
 - Tuesdays: Available pre-10 AM post-5 PM
 - Thursdays: blocked out class time from 5 PM to 7 PM
 - Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays: on call

2. You are expected to be reachable via text during “on call” hours unless in class, asleep (rare), or dead.

VI. CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL

(You broke it, you report it. Immediately.)

In the unlikely event of damage, contamination, or any deviation from acceptable domestic operation, the following procedure must be followed with military precision:

1. Damage Report:

- Submit a written damage log within 30 minutes of incident.
- The log must include:
 - Time of incident
 - Nature of damage (e.g., broken glass, mysterious goo, bleach on dark fabric)
 - Cause of damage (yes, including “I panicked and flailed”)
 - Immediate action taken
 - Estimated replacement cost, if applicable

2. Verbal Notification:

- In addition to the written log, you must notify Sakusa in person or via encrypted messaging app (see Appendix B: Acceptable Communication Channels).
- Do not wait until he finds out on his own. He will notice. He always notices.

3. Biohazard/Contamination Events:

- For incidents involving blood, vomit, unidentified mold, or seafood smells:
 - Evacuate the area
 - Do not attempt to clean it yourself
 - Activate the Emergency Sanitation Protocol (ESP) located in the linen closet (top shelf, hazmat gloves provided)

- Sakusa may summon a professional service should your incompetence escalate beyond acceptable thresholds

4. Fire/Flood/Acts of God:

- Call emergency services before calling Sakusa
- Then call Sakusa
- Then prepare to explain why there's water coming out of the dishwasher vents
- And yes, a scorched pan does count as a "localized fire"

5. Do Not:

- Hide broken objects behind the sofa
- Blame "weird vibes" or "mysterious energy"
- Try to replace anything expensive with a knockoff from Daiso
- Claim it was "like that when you got here"

Failure to follow this protocol will result in a dramatic sigh, a pointed email from HR (read: Sakusa Kiyoomi), and a potential deduction from your salary or cocktail privileges.

VII. FINAL NOTES

While you lack conventional qualifications, your résumé shows improvisational ability, physical stamina, and cocktail proficiency—all of which, unfortunately, are more useful to me than a traditional housekeeper.

Don't disappoint me, Miya.

— CEO, Sakusa Industries

Exasperated by incompetence since 1986

Please see Appendix A and Appendix B for detailed protocols and communication guidelines.

Appendix A: Approved Tea Inventory

(No substitutions. No expired sachets. And yes, the steeping time is still exactly three minutes unless otherwise specified.)

1. Sencha (煎茶)

- Standard green tea; to be consumed on weekdays and during reflective silences.
- Pairs well with solitude, rainfall, or minor existential crises.
- Steep: 2–3 minutes, 80°C

2. Matcha (抹茶, Ceremonial Grade)

- Reserved for Sundays, performance reviews, or days when spiritual clarity is required.
- Must be whisked properly. No shortcuts. No lumps.
- Preparation involves: sifter, bamboo whisk (chasen), and unshakable patience.

3. Hōjicha (ほうじ茶)

- Roasted green tea with low caffeine; evening default.
- May be served warm or cold. Never lukewarm.
- Steep: 30–60 seconds, boiling water acceptable.

4. Genmaicha (玄米茶)

- Green tea with roasted brown rice. To be served during moments of nostalgia, rainy days, or emotionally taxing errands (e.g., interacting with PR reps).
- Crunching the rice is not encouraged.
- Steep: 2–3 minutes, 80°C

5. Mugicha (麦茶)

- Barley tea. Summer default. Always chilled.
- Hydrating and caffeine-free. If found warm, consider it a breach of contract.
- Prepared by cold brewing or boiling, then refrigerating.

6. Western Imports (Stored Separately, Use Sparingly):

- Earl Grey – For international meetings or diplomatic-level socializing.
- Peppermint – Permissible only after late-night ramen.
- Chamomile – Acceptable during migraines or poetry-induced ennui.
- Note: These teas are stored in the right-hand tin labeled “Colonial Relics.”

Appendix B: Approved Communication Channels

In order of preference and urgency:

1. Encrypted Messaging App: Signal

Handle all sensitive communications here (e.g., scheduling, password resets, emotional breakdowns).

2. iMessage

For routine updates (e.g., “tea steeped,” “toilet unclogged,” “did not murder the blender today”).

3. Email (Subject line must include: [TASK] or [ALERT])

Used for weekly summaries, shopping lists, or any communication exceeding three paragraphs.

Avoid emojis unless medically necessary.

4. Written Post-Its (color-coded)

- Blue: For logistical notes (e.g., “dry cleaning at 5”)
- Green: For reminders (e.g., “buy more lavender candles”)
- Red: For warnings/emergencies (e.g., “fridge is humming ominously”)

Place notes on the kitchen bulletin board or the hallway mirror.

5. Verbal Communication

- Acceptable only if Sakusa is not wearing noise-cancelling headphones, reading, writing, in the middle of skincare, or facing away from you.

6. Emergency Contact Protocol

- If unresponsive for longer than 12 hours and the house has not burned down, send a polite “Are you alive?” via iMessage.
 - If there’s smoke, screaming, or something writhing in the sink, call emergency services first, Sakusa second, and your therapist third.
-

No, really, Atsumu’s life *has* to be the world’s longest-running cosmic joke.

He rereads the contract. Then again. Just to make sure he hasn’t hallucinated the whole thing.

Maybe he’s actually in a coma. Maybe some merciful deity took one look at his GPA and decided to put him out of his misery.

...Maybe Trench Coat Guy *did* sacrifice him to the devil after all.

Oh no.

His coma fantasy involved sleep, gourmet hospital food, and maybe a hot nurse. Not this Kafkaesque legal nightmare.

And now, Sakusa’s words echo with horrifying clarity: *Study the contract, Miya.*

Okay. Fine.

Atsumu grabs his yellow highlighter with all the ceremony of a knight drawing his sword.

If Sakusa wants serious, then serious is what he’ll get. Atsumu is going to annotate this entire monstrosity, scan it, and send it back like a declaration of war.

After all, he *is* a med student. Precision is the bare minimum.

Hello Sakusa,

Per your instructions to “study the contract,” I have done so with the dedication of a man on the brink. Annotations attached. Good luck.

1. All outside clothing (including shoes) is to be removed *immediately upon entry*.

Clarification needed: Am I to undress in the doorway? Just confirming before I traumatise your neighbours.

2. Clean loungewear will be available in the second drawer of the guest room dresser.
Each item is intended for single use only before laundering.

Question: In the unfortunate event of a spill or an... accident, am I to parade around nude for the rest of the day?

Follow-up: Will wearing Tuesday's socks on a Thursday result in spontaneous combustion?

3. Section 5: *Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays — on call*

Clarification needed: Are we talking 24-hour on-call? Or just the waking hours?

I'd like to prepare emotionally if I'm expected to transform into a bat over the weekend.

4. *Submit a written damage log* within 30 minutes of incident.

Clarification: Word count? Font? MLA or APA citation style?

Follow-up: How many academic sources do I need for "I dropped a plate"?

5. Prepare to explain why *there's water coming out of the dishwasher vents*

Genuine Question: Is this a known household phenomenon? Should I make an offering to the God of Household Appliances at the local shrine?

6. potential deduction from your salary or *cocktail privileges*.

Exclamation: I get cocktail privileges!?

7. Handle all sensitive communications here (e.g., scheduling, password resets, *emotional breakdowns*).

Further clarification: How many emotional breakdowns am I allotted per day?

Negotiable number: two?

8. “*did not murder the blender today*”

Note: I’ve never, in my 25 years of life, murdered a kitchen appliance. I take great pride in this.

Any implications to the contrary will result in a small, yet passionate tantrum.

9. Avoid emojis *unless medically necessary*.

Confession: I am chronically incapable of texting without an emoji. It’s a condition. Please consult my imaginary doctor.

10. call emergency services first, Sakusa second, and *your therapist* third.

Note: I cannot afford therapy. If I could, I’d be a functioning adult instead of a walking ghost of failed ambitions.

Thank you for your time, patience, and for not blocking my email address. Yet.

— Miya Atsumu

Satisfied, Atsumu scans the contract using their prehistoric printer and fires off an email to S.Kiyoomi@SakusaIndustries.com titled:

[ALERT] Inquiries by Paranoid Uni Student

Just as he clicks send, the front door groans on its elderly hinges.

Atsumu glances over his shoulder in time to see Osamu muscling his way inside, arms full of textbooks and plastic bags looped around his elbows, uni bag slipping down one shoulder like it’s trying to make a run for it.

“Ack!” Osamu yelps as the biggest textbook takes a nosedive and lands squarely on his socked foot.

Atsumu sighs and rises to help. “Rough day?”

“Only contemplated homicide five times,” Osamu mutters as Atsumu peels the books off him. “You?”

“Almost got murdered in the library.”

“Eh.” Osamu shrugs as he drops his bag with a thud. “Not the first time someone wanted to kill you.”

“*Rude*, Samu, *rude*. Who would help you pay rent if I died?”

That gives Osamu pause. He squints at Atsumu with all the gravity of a man doing the math.

“... You’re right. Please don’t die before graduation.”

Atsumu hurls a slipper at Osamu’s retreating back. It flops off his shoulder like a dead fish. Ignored.

The universe is *so* unfair to Atsumu.

Sakusa doesn’t get back to him until two days later, bright and early on a Friday.

The email Atsumu receives is as follows:

[ALERT] Answered Queries by Exhausted CEO

Miya,

Please find attached my replies to your generous annotations.

-
1. All outside clothing (including shoes) is to be removed *immediately upon entry*.

Clarification needed: Am I to undress in the doorway? Just confirming before I traumatise your neighbours.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: There is a designated changing area immediately upon entry. Casual nudity will not be tolerated. Do not disrobe unless explicitly instructed.

2. Clean loungewear will be available in the second drawer of the guest room dresser.
Each item is intended for single use only before laundering.

Question: In the unfortunate event of a spill or an... accident, am I to parade around nude for the rest of the day?

Follow-up: Will wearing Tuesday's socks on a Thursday result in spontaneous combustion?

Sakusa Kiyoomi: You'll find a spare set of each uniform.

Sakusa Kiyoomi Following-up: Wearing Tuesday's socks on a Thursday will result in confiscation and a remedial lesson in reading comprehension. Tread carefully.

3. Section 5: *Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays — on call*

Clarification needed: Are we talking 24-hour on-call? Or just the waking hours?

I'd like to prepare emotionally if I'm expected to transform into a bat over the weekend.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: I'd say "waking hours," but I suspect your circadian rhythm is a myth. Let's standardise to 7 AM–7 PM.

Deviations will be communicated in advance.

If you do transform into a bat, kindly do so off-premises.

11. *Submit a written damage log* within 30 minutes of incident.

Clarification: Word count? Font? MLA or APA citation style?

Follow-up: How many academic sources do I need for "I dropped a plate"?

Sakusa Kiyoomi: I leave that puzzle to your scholarly instincts.

12. Prepare to explain why *there's water coming out of the dishwasher vents*

Genuine Question: Is this a known household phenomenon? Should I make an offering to the God of Household Appliances at the local shrine?

Sakusa Kiyoomi (with rising exasperation): Yes. It is. Is it cursed? Haunted? Possessed? We may never know.

Please do make the offering — and ask your Appliance God to kindly *stay away from mine*.

13. potential deduction from your salary or cocktail privileges.

Exclamation: I get cocktail privileges!?

Sakusa Kiyoomi: Not anymore.

14. Handle all sensitive communications here (e.g., scheduling, password resets, *emotional breakdowns*).

Further clarification: How many emotional breakdowns am I allotted per day?

Negotiable number: two?

Sakusa Kiyoomi: One and a half. Final offer.

15. “*did not murder the blender today*”

Note: I’ve never, in my 25 years of life, murdered a kitchen appliance. I take great pride in this.

Any implications to the contrary will result in a small, yet passionate tantrum.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: Duly noted. Please redirect said tantrum at the blender if necessary.

16. Avoid emojis *unless medically necessary*.

Confession: I am chronically incapable of texting without an emoji. It’s a condition. Please consult my imaginary doctor.

Sakusa Kiyoomi, warning: If you exceed ***three (3)*** emojis per conversation, I will personally emerge from your screen to slap you.

17. call emergency services first, Sakusa second, and *your therapist* third.

Note: I cannot afford therapy. If I could, I’d be a functioning adult instead of a walking ghost of failed ambitions.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: I’ll speak with my secretary to arrange weekly sessions with our staff counselor. Attendance is mandatory. Payment is covered.

Should this email fail to clarify your concerns, feel free to submit additional queries.

—

Sakusa Kiyoomi

CEO, Sakusa Industries

(1 point awarded for proper communication protocol)

(1 point deducted for excessive cheekiness)

Total Points: 0

“Gah!”

Atsumu throws his head back and yanks at his hair, because this guy does *not* look—or act—like his job description.

Across the room, Osamu, mid-bite of toast, manages, “Do you plan to follow that with an intelligent thought or...?”

“Don’t talk with food in your mouth,” Atsumu snaps. Then sighs. “I applied to be a live-in maid for a rich CEO.”

Osamu chokes. “You did *what?*”

“I had to quit my job at Mayu’s, okay? And then I came across this listing—live-in maid, outrageous pay—so I just... applied. Y’know. *Viva la vida.*”

“Tsumu, what the fuck?”

“It’s six and a half grand a month!”

Osamu gawks at him, speechless.

Atsumu winces. “Anyway, we’re still ironing out the contract.”

“Right. So what do I tell Ma when they find your body floating in a river?”

“Uh... that I lived a short, miserable life haunted by textbooks? But hey, if I die, at least it’ll be in a fancy penthouse instead of this dump.”

Osamu rolls his eyes so hard Atsumu hopes it gives him a migraine. “How are we even related? You have zero survival instincts.”

“Sorry I wasn’t born a pussy—you took all of that in the womb.”

Osamu hums, licking jam off his thumb. “At least I *get* some pussy.”

Atsumu wants to scream.

But he has a hunch that'll only make things worse.

So he flips Osamu off, gathers the last shreds of his dignity, and heads for a shower.

Maybe by the time he gets out, Osamu will be long gone—

and Atsumu can focus on professionally self-destructing via mouthy emails to the CEO of a cutting-edge Neurochemical Therapeutics company.

Kidnapping Protocol, Five-Star Rated

Chapter Summary

“Miya,” Sakusa greets him, dry as bone, like he hasn’t just spent two minutes staring him down through translucent glass. “I see my contract hasn’t sent you running for the hills.”

Chapter Notes

I meant to upload this chapter yesterday—then I ended up in the ER because I thought I was having a heart attack. Fun times.

But alas, I persist.

Please enjoy this offering of disaster-student Atsumu in all his chaotic glory.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wednesday comes too soon.

Possibly because Atsumu has clocked a grand total of fifteen hours of sleep in five days.

Possibly because he’s dreading his medical ethics class.

(Most likely because he’s about to sign a contract that has him living in some CEO’s penthouse for the next two years—should he live that long. His sleep schedule promises otherwise.)

The security guard grins when Atsumu stumbles back into the lobby—still in the same oversized suit, still fumbling his way through a corporate building like an underdressed intern.

“Did Sakusa-sama charm you into coming back?”

“He does have a way with words,” Atsumu mutters. *And a fat paycheck.*

Sakusa’s assistant reappears to escort him up and promptly abandons him outside the office once more.

8:58 AM.

The figure behind the frosted glass sees him.

The figure behind the frosted glass waits until 9:00 sharp to let him in.

“Miya,” Sakusa greets him, dry as bone, like he hasn’t just spent two minutes staring him down through translucent glass. “I see my contract hasn’t sent you running for the hills.”

“I may or may not have contemplated that once or twice,” Atsumu mutters, shuffling in. “But hey, I never shy away from a good challenge. See: ongoing medical degree.”

Sakusa gestures for him to sit. “Do you have any final questions before we proceed?”

Atsumu has—rounding up to the nearest ten—fifty.

He settles on the most pressing.

“Okay, this might sound weird but... if I move in, do I have to leave on days off? Like, am I allowed to bring stuff? Or am I confined to, like, a sterile cubicle?”

“Relax,” Sakusa says.

Only then does Atsumu realise he’s sitting like a mannequin and forcibly unclenches his spine.

“There’s a guest ensuite at the residence for you,” Sakusa continues. “You’re allowed to bring personal belongings—provided they’re cleaned before they touch anything.”

“So I *can* decorate?”

“If you don’t drill into the wall or rip off the paint, yes. I’m not enslaving you, Miya. You’re free to exist outside work hours. Just don’t get arrested or embarrass me in front of guests.”

He slides a fresh contract across the table. “If that’s all, sign on page five.”

Atsumu swallows. He picks up the pen. This is it. No turning back.

“Is there anything else I should know...?”

Sakusa tilts his head. “Like what?”

Atsumu hesitates, then blurts out, “I’m quitting my job at the library for this. I *will* make mistakes. I need to know if one wrong move is going to land me on the street again.”

Sakusa taps his pen, contemplative. “If I terminate the contract within your probation period, you’ll be compensated for the days worked—and any immediate financial losses. After the probation, I’m legally obligated to pay out one month’s salary.”

Atsumu exhales hard. Even a month’s pay would buy him time to land on his feet.

“Okay then,” he says, scribbling his signature. “Guess I’m yours till you get sick of me.”

“Dear gods, pity my greying head and don’t burn the place down.”

Atsumu glances again at Sakusa’s silver streaks with quiet envy.

God’s idea of a perfect specimen, he thinks.

And promptly flushes when he realises he’s been caught staring.

Those damn twin moles are going to be his downfall.

He wrenches his gaze away. “When do I start?”

“Saturday. It should give you time to settle in.” Sakusa grabs a sleek white card and slides it over. “Now, pay attention. This is important.”

Atsumu straightens. “Yessir.”

“You’ll arrive at the apartment tomorrow at 7 PM. I’ll walk you through the move-in process and—more importantly—the robes. Am I clear?”

“The... robes?”

“Yes. You’ll see.”

Atsumu nods quickly, accepting the mystery. “Got it.”

“Leave your address with my secretary before you go. She’ll arrange a ride.”

“I—thank god. I was stressed about dragging everything on the bus.”

Sakusa raises an eyebrow. “You don’t have friends with cars?”

“Uh. All my friends are broke uni students. There’s Kuroo-kun, but I’m afraid of owing him a favour.”

Sakusa doesn’t blink. “You need better friends.”

Wow.

“Unless you’ve got a list of broke twenty-somethings I can screen for car ownership, I’m out of luck.”

“Unfortunately, my contacts are mostly international businessmen in their fifties. But if you’re willing to roll the dice, I’ll shortlist the least insufferable ones.”

He pauses. “That should narrow it down to about... 0.5.”

“Zero point five,” Atsumu repeats, deadpan.

“Precisely.” Sakusa turns back to his computer. “Now, aren’t you late for class?”

Atsumu glances at the clock. “About to be. I’ll see myself out.”

“Hold on.” Sakusa picks up the phone. “Shimizu-san, my office please.”

The secretary materialises like a summoned spirit. “Sir?”

“Miya needs a ride to the residence tomorrow. 7 PM sharp. See that he arrives—preferably in one piece.”

Shimizu bows. “Certainly. Miya-san, this way.”

Atsumu throws a last-minute, “Thanks for hiring me!” over his shoulder and scrambles after her.

Shimizu takes his address in handwriting so elegant it feels aggressive.

Atsumu peers at her, hesitant. “Um. Should I be worried about... not arriving in one piece?”

She levels him with a look. “There was an incident. A drunk ex-employee fell out of a window.”

“Oh my god.”

“Be sober, Miya-san. Or I will deliver your body to Sakusa-sama myself. In a coffin.”

He raises his hands in surrender. “No worries! I’m only high on sleep deprivation, that’s all!”

She doesn’t blink.

Atsumu bolts.

He makes it to the lobby and finally stops to breathe.

Officially employed. One step away from financial stability.

Holy shit.

The security guard—*Tsukishima Kei*, according to his name tag—hands over his ID.

“Congrats.”

Atsumu gives him a tired smile. “Might wanna hold onto that. Could get fired tomorrow.”

He’s almost run over on his way to class, which is fucking ironic considering Atsumu has *just* regained his will to live. He flips the driver off without missing a beat. “THE SIGNAL IS RED, ASSHOLE!”

Suffice to say, he offends an entire row of cars driven by stuck up executives and old ladies.

But he makes it to Medical Ethics just in time, which, in this economy, is all that really matters.

(If Atsumu is made to sit out one more class, he's going to transform into the Joker and end everyone in sight.)

While students file in, Atsumu pulls out his laptop and checks his email. (A seasoned connoisseur of shitty university lecturer etiquette, he's been conditioned to obsessively refresh his inbox after one too many last-minute cancellations and 'oops, class moved to Zoom' emails.)

There's an email from Haraguchi-sensei with feedback on their last assignment.

"... oh no," Atsumu whispers but opens it anyway.

Instructor Feedback – Haraguchi-sensei, Biochemistry I

Atsumu-san,

I am... intrigued by your interpretation of enzyme kinetics under variable pH conditions. While your results were, as you put it, "a goddamn trainwreck" (which I would advise you not to include in formal scientific reports), your attempt at humor did not go unnoticed. Unfortunately, neither did the missing citations, suspiciously identical spectrophotometer values, or the graph titled "Chaos, visualized."

In the future, I suggest you:

- a) avoid anthropomorphising catalase,
- b) actually label your axes, and
- c) refrain from submitting at 11:59 PM with a file name like "final_final_DEAR_GOD_FINAL.pdf."

Grade: C- (I rounded up for emotional damage.)

Please see me during office hours if you'd like to salvage your dignity. Or the semester. Preferably both.

“Oh my God,” Atsumu shuts his laptop with a snap and attempts not to descend into the deepest pits of despair.

Maybe that truck was onto something. Atsumu should’ve just let it take him out. Hell, he should’ve volunteered to be its personal road bump.

Above his shoulder, Kuroo says. “Are you okay?”

“No,” Atsumu says numbly. “I think I’m going to fail biochem I.”

“Ah.”

He thinks that’s the end of it but Kuroo shifts seats to join Atsumu’s side. “Shirabu Kenjiro, Kunimi Akira and I meet up over the weekends to review class notes and do assigned readings together. Would you like to join us?”

Atsumu blinks, surprised. “Would your study buddies be okay with that?”

“Sure,” Kuroo shrugs. “We have other people join sometimes.”

“Where do y’all meet up?”

“Either at the library or Kunimi’s dorm. Sometimes we visit a study cafe but I’m trying to save up this month.”

Huh. Maybe he’s finally due some good luck. Maybe the universe has taken pity on his disaster-shaped existence. “Kuroo-san, I love you.”

Kuroo cackles. “I’ll text you when we have our next study session, okay?”

“Please,” Atsumu nods fervently. “God, it’d be kinder to bury me before Sensei suffers the misfortune of seeing me again.”

Kuroo pats his back awkwardly. “There, there, don’t give up.”

He doesn’t *want* to.

Atsumu just wishes he had more time to dedicate to his studies.

“So you signed,” Osamu says when he finds Atsumu packing that evening.

“I signed,” Atsumu confirms.

There’s a pause. Then, “When do you leave?”

“Tomorrow,” Atsumu mutters, distracted. How many boxers are too many boxers to pack? Better yet, how many luggage bags are too many bags to bring? “Hey, can ya help me pack?”

Osamu sighs but quietly joins him, folding clothes into Atsumu’s handbag.

“So...” Osamu starts, chewing on his lip. “How does this work? Do ya still get to come home? Do I... do I need to find another roommate?”

“What?” Atsumu startles, only then seeing the wilted look on Osamu’s face. “Samu, no. Of course not. I’m still gonna be paying rent and groceries, I promise.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Osamu scoffs. “I’m asking whether I’ll be seeing you around, or if you’ve signed away your autonomy too.”

Atsumu rolls his eyes. “I’m free outside work hours.”

Then, because he knows Osamu, and because the idiot is too proud to say it, Atsumu loops an arm around his neck and pulls him in for a head scruff.

“I’ll miss you too. Don’t burn the house down while I’m gone.”

“Shut up, Tsumu,” Osamu grumbles, but the fist he thumps against Atsumu’s back is too gentle to be mad. “Try not to get fired in your first week.”

Atsumu hopes he makes it through the front door at this rate, but still grins.

“Nah. I’mma work my ass off and get that fat paycheck. Then y’know what I’m gonna do, Samu? I’m gonna get us a car.”

Osamu gawks. “I hope you’re sane enough to mean a toy car. Right, Atsumu? We’re talkin’ McDonald’s Happy Meal car toys, yeah?”

Atsumu cackles and withholds the part where he means the kind with wheels and an engine. “We’re boycotting McDonald’s, remember? Think bigger.”

“Bigger...” Osamu shakes his head. “Y’know what? I don’t wanna know. Keep your crazy dreams to yourself.”

Atsumu chuckles and grabs Mr Fox from his bed. “Here. Pack this.”

“Yer taking your plushies with ya?”

“I need someone to keep me company at night,” Atsumu says primly, locking eyes with Mr Fox’s beady gaze. “My lifelong companion. Especially considering I can’t have guests over.”

“Aw man. There goes my dream of seein’ a CEO’s penthouse up close. Steal an ashtray, will ya?”

Osamu packs Mr Fox while Atsumu swats him.

“Samu! No.”

“I’m just saying.”

“It’d be easier to have you bleach your hair and go in as me...”

“Nah,” Osamu says. “Yer so dumb I’d give you away in a minute. Then I’d get arrested. And you’d get fired. Not worth it.”

Atsumu gasps. “Ya sure you wanna call me dumb after you flooded our bathroom last year tryna flush your homework down the toilet?”

Osamu flushes pink. “Shuddup, Tsumu.”

“That’s what I thought.”

Together, they pack. Atsumu gathers his life into two suitcases, his fake plants and posters into boxes. He debates packing toiletries... but honestly, he’d be shocked if Mr Disorb-in-the-Doorway-or-Die doesn’t have soap in his guest room.

So he just grabs his toothbrush.

And moisturiser. Moisturiser is essential—especially when he keeps forgetting water is important and his skin starts cracking like a crusty sponge.

Six salonpas patches for when he pulls a muscle curled up like a shrimp at 2 AM.

Eyedrops for the all-nighters.

Really, just a Med Student Starter Pack: I’ll Die Before I Graduate edition.

God, he hopes Sakusa keeps beer at home for the occasional breakdown. Atsumu would hate to lie on the floor in a puddle of his own tears and wait for old age to take him.

(Old age being thirty, in Med Student speak.)

...Maybe Sakusa was onto something, signing him up for mandatory weekly therapy.

Atsumu just hopes the therapist doesn’t quit after hearing about his existential dread and cup-ramen diet.

He really, really hopes his life’s about to turn around.

He’s due for a break... right?

The next day, at exactly 6:20 PM, a sleek, blacked-out SUV pulls up outside Atsumu’s apartment. The kind of vehicle they use in action movies to kidnap corrupt CEOs or presidential heirs.

Atsumu gulps as an imposing man in sunglasses steps out. He looks like he's smoked gravel since birth. "Miya-san," the man says, voice rasping like an old engine. "I'm here to transport you to the residence."

Transport him? What is he, a cargo shipment?

"Uh... right."

Wordlessly, the man confiscates Atsumu's luggage—confiscates, like it's evidence—and loads it into the trunk.

Atsumu exhales slowly, trying to resign himself to whatever comes next. It's unlikely the apocalypse will kick off during a 25-minute car ride. And if he gets kidnapped? Honestly, there are worse ways to be kidnapped. At least this one comes with leather seats.

The SUV glides through the city like a ghost—tinted windows, whisper-quiet engine, driver silent as the grave. Atsumu spends the ride imagining worst-case scenarios and trying not to wrinkle his gym shorts on the luxurious upholstery.

Eventually, they arrive at a building so sleek it looks like it was designed by an architect with a god complex. Inside, he's escorted straight to a private elevator, standing awkwardly in his white t-shirt like a high schooler who snuck into a luxury hotel.

"You have the key card Sakusa-sama provided?"

Panic flares—and then he remembers the little white card in his laptop bag. "Uh. Yeah. This one?"

The man nods. "Press it to the scanner in the elevator. It will take you directly to the penthouse."

Atsumu glances at the elevator doors, then back. "Aren't you coming with me?"

"My authorisation ends here," the man says cryptically, and walks off like a character from a noir film.

Atsumu stares after him, baffled. Is this a running theme? Do all of Sakusa's employees get a bonus for dramatic exits?

His brain conjures a vivid image of Sakusa on a throne of fire, devil horns perched atop perfectly styled curls, surrounded by the burning contracts of abandoned assistants. Shirtless, obviously. It's Atsumu's fantasy—he gets to decide.

Dragging his suitcase into the elevator, he pauses in front of the glossy white glass walls. No buttons. Just screens. Just vibes.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me."

It takes him a solid minute of waving the card around like a confused pensioner at a self-checkout before the scanner finally beeps. Of course a man like Sakusa would live in a

building where even the elevator makes you feel poor.

The ride up takes forever. Or maybe just long enough for Atsumu to deeply question his life choices.

When the doors open, he half-expects marble floors and a dramatic chandelier. Instead, he finds himself in a surprisingly warm hallway—all rustic tones and soft lighting. Potted plants line the edges, and framed nature prints hang neatly along the walls. There's a runner rug in muted reds and greens, and even a console table with handmade pottery and a large mirror.

It's... oddly serene.

And way too fancy for his sweaty gym socks.

He slows down, partly to admire the quiet wealth on display, mostly to prevent his suitcase from leaving skid marks on the kind of carpet that probably comes with its own insurance policy. Rugs are expensive. Runner rugs are *criminally* expensive.

Before he can even knock, the double doors swing open.

And there's Sakusa. In loungewear.

Atsumu actually stumbles. The man is freshly showered, damp curls framing his face, wearing loose black slacks and a soft white t-shirt that clings just slightly to his shoulders. It has to violate some cosmic law to look this good after bathing.

"Miya. Right on time," Sakusa says evenly. "Please take off your shoes here."

There are two armchairs beside the shoe cabinet. Atsumu starts to sit—then freezes mid-squat when he catches Sakusa giving the armchair a very specific kind of look. The kind of look that implies chair inspections are routine.

"Am I... allowed to sit? Or will the chair file a complaint?"

Sakusa blinks. The moment stretches. Then he exhales sharply through his nose. It sounds suspiciously like a snort.

"Sit, Miya."

Atsumu carefully tucks his sneakers onto the second shelf of the genkan cabinet, like he's performing a ritual. As per the contract he signed. Page one, clause one.

Only when he slips into the provided slippers does Sakusa continue.

"There's a shower through that door," he says, pointing. "Loungewear is in the cabinet. Towels are in the cupboard. A professional service will handle your laundry and luggage sanitation."

Atsumu hesitates. "Sanitation?"

Sakusa nods, deadpan. “No outside clothes or items past the genkan. That’s Rule Number One—and the most important. We’ll cover the rest after you’re clean.”

He bends—*bends*—to place a second pair of slippers just beyond the boundary of the genkan. “Once you’re done, switch into these before stepping into the apartment. I’ll be in the living room.”

With that, he vanishes around the corner. Quiet. Efficient. Terrifying.

Atsumu stares at the space where he used to be.

What the actual hell has he signed up for?

Chapter End Notes

[Kiyoomi’s Penthouse](#)

Soft Landing, Hard Edges

Chapter Summary

“I’d hate to violate the rag gods on my first day,” Atsumu mutters. “Is there a rag for existential despair, or do I just use the one for mirrors?”

“That’s the beige one.”

“You’re joking.”

“Am I?”

Chapter Notes

I’m uploading this from the doctor’s waiting room because I have no self control,,, please give it some love, I’m suffering enough as is

Atsumu creeps into the bathroom with bated breath, half expecting a sponge to leap out and attack him for daring to exist in gym clothes.

What he finds is—somehow—worse.

He freezes.

Ceiling-to-floor windows. In the fucking bathroom.

“Oh my God.”

Ignoring the neatly labeled cabinets and laundry baskets (for now), he crosses the admittedly massive space. It takes him five full strides to reach the window, and when he does, the breath leaves his lungs in one stunned whoosh.

The city is winking to life before his eyes as the sun dips below the horizon. From his spot—possibly in the tallest building for several kilometers—he sees an ocean of lights stretching outward until they disappear into the haze of distance.

Reflexively, he snaps a photo and sends it to Osamu.

I think my boss might be an exhibitionist.

Osamu replies instantly:

is that,,, the fuckin bathroom?

Right? Atsumu replies. *i thought so too.*

He spends a moment investigating a UV-C light box sitting on the counter. He's only ever seen these in Instagram reels—the kind that promise to kill 99.9% of germs on phones but always seemed like a hoax.

Sakusa Kiyoomi, of course, has one.

He figures it's safe to chuck his phone inside. And if not, well—the beat-up iPhone 11 he's been dragging around for five years is past its expiration date anyway. It's a miracle it still makes outgoing calls without bursting into flames.

Next: drawers.

He begins poking around like he's diffusing a bomb labelled “Hygiene Standards: Sakusa Kiyoomi.”

Loungewear. Labeled. Of course.

Towels. A frankly obscene number of towels. Possibly enough to supply a small household for a month.

And then—

An entire cabinet dedicated to moisturisers and deodorants. Atsumu gawks.

He reaches for a sakura-themed tube: *Hada Labo Hyaluronic Acid Lotion*.

Then another: *Curél*. Ceramide-based. Sensitive skin.

On a stunned spree, he starts grabbing bottles like an overwhelmed museum-goer.

Shiseido Elixir. Anti-fucking-aging.

Holy shit, this is high-end for a guest bathroom.

He sifts through half a dozen face wash bottles, caught somewhere between reverence and existential dread.

Foaming cleansers. pH-balanced cleansers.

Atsumu is half-tempted to scream.

The cursed pH enzymes are going to send him to an early grave. And possibly haunt him from beyond.

He keeps one bottle front and center. Just in case he needs to shock himself awake on a lonely night.

Eventually, he gives up—especially after finding a clay-based cleanser—and files it all under Rich People Things.

Even the deodorants come in four formulas:

Spray. Powder. Stick. Gel.

Why?

Who is Sakusa hosting in this apartment? The entire population of Tokyo?

Feeling increasingly nervous, he traipses toward the laundry baskets to shed his clothes.

Is there a special, Sakusa-Approved™ shower protocol? A designated loofah hierarchy? Does he need to chant?

He stops dead in his tracks.

There's a glass brochure mounted on the wall of the shower cubicle.

Instructions. On how to shower.

Atsumu grabs the nearest towel, balls it up, and screams into it.

It's that or swallowing a deodorant stick.

Atsumu exits the bathroom in a cloud of steam smelling like a field of daisies sneezed at him. He spent approximately ten minutes sweeping the bathroom and wiping down the mirror. Just in case. Y'know. Just in case this is an elaborate test designed to mess with him.

He carefully switches slippers and pads ahead in the general direction Sakusa disappeared.

Atsumu falters at the sight of a wide wooden staircase underlit with soft, warm LEDs and bracketed with glass balustrades. The stairs connect two open-plan levels framed by double-height ceilings and expansive glass, glowing like a path of starlight into the hush of modern grandeur.

He can hear the murmur of a one-sided conversation drifting from around the corner of what appears to be the living room area.

“C'est noté. Merci. Au revoir.”

Atsumu stumbles again.

French. *French*. Of course—*of course* God's Perfect Specimen speaks French.

Sakusa ends the call and looks up briefly to catch him standing there like a deer caught in the headlights. “Good, you’re here. Have a seat.”

Atsumu picks the least intimidating seat; a square-shaped ottoman across from Sakusa’s perch on the couch. He regrets it instantly when his long limbs force him to manspread. Awkwardly, he leans forward to rest his forearms on his knees and staples his hands together. He hopes it makes him look attentive instead of disrespectful.

“Before we get started, I have a few essential questions.” Sakusa pulls out one of those digital notebooks Atsumu keeps seeing in YouTube ads when he’s just trying to understand catalase at 3 AM. “What’s your blood type?”

The question catches him off guard, but he still manages to blurt, “AB+. Is there a reason you need to know this...?”

“I’d like to be prepared should you be involved in an accident.” Sakusa glances up. His eyes catch on Atsumu’s hunched-over frame, but he says nothing. “Are you allergic to any foods or medications?”

“Um—no. Not that I’m aware of.”

“Hm.” Sakusa nods and makes another note. “You’re covered by the national insurance plan, I assume?”

Atsumu waves it off. “Yeah, I pay at city hall—when I remember.”

Sakusa’s subsequent glance is horrified. “When you... when you *remember*?”

“Hey, try being a full-time Med student who works two jobs,” Atsumu grumbles, flushing in embarrassment. He feels like an elementary school student caught pulling somebody’s pigtails.

Sakusa sighs. “HR will reach out to get you on the company’s insurance, assuming this arrangement is long-term.”

Atsumu blinks. “Wait, like... actual employee insurance?”

“Is there another kind?”

“The broke student kind,” Atsumu mutters.

Sakusa blinks. Then—snorts, very softly. Atsumu grins. He secretly awards himself one point for amusing Sakusa.

“Just a few more questions,” Sakusa says. “Who’s your emergency contact?”

“That’d be my twin brother.” Atsumu pulls out his—99.9% germ-free—phone. He doesn’t miss how Sakusa’s gaze flicks briefly to it, maybe even approvingly. “I’ll email you his contact.”

“You have a twin?” Sakusa asks evenly, but Atsumu can catch a hint of intrigue in his voice. “Identical or fraternal?”

Atsumu grins. “Identical. I did steal all the charm, of course.”

“Of course,” Sakusa mutters. “Am I going to be mistaking him for you in the streets, then?”

Atsumu struggles to imagine Sakusa Kiyoomi *in* the streets like a commoner. “No, he doesn’t dye his hair.”

“Very well,” Sakusa exhales. “I also need to know if you’re currently on any medications.”

“Nope,” Atsumu says, about to blurt *healthy as a horse* when he remembers he’s been functioning off photosynthesis and osmosis these days. Honestly, the last thing he digested properly might’ve been a granola bar he found in his bag.

“Unless you count Vitamin C,” he adds. (Which, honestly, was probably expired.)

“Vitamins don’t count,” Sakusa deadpans. “Any drugs?”

Atsumu arches an eyebrow. “Ya think I have time—or money—to do drugs?”

“I suppose not,” Sakusa concedes. He closes his notebook with a soft click. “That’s all for now. I’ll circle back if I remember something.”

Atsumu nods, suddenly nervous again. “Are you going to show me the ropes now...?”

Sakusa stands, somehow disarming even in loungewear, looking about a decade younger than he should. “Some of them, certainly. We’ll take it a few steps at a time. There’s a lot to cover.”

Atsumu glances again at the staircase, trying not to sweat at the sheer *scale* of everything. He’s going to have his hands so full, he briefly considers visiting a shrine to ask for divine mercy before an untimely demise at the hands of household chores.

University Student Succumbs to Horrors Wrought by Household Appliances — See Article Below.

He shakes his head free of that ridiculous thought.

Sakusa leads him to a nondescript door beneath the staircase, and with every step, Atsumu feels more like Harry Potter being ushered into a broom closet.

You’re a wizard, Atsumu, Sakusa might say—in a more forgiving universe.

You’re a disaster, Atsumu, he’d probably say in this one.

“This is your room for the duration of your stay,” Sakusa says, turning the handle.

Atsumu prepares himself for a cubicle-sized lodge.

Instead, a cool waft of air greets them, and Atsumu gasps.

He stops just inside the doorway, unsure whether he's been assigned a guest room or accidentally wandered into an IKEA showroom.

The entire space looks like it was designed by someone who believes “warmth” is a lighting temperature, not a feeling. Everything is grey, silver, or suspiciously beige. The bedspread has a geometric pattern that probably came with assembly instructions. Shelves are lined with vases and storage boxes that scream *Pinterest Dorm Aesthetic*.

A desk stretches the length of the wall like a runway for productivity—dual monitors, ergonomic chair, a mounted TV tuned to the news he won't pretend to understand. Even the kitchenette—because yes, this guest room has one—is spotless. Not just clean. *Spotless*. Like the microwave's never hosted anything more rebellious than boiled water.

The bed itself looks like it was fluffed by angels. Atsumu resists the urge to belly-flop onto it, if only to maintain the illusion of self-control.

All of it reeks of quiet, understated wealth. Not the flashy, gold-plated kind. The kind that doesn't have to say anything—because the thread count already said it all.

There's another door tucked into the far corner of the room. Atsumu stares at it, half-terrified. More space?

“The bathroom,” Sakusa says, following his gaze. “Take a look, if you want.”

Atsumu obeys. The handle turns smoothly under his hand—and he stops short.

He stares like the bathroom just proposed to him.

The floor tiles are sleek and cold enough to make him question whether shoes are even *allowed* in here. The air smells like eucalyptus and quiet judgment. The sink is shaped like a ceramic halo—the kind you see in spa ads, where the woman looks too beautiful to relate to. There's a tray of expensive-looking soap, lotion, and what might be facial mist... or possibly disinfectant. With Sakusa, it's a toss-up.

The rainfall showerhead looks like it costs more than Atsumu's rent. The glass is so pristine he nearly walks into it.

And then—tucked behind a smoked-glass partition like it's shy—he sees it.

A bathtub.

Not one of those cramped, knees-to-chest situations either. No. This is a *soak-until-your-existential-dread-dissolves* kind of tub. The kind that says: *cry here, and you'll still look cinematic*.

Atsumu inhales. Slowly. Reverently. His lip wobbles.

He may never financially recover from this room—but spiritually? He's found religion.

“You said your previous maid complained about a hostile work environment?” he says, still dazed.

“This job is not for the weak-willed,” Sakusa replies flatly. “So yes. She did.”

Someone left *this* room? “May I say something very rude?”

“If you insist.”

“What a pussy.”

Sakusa snorts—quietly, but undeniably. A dignified snort, if such a thing exists.

Two points to Atsumu.

“Perhaps,” Sakusa allows. “But I’d withhold judgment until your first day of work.”

Atsumu nods, rapidly. He’s fully prepared to get on hands and knees to polish imaginary germs off the grout if it means he gets to stay here.

“Show me the ropes,” he says. “I’m mentally ready.”

Sakusa shakes his head in faint amusement, already turning to lead the way. “We’ll cover this floor today. Upstairs tomorrow. Let’s start with the kitchen—follow me.”

Atsumu feels—a little bit—like a lost duckling following a wolf into its den. A very expensive, very clinical den, but a den nonetheless.

The kitchen is exactly what you’d expect from a rich CEO: elegant marble countertops, top-of-the-line appliances in sleek black and silver, and a single pop of colour in the form of a lonely vase of white lilacs.

He barely has time to admire it before Sakusa beelines toward one of the cupboards with the single-minded focus of a man on a hunt. He swings open the cabinet under the sink—and Atsumu draws up short.

Because it looks like a pharmaceutical aisle had a baby with a hardware store. Bottles of all sizes. Colour-coded labels. A laminated instruction sheet that might qualify as a minor religious text.

“I—” Atsumu crouches down, momentarily speechless. He squints at the labels, just in case he’s hallucinating. “That’s a lot of cleaning products.”

Sakusa crouches beside him, and Atsumu nearly jumps out of his skin.

There’s a whiff of clean aftershave and expensive deodorant that he heroically ignores in favour of surviving Sakusa’s judgy stare.

“Yes. They each serve a different purpose,” Sakusa says, pointing to a blue bottle. “This one is strictly for stove tops.”

Atsumu reads the label aloud. “EZ Brite Glass & Ceramic Cooktop Cleaner & Conditioner.” He lets out a stunned laugh. “Your stove has a *conditioner*? I don’t even use a conditioner.”

Sakusa’s eyes flick to his hair. “You should, if you don’t want your bleached strands falling out by thirty.” He pauses, dry as dust. “I can recommend a few brands for human use. I’d hate for you to share with the stove.”

Atsumu snorts. “Please be mindful of my budget. I only buy shampoo when it’s on sale.”

“Your bathroom is already equipped with a conditioner, Miya. I’m not a barbarian.”

Atsumu flushes, grabbing the blue bottle and a similarly-coloured rag—only for Sakusa to cut in, sharp.

“Not that one. That’s for the oven.”

“It’s... it’s just a rag.”

“It’s *not* just a rag. It’s microfiber, heat-resistant, and oven-designated.”

Atsumu lifts his hands in surrender. “Right. Rag law. Got it.”

Sakusa hands him the laminated instruction sheet. “Rag ‘law.’ Here.”

Atsumu skims it. “Okay. Yellow for the stovetop, blue for the oven...”

“Precisely.”

Oh, he is so doomed. Majoring in med school and Sakusa school? He should’ve brought a notebook. Or a therapist.

“I’d hate to violate the rag gods on my first day,” Atsumu mutters. “Is there a rag for existential despair, or do I just use the one for mirrors?”

“That’s the beige one.”

“You’re joking.”

“Am I?”

Atsumu stares at him, then sighs. “Right. I’ll study the manual. I’ll treat it as extra assigned reading. My biochem prof does this all the time.”

Sakusa nods approvingly and stands, surveying his kitchen like a general preparing for war. “Good. Now, onto more pressing matters.”

Atsumu dreads to imagine what Sakusa considers *more pressing* than colour-coded rag law.

But like a man on a God-mandated cleaning rampage, Sakusa starts firing instructions like a military sergeant. Atsumu scrambles to keep up.

“So, I start with the living room, then enter the kitchen, but I can’t re-enter the living room after the kitchen unless I clean the kitchen first, but I can’t clean the kitchen without first cleaning the hallway, which means—”

“Miya.”

“Yeah?”

“You’re overthinking.”

“I’m *under*-qualified.”

Sakusa’s stoic expression softens, just slightly. “You’ll get the hang of it.”

Will he?

Atsumu glances around the sprawling living room and open-plan kitchen. They’ve barely scratched the surface, and he’s already overwhelmed. “I don’t think two days’ll be enough.”

“I don’t expect you to have everything memorised in two days,” Sakusa replies. “However, I do expect you to refer to each manual religiously. They exist for a reason. Feel free to take this one to your room and study before Saturday. I suggest highlighting the daily, weekly, and monthly tasks, as per the contract.”

Dear gods, he won’t be getting any sleep tonight.

“Now,” Sakusa says, already halfway to the next room, “onto the pantry, laundry room, and dining area.”

Scratch that—he won’t be getting sleep tonight or any night ever again.

Atsumu doesn’t follow right away. He lingers, glancing one last time at the instruction sheet in his hand like it might stage an uprising if he looks away for too long. Then he exhales a long, theatrical sigh—half exhaustion, half performance.

“I came here to escape a dead-end job, not to be indoctrinated into a cleaning cult,” he mutters.

Having clearly overheard, Sakusa glances back with a faint smirk. “Tough luck.”

Flushing, Atsumu hurries after him, vowing to keep his commentary internal. If possible.

“Samu, this house is insane,” Atsumu hisses into his phone the moment he’s alone. “He has four washing machines. Four. One for outside clothes, one for inside clothes, one for cleaning rags—and an extra one just for me. A washing machine, Samu. For me.”

“Yer kidding.” Osamu’s video feed shows a frown so deep it could form tectonic plates.

“Gods, I wish. And like—he’s got his entire kitchen labelled, his rags colour-coded, ten different cleaning products, and his stovetop has a conditioner.”

“Bruh.” Osamu squints. “Even *you* don’t use conditioner.”

“That’s what I said!”

Atsumu flops onto the bed and sinks into luxury, grinning like he just unlocked a secret level.

“Hey, Samu. Wanna see my room?”

“...Your expression is freaking me out.”

Grinning like a Cheshire cat that got the cream, Atsumu flips the camera to reveal the expanse of his room. “It has a kitchenette.”

“Fuck off,” Osamu gasps, face practically glued to his screen. “Is that a plasma TV?”

“God, I know, right? I almost cried.” Atsumu pans the camera to the study desk. “And I got this dual-monitor setup—it makes me feel like I’m hacking into the Pentagon for Tom Cruise.”

“What the fuck kinda money does yer boss have?” Osamu’s voice is practically vibrating with envy. Atsumu almost feels bad for what he’s about to do next.

“I haven’t shown you the best thing yet,” he says in a reverent whisper.

“There’s *more*?” Osamu lowers his voice to match the gravity of the moment.

Atsumu beelines to the ensuite. “I have my own bathroom and...” He pans slowly, giving the moment the cinematic weight it deserves—until it lands on the new love of his life: a bathtub.

“No. No. Fuck off. No,” Osamu yells. “Are ya *kidding* me? A *bathtub*? Ya get a freakin’ bathtub?! What the fuck.”

Atsumu bursts into laughter, full-bodied and tear-inducing. “I feel like I’m dreaming, despite the horrors. A nightmare dressed like a daydream.”

“Don’t quote Taylor Swift while I’m having an existential crisis,” Osamu groans. Still gawking. “...Does your boss need another cleaning aid? A human rug, perhaps? I’m available.”

“Yer such a clown,” Atsumu chuckles. “I’d ask, but I’m scared he’ll pull out a choose-your-own-dialogue app where one wrong bubble gets me fired.”

Osamu snorts and flops on his bed. “Yer buying me a gift with your first paycheck to make up for this much emotional damage.”

Atsumu softens, his grin crooked. “I told ya. I’m getting us a car.”

Osamu’s eyes glint. “After what I’ve seen? I believe it.” He yawns into his pillow. “I gotta go finish my damn essay and honestly, I’d rather die.”

“Please don’t remind me. I have to finish my assigned readings—and pulling my nails out would be kinder than deciphering texts from the 1700s.”

“Go,” Osamu groans, dragging himself upright. “Go study on yer fancy desk and cry in yer fancy tub. Us commoners cope with cup ramen and Coldplay at 3 AM.”

“Alright, peasant,” Atsumu teases, sticking out his tongue. Osamu flips him off before the call ends.

He’ll let Osamu believe this is paradise for another day or two—before the horrors truly dawn and Atsumu begins his slow, tragic descent into madness.

But for now...

He beelines to the bathtub, fully intending to consummate their marriage.

Where the Silence Lives

Chapter Summary

Atsumu crouches and starts ripping open cardboard. “Ukai-chan,” he breathes at the sight of his fake succulent. “You survived.”

“You name your fake plants?” Sakusa’s voice makes him jump.

He turns to find Sakusa, coffee in hand, eyeing him coolly.

Atsumu laughs, high-pitched. “Anything that’s seen me sobbing over assignments at 3 AM gets a name.”

Chapter Notes

So I got sick, turned into a couch potato and went on a Detective Conan binge, but eventually I had to crawl back here to project my misery on Atsumu. Welcome to chapter 6. Please pray for this man. (Please pray for me.)

Atsumu’s alarm floats him awake at 6:40 AM on his first Friday at the Sakusa residence.

The perk of living where you work: sleeping until the last possible second. Atsumu intends to milk each minute of undiluted sleep like his life depends on it.

He hasn’t slept this well since he was a baby.

“Until we meet again,” he murmurs to his pillow with theatrical longing. “Prepare for waterfalls later tonight.”

Already his trusted companion, the pillow doesn’t judge. He loves his new bed so much he wishes he could spend the entire weekend in it.

But alas—duty calls.

He leaves his room smelling like he rolled in a lavender bush overnight—which, technically, he had, after discovering a bottle of Sleep Spray (a calming blend of melatonin, lavender, and chamomile) promising the mind a full night’s peace.

“Good morning,” he yawns as he pads into the living room in Friday’s loungewear.

Sakusa, far too pristine for 7 AM, glances at his outfit and hums, almost approvingly.

“We don’t know if it’s a good morning yet.”

Atsumu blinks. “Uh... yeah, but it’s a polite custom greeting?”

“Polite greetings then, Miya. How did you sleep?” Sakusa replies, completely humourless.

It’s so absurd it knocks Atsumu fully awake.

“Uh. And greetings be upon you too? I slept like a baby, actually. Can I... get you something? Coffee? God, that’s weird—offering you something from your own kitchen.”

“Technically,” Sakusa says, settling into one of the high white chairs across the counter, “it’s your kitchen. You’re the only one using it.”

Atsumu has a smart reply on the tip of his tongue but swallows it. Too early to be a clown.

“Okay. What kind of coffee do you drink? And please don’t say black coffee.”

“I know I’m almost forty, but no. I don’t subscribe to the ‘black coffee for all adult men’ school of thought. My days are miserable enough.” Sakusa rests his chin on his palm, studying Atsumu beneath the curl of his lashes.

Jesus Christ. He doesn’t look a *day* over thirty. If Atsumu ran into him at uni, he’d assume he was just another overachieving classmate.

“I like a good Spanish latte.”

Atsumu grins. “A man after my own heart. Where d’ya keep your coffee?”

“Top cupboard on the far right—yes, that one. I prefer the Brazilian roast.”

Nodding, Atsumu opens the fridge. Everything is so obsessively arranged, he half expects labels and a diagram. He wonders if a ruler and a label maker were involved.

He scans the milk section. “Regular milk okay, or will you start frothing at the mouth? Should I have asked if you have allergies first?”

Sakusa pauses. “I don’t. Though pineapples disagree with me.”

“Shame on the pineapples. I’ll boycott them in protest.” Atsumu winks, gathering ingredients. He rummages through the drawers until he finds the blender. “Wait—iced or hot?”

Sakusa raises an eyebrow. “It’s summer.”

“Iced it is, then.”

This part is familiar. Atsumu’s worked as a barista for the last two years. It’s easy to pretend he’s just making coffee for another customer—not a multimillionaire CEO in his

multimillionaire kitchen.

Sakusa checks his phone. “Your sanitised belongings will be arriving any minute.”

Right. His wardrobe had stayed out overnight. Hopefully, it survived the horrors of Sakusa’s idea of professional sanitation.

He washes his hands and approaches the coffeeshop-grade machine with reverence. Of course Sakusa would own something like this.

“Will I need to sanitise everything every time I leave the house?”

“Clothes go in the laundry basket. Shoes stay in the genkan. Bags go in the hallway cupboard. Anything else—your phone, laptop, books—gets wiped with disinfectant before entering your room or any shared spaces.”

Sakusa checks his phone again. “Tsk. They’re a minute late.”

Atsumu sweatdrops. Not only is his boss obsessive about cleanliness, he’s also obsessive about time. In his twenty-five years of life, Atsumu has never met anyone like Sakusa Kiyoomi.

“Traffic can be bad at 7 AM! Cut them some slack.”

“They should have accounted for traffic.” Sakusa clicks his tongue again, irritated.

Wow. He’s worse than Fukuda-sensei.

Atsumu turns on the blender, debating whether he’s allowed to make himself a coffee too. He should probably buy his own ingredients...

The intercom rings.

Sakusa shoots toward it like a bullet.

Atsumu starts praying for the poor employees. *Run*, he thinks. *Forget my stuff. Sacrifice it for self-preservation. Run, run, run.*

It takes ten long minutes before Sakusa returns, still visibly annoyed.

“Did they... get everything? In one piece? Or am I now complicit in murder?”

“Yes.” Sakusa grabs a disinfectant spray.

Atsumu’s eyes widen. He follows cautiously, half-expecting Sakusa to wipe a delivery guy’s face down for daring to breathe.

But all he finds in the genkan are two bags and several cardboard boxes.

He gawks as Sakusa crouches and thoroughly wipes both bags before placing them on the “inside” side of the house. The boxes remain outside.

“Please unbox your belongings here and carry them in. Cardboard can’t be reliably disinfected.”

“Right,” Atsumu exhales, weirdly enthralled by the sight of Sakusa doing something so... domestic.

“Your coffee’s ready, if you wanna have it while I unbox my life in record time.”

“I’m not in a hurry.” Sakusa vanishes behind the corner.

Atsumu crouches and starts ripping open cardboard. “Ukai-chan,” he breathes at the sight of his fake succulent. “You survived.”

“You name your fake plants?” Sakusa’s voice makes him jump.

He turns to find Sakusa, coffee in hand, eyeing him coolly.

Atsumu laughs, high-pitched. “Anything that’s seen me sobbing over assignments at 3 AM gets a name.”

“Do you name your textbooks too?”

“Yes. I call them *The Satanic Verses*.” Atsumu deadpans.

Sakusa blinks.

Atsumu doesn’t wait for a reaction. He grabs fake plants and posters and hurries to his room. He returns for a second load. Then a third. All under Sakusa’s silent surveillance.

He’s sweating. Is Sakusa judging his choices? Is he grading him silently?

“We need to go over your meal selections after this,” Sakusa says, crouching again to inspect the boxes.

“You have one titled *Existential Despair*?”

Atsumu flushes. “Uhh.” He yanks it behind his back. “It’s an emergency kit. For difficult nights.”

“What kind of kit?”

Sighing, Atsumu surrenders the box. “Salonpas. Eye drops. Electrolytes.”

“Ah.” Sakusa nods and types something into his phone. “Student despair. I remember it well.”

Hearing Sakusa mention university feels like hearing a priest recall his rave days. Outlandish. Impossible.

“Somehow, knowing even you had student despair makes me feel better.”

Sakusa snorts softly.

Ah! Two points to Atsumu.

He should start keeping score.

“I’ll organise these later. Are we covering the second floor now?”

“Yes. Follow me.” Sakusa drains his coffee and pauses only to place the glass in the sink.

They ascend the stairs, Atsumu trailing behind in hushed awe. If the ground floor was overwhelming, the upper level is enough to knock him clean off his feet.

There’s a second living room. This one features a grand piano positioned before a sweeping cityscape.

Who the hell needs two living rooms?

“My home office,” Sakusa says, gesturing to a closed door. “Strictly off-limits. Only enter if explicitly ordered to.”

Atsumu nods, momentarily mute—partly from the stern warning, but mostly because he’s just clocked another open-plan kitchen. From the layout, it looks like Sakusa’s penthouse was once two separate apartments stitched together with thread made of pure money.

Next, he’s led into a guest room so aggressively picturesque, it looks surgically extracted from a high-end interior design magazine.

Then comes a bathroom that rivals the one downstairs—floor-to-ceiling windows, a freestanding tub, and a skyline view that borders on pornographic.

Good gods. Osamu would pop an aneurysm.

“I rarely have guests stay the night,” Sakusa adds, as if reading his mind. “So you’re not required to clean this area daily. Weekly will suffice.”

Atsumu lets out a tiny sigh of relief. The amount of work he’s going to have on his hands is nauseating.

But then Sakusa opens the next door, and Atsumu gasps aloud. He stumbles a step. “Yer freakin’ kidding me,” he breathes, eyes going wide at the sight of what can only be described as a small private auditorium. “You have a home theatre?”

“Yes,” Sakusa replies coolly. “This one falls under monthly cleaning.”

This is absurd. So absurd he nearly pulls out his phone to FaceTime Osamu on the spot—if only to share the madness—while Sakusa stands there, arms crossed, radiating quiet judgement.

Then comes another bathroom.

Of course.

Does Sakusa rotate his scenic views while taking a shit to keep things interesting? *Sheesh.*

He's not sure what he expects when Sakusa says, "*The library's through here.*" Probably something sleek and sterile, lined with unread philosophy tomes meant to impress houseguests. Instead, Atsumu steps into a cathedral of warmth—light, wood, and silence so thick it presses into his skin.

The first thing that hits him is the height. Two stories of shelves stretch toward a ceiling where light spirals down from a chandelier that looks like it belongs in a modern art museum. Every shelf is backlit, and the sheer *number* of books makes his stomach flip. But it's not just quantity—it's intimacy. The spines are worn. Leather softened at the corners. Some covers are taped. Others have lost their jackets entirely, like they finally gave up trying to look presentable.

Atsumu stares, half expecting a ladder to come swinging down like in some rich person's fantasy, and—yep—there it is. An actual rolling ladder, tucked to the side, like it's just waiting for Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* to burst into song.

There's a curved couch in the middle, white as snow, breaking the verticality of the space like a soft, beckoning crescent moon. A few throw pillows arranged with surgical precision. Gold-trimmed coffee tables—too elegant for coffee. And on the far wall, a framed black-and-white photograph: a piano. A child at the keys. A man behind him, hands ghosting above the boy's shoulders, showing him where to place his fingers.

Atsumu doesn't ask.

His gaze catches on the books again. Medical texts. First editions. Murakami and McEwan shoulder to shoulder. Biographies, journals, poetry anthologies in languages he can't even name. And then—he snorts.

Nutella: A Culinary History.

Framed. On the wall. Like the goddamn Mona Lisa.

Of course.

He doesn't know what's more unsettling—that Sakusa *owns* a book like that, or that he's proudly displayed it in what feels like a sanctuary.

"You've read all of these?" Atsumu asks.

Sakusa doesn't answer. He just walks over, pulls out a clothbound volume, and hands it to him.

Inside: *Sakusa K.* written in looping cursive. Dated fifteen years ago. Dog-eared on nearly every page.

This room feels... different. Even Sakusa, standing there with the weary spines behind him, looks softer. Less rigid. Like *he* belongs here too.

Atsumu drifts to one of the shelves, propelled by curiosity and longing. “*Principles of Neural Science* by *Eric Kandel*.” Leather-bound. Annotated. Atsumu might cry. “This thing’s thicker than a dissertation and ten times sexier.”

Sakusa’s lips twitch. “You may use the library—provided you return everything to where it was and leave it otherwise undisturbed.”

Atsumu gapes, exhilarated. “Oh my god, seriously? It’s not even my birthday yet.”

Sakusa’s already walking away. “Let’s move on. Please don’t drool on the furniture.”

There’s so *much* to admire.

The balcony looks like it belongs in a Bali resort ad. Atsumu is breathless, taking in the soft lights, the warm wood tones, the potted plants. “Oh my God, Sakusa-san,” he whispers.

“This is my favourite spot in the house,” Sakusa says quietly, surveying the early morning sky with unguarded eyes. “Besides the library. Please treat it with respect.”

“Yessir,” Atsumu responds instinctively.

“Now,” Sakusa says with a sigh, leading him to a door that *feels* heavier, different. “Most importantly—my room.”

Atsumu holds his breath, not sure what to expect.

Then—he forgets how to breathe.

It’s not just big. It’s *Luxury*—capital L, intimidating and unapologetic. One wall is floor-to-ceiling windows, revealing the city like a cinematic backdrop.

The bed looks straight out of a magazine spread: muted grays and blacks, layered in military precision. The comforter has a sheen like it’s never known sleep—just industrial-grade steaming. The pillows are stacked like they were briefed. Even the bedside lamps glow at what feels like an exact Kelvin temperature Sakusa had personally calibrated.

A sleek TV is paused mid-scene on some noir film. The actor on screen looks directly at Atsumu like *he* knows Atsumu doesn’t belong here.

The furniture is minimalist to the point of suspicion. Black chair. Black table. Dark console. No books. No clutter. No fingerprints. No soul.

Not a bedroom. A control room. Every surface looks like it signed an NDA.

Atsumu tiptoes, afraid to shuffle too loudly. Afraid to *breathe*.

Still, even in the perfection of it all, there was something kind of... sad. Like the space had been designed to keep the world out, but in doing that, had forgotten to let the person who lived here in.

“Miya,” Sakusa says with gravity. “This room... permits no missteps.”

Atsumu gulps. He believes him.

“There’s a manual in my study. I’ll share it later. Study it. Memorise it. Miss *nothing*.”

He nods rapidly, heart thudding. *God help him*. He’s about to be vaporised by a laser beam of judgment.

“I promise,” he blurts. “I’ll be extra, extra careful.”

Sakusa moves deeper into the room, into a side door—*the closet*.

Atsumu falters. Again.

If the bedroom was intimidating, this is... *insane*.

The walk-in closet looks less like a walk-in and more like a boutique—*the* kind of boutique where you don’t check price tags unless you enjoy spontaneous heart attacks.

Everything is immaculately arranged: suits on one side, all in shades of charcoal and bone; shirts hung like they’d been ironed by angels; belts coiled like sleeping snakes in individual trays. Even the hangers match. Of course the hangers match. They probably have their own monogram.

There is an island in the center—*an island*—drawers sleek and symmetrical, topped with what looks like a decorative reed in a glass vase. Who decorates their closet? Sakusa Kiyoomi, apparently. The lighting is warm and exact, casting soft glows on each ensemble like it’s on display for auction.

And not a sock out of place. Not a wrinkle. Not a rogue piece of lint. Atsumu isn’t sure if he’s allowed to *breathe* in here without contaminating something.

He rubs the back of his neck. “So... this is where clothes go when they’ve made it in life.”

It slips out before his self-preservation kicks in. The silence echoes.

But beneath the awe—beneath the *wow-he’s-so-out-of-my-league* panic—there’s a creeping pang of something else.

Because yeah, it’s beautiful.

But it's also... clinical. Empty.

Like it's hiding what's *missing*.

Then he sees it.

Amidst all the tailoring: a single hoodie. Faded navy. Threadbare at the cuffs. It doesn't belong.

Atsumu's eyes flick to the tag.

"Old school hoodie?"

Kiyoomi's gaze flickers. "It belonged to someone."

He doesn't elaborate.

Doesn't need to.

That dissonance lodges somewhere in Atsumu's chest.

"Let's move on," Sakusa orders. "There are still a few rooms to cover."

A few? Atsumu swallows a hysterical laugh. More rooms. More furniture that probably has its own legal counsel.

Sakusa doesn't even show him the ensuite bathroom. It's just a given.

Another balcony. Atsumu briefly contemplates nose-diving off it. If he leaps fast enough, maybe he can outrun the anxiety attack nipping at his heels.

He's not even surprised at the home gym or the wine cellar. Just *tired*.

Sure. A wine cellar with over a hundred bottles. Of course it's beautifully furnished. Of course the wine gets a dedicated room—wouldn't want it to feel *neglected* and explode.

Back in the living room, Atsumu notices a home bar in the corner.

Would a mental breakdown justify whiskey before 8 AM? Because honestly—he could use a flight.

Then Sakusa turns a corner.

Revealing stairs.

Atsumu freezes.

No.

Absolutely not.

If there's a *third* floor, he's quitting on the spot—

“Breathe,” Sakusa says, catching his horror. “It's just the terrace.”

His lungs deflate like a popped balloon. “Right,” he croaks. “Of course.”

He's too shell-shocked to appreciate what's clearly a rooftop lounge styled like a luxury resort.

“This is where I host guests,” Sakusa says with all the enthusiasm of someone discussing dental surgery. “Usually once a month. I'd appreciate your help keeping them from going rogue.”

Atsumu nods numbly.

Sure. What's a little party security on top of the emotional collapse?

“That's all,” Sakusa concludes.

Atsumu collapses into a chair without a shred of hesitation. “I'd like to have my allotted mental breakdown now.”

Sakusa glances at the time, deadpan. “You have thirty minutes to repack your existential crisis and join me in the living room.”

Atsumu's voice cracks. “Which one?”

“Downstairs.”

Downstairs? *Which* fucking downstairs?

“Whichever one you can crawl to first.”

And with that, Sakusa vanishes.

Atsumu groans into his hands, sinking into the outrageously plush chair. Somewhere behind the static hum in his brain, a single thought surfaces:

I live here now.

With *him*.

And his graveyard-silent living room.

And his serial killer bedroom.

And his actual museum of a closet.

And two goddamn kitchens.

And a wine cellar that probably costs more than Atsumu's yearly income.

He peeks up at the sky. Clear. Blue. Mocking.

"I'm gonna die here," he mutters. "Death by elegance. Just find me crushed under a baroque lamp, or drowned in bath oil labelled 'infused with stardust.'"

Somewhere in the distance, a chime sounds—probably a sensor alerting Sakusa that his employee is slouching too hard on designer furniture.

Atsumu drags himself upright with the air of a condemned man. "Thirty minutes," he mutters. "You've got thirty minutes to mourn the life you used to know... before you were adopted by a minimalist Bond villain with OCD and a tragic hoodie."

The city stares back at him, indifferent.

Atsumu sits there in numb realisation and starts praying to a god he doesn't even believe in.

Please. Please let me survive this. I need this. I need this.

He wipes at his eyes when he realises they're wet, then clutches the ring hanging in the hollow of his neck.

I have to do this. For Samu. For Ma.

And above all... his grip tightens around the cold metal, quietly aching—for Granny.

The Companion of a Very Old Story

Chapter Summary

It's only as he's switching slippers that he hears the quiet notes of piano drifting from the second floor.

He slows, stopping at the foot of the stairs.

The jazzy tune is... sad, Atsumu thinks, a wrench twisting in his chest. It sounds like heartbreak and regret, so unlike the unreadable Sakusa Kiyoomi.

Chapter Notes

This chapter took some time because I'm sick, thank you for your patience! Please enjoy ♥

Thank you so so so much for 400+ kudos I literally can't believe how much love this fic has gotten, I love you all, mwah 💋

Quick note: I linked two piano pieces in the passage for a more immersive reading experience, I suggest you play them in the background!

Atsumu puts himself back together. Somehow. (It may or may not involve slapping his cheeks a few times and leaning over the edge of the terrace to let the adrenaline knock him alert. (Do Not Try This At Home.))

He finds Sakusa in the first-floor living room, lounging on one of the plush, dark grey couches with his tablet and another coffee in hand. There go Atsumu's dreams of having the leftovers.

"I'm back."

Sakusa glances up and takes in the sight of Atsumu standing there.

"Existential crisis averted?"

"More like locked in the deepest recesses of my soul until later."

Sakusa shakes his head with faint amusement.

“Sit, Miya. I need to get your menu choices sorted before you starve.”

Atsumu chuckles uncertainly and knows better than to sit on the ottoman this time. He lowers himself onto the opposite couch, mindful not to disturb the perfectly arranged cushions.

He can almost hear Osamu gasping in shock: *Did you just sit your fat ass on a historical relic?*

“I’m not picky about food,” Atsumu says, trying not to fidget. “I’ll have whatever you’re having...” He trails off, then panics. “Unless you’re having, like, extravagant five-course meals that cost a fortune! I’m already living off cup ramen, I can continue to do that.”

He realises Sakusa is staring at him. He just can’t tell if it’s muted horror, exasperation, or some Sakusa-exclusive emotion, but it makes him squirm.

Sakusa puts his tablet down.

It takes everything in Atsumu not to yelp.

“Miya,” Sakusa says levelly.

Atsumu’s spine straightens with an audible crack. He nearly cringes.

“Y-yeah?”

“It’s an oversight on my part that I haven’t opened with this: while you’re here in my house—be it for a day or a year—food is a given. Three balanced meals a day, for you and for me, delivered like clockwork and coordinated through you.”

He gulps, feeling weirdly chastised.

“When you communicate with Tendou-san to arrange my meals, you’re allowed to make special requests, provided the staff can prepare it in time. Am I clear?”

Atsumu nods dumbly.

“Now,” Sakusa says, picking up his tablet again, “let’s start with your preferred side dishes and finish this before lunchtime.”

Atsumu returns to his room in a daze, armed with enough manuals to qualify for a minor university course, and reeling from the knowledge that he’s about to have a full, proper meal for probably the first time this year.

Putting his room in order will have to wait. He needs to tattoo these instructions onto his skull immediately or his anxiety is going to make an attempt on his life. Starting with Sakusa’s Room of Doom. (Sakusa’s Bat Cave? Sakusa’s MI6 quarters?)

The manual for that alone is three pages long.

Atsumu starts sweating again.

It goes a bit like this—roughly paraphrased:

The employee shall enter with their right foot first, accompanied by a quick prayer to banish the devils of incompetence from their soul. The employee shall change the bed sheets should they spot any unsightly spots, specks of dust, or imaginary lint. The employee shall vanquish the wrinkles of forgotten dreams from the duvet, vacuum the soul out of the carpet, and attack every surface unprovoked with cleaning agents that may or may not qualify as a laboratory hazard.

The employee is also to abuse the pillows with repeated spankings until they kill any lingering hopes and dreams of a personality. They shall then dismantle the bedside lamps with surgical precision and perform invasive operations to extract any dust that may lurk beneath the hood.

All in all, Atsumu feels obliged to fall into a *dogeza* and beg the forgiveness of inanimate objects for the way he's been instructed to violate them.

He pulls out the contract he signed and starts sweating again almost immediately.

What had once seemed like a harmless clause now feels vaguely sinister.

3.1 a) General tidying of common areas (living room, kitchen, home gym)

...except Sakusa has two living rooms. And two kitchens.

3.1 d) Bathroom sanitation (toilet, sink, surfaces, mirror, shower enclosure—yes, all of it)

...except Sakusa has four bathrooms. Not including Atsumu's own.

3.1 e) Emptying trash and sorting recyclables into Sakusa-approved bins

Which didn't seem so bad at first—Sakusa had pointed out the bins in the kitchen, each clearly labeled for plastic disposal.

But then Atsumu realised he also has to empty the bins from five bathrooms, two kitchens, the terrace, and the gym.

He has a strong suspicion this will be the biggest pain in his ass.

(Excluding Sakusa's serial killer hideout.)

Atsumu turns on the monitor in his room, too stressed to appreciate the buttery-smooth interface or lightning-fast processor. He pulls up a Google Sheet and starts building a cleaning schedule that'll somehow allow him to finish his homework and still make it to class.

This is the only way he knows how to compartmentalise.

Class review with Haraguchi-sensei later that evening is a masterclass in mortification.

Atsumu fidgets under the kindly man's exasperated gaze.

"I know you're a dedicated student, Atsumu-san," Haraguchi-sensei says—far nicer than Atsumu deserves after the disaster he submitted last week. "You do well in exams, you're present in class. But your lab work needs polishing. I suggest you stay after class to practice the experiments we've covered until you can perform them confidently. The lab is reserved on Fridays and Tuesdays, six to nine. You're welcome—and encouraged—to join."

Atsumu nods, swallowing thickly. He's grateful. Really. But he's also so furious with himself he's on the verge of tears.

He flunked his assignment because he was working two part-time jobs with soul-crushing hours.

The irony stings. He had money to cover tuition—only to risk failing the semester altogether.

What's the damn point?

Determined, he stalks across campus to the cafeteria. If Haraguchi-sensei's lab is open at six, then Atsumu's going to sit his ass down and wait.

He glances at the time—ten past four—and texts Osamu:

Are you still on campus?

Osamu replies instantly:

Unfortunately.

listen, I'm staying here for extra lab time till like 9. if u wanna swing by to show me ur ugly mug before you go home.

just say ya miss me u scrub jfc comes the reply—but it's not a no.

ew nvm I take it back don't come.

I'll see you at 5.

Damn scrub.

But Atsumu finds himself smiling anyway.

He grabs fries from one of the many fast food outlets on campus and winces when he checks his account balance: under three-thousand yen. Which, by his calculations, equals ten servings of fries for the rest of the month.

Atsumu stares mournfully at his tray. He's going to have to downgrade to granola bars again.

At least on campus. Sakusa, thank the gods, seems intent on feeding him.

Unfortunately for lunch today, the kitchen wasn't able to accommodate his request on such short notice. Sakusa's expression had turned stormy—Atsumu had briefly considered claiming he lives on beet juice and disappointment just to save the kitchen staff—but there'd been eggs in the fridge.

That worked fine.

Now, though, his stomach's growling, and he shoves fries in his mouth like they've personally offended him.

"Anyone ever tell you you eat like a savage?"

Kuroo's voice cuts through with a snicker. "Take a breath. The fries aren't going anywhere."

"Shuddup, Kuroo. I'm hungry." Atsumu glares, but doesn't stop him from dropping into the only open seat at the table. "What're you doing here anyway?"

"Came to find you, actually. Haraguchi-sensei said you'd be around. You staying for lab time? A few of us are planning to go through the experiments together."

"Yes, please," Atsumu exhales. "Mine are a disaster. I could use all the help I can get."

"Cool, cool." Kuroo pulls out his iPad like it's a weapon of war. "Mission Save Miya Atsumu's GPA: Initiation phase complete."

"God, you're insufferable," Atsumu mutters, but he's smiling again.

The lab smells like bleach, boiling stress, and crushed dreams.

Atsumu stands in the doorway, clutching his lab manual like a holy text, whispering a silent prayer to the Chemist gods to spare him from disaster. The air hums with fluorescent lighting and the shared suffering of undergrads already elbow-deep in buffer solutions and existential dread.

He spots his group across the room, hunched over a cluster of test tubes like they're defusing a biochemical bomb.

"Look who finally decided to show up," mutters Kunimi, not looking up from his spectrophotometer. "Looks like Kuroo acquired a new hostage."

"I'm a willing hostage," Atsumu says, donning the stiff lab coat of shame. "Turns out flunking enzyme kinetics gets you a guardian angel."

"More like a devil in disguise," Kunimi snorts.

“Come here, Miya. Time is of the essence,” Shirabu calls, finally looking up from his worksheet.

Atsumu groans theatrically. “You sound like my new boss.”

Kuroo drops a hand on his shoulder and steers him toward their station. Pipettes. Buffer solutions labeled with aggressive pH numbers. Cuvettes stacked like judgmental little coffins. The spectrophotometer sits smugly, daring him to get a single decimal point wrong.

“We’re testing catalase activity across pH 3 to 11. Don’t mix the buffers this time. Last week’s ‘hydrochloric tsunami’ is still a department legend.” Kuroo’s voice takes on an alarmingly accurate impression of Fukuda-sensei’s no-nonsense tone.

Kunimi slides a worksheet his way, face twisted in rare sympathy.

“That was one time,” Atsumu mutters, grabbing a pipette. “If they didn’t want pH 11 to look like lemonade, they shouldn’t have made it yellow.”

The beaker of hydrogen peroxide fizzes in judgment.

He watches Shirabu inject the enzyme into a test tube at pH 7 and start timing. Bubbles form—oxygen, he knows that much. The enzyme’s breaking down the peroxide, converting it into oxygen and water. A clean, elegant reaction.

Unlike the state of his GPA.

Shirabu glances his way. “Go prep pH 9.”

Atsumu’s spine straightens. “Copy that.”

Somewhere in the background, a test tube explodes with a pop like a champagne cork from hell. Atsumu flinches and doesn’t dare look back. No need to acquire someone else’s bad luck via light scattering.

He begins the ritual of reagent hunting: Tris base, hydrochloric acid, a beaker he fills with distilled water, a pH meter, a volumetric flask that seems to gauge his incompetence by how it slips in his hands, a magnetic stirrer that he hopes doesn’t summon demons, and a stir bar. Kuroo watches like a hawk with a clipboard.

“Good,” he nods. “We’re doing a 100 mL solution. How much Tris base do you need?”

“Uhh.” Atsumu fumbles with pen and paper, opens his calculator. “1.21 grams?”

“121.14 g/mol,” Kuroo corrects, peering over his shoulder. “Write that down. You’ll forget.”

God, this guy’s just Fukuda-sensei with worse hair. “R-right.”

“What’s next?”

Atsumu hesitates. Will the wrong answer get him dissolved in acid? “Dissolve the Tris in distilled water?”

“Yes. But how much? And how? You have to write that in the report. Haraguchi-sensei gives points for precision, and you need those more than oxygen. Start with 80 mL, *not* 100. You adjust up to 100 after titrating the pH with HCl. This is where people mess up.”

“Right,” Atsumu gulps. “Are you going to stand over my shoulder the entire time like a stalker?”

“Yes,” Kunimi and Shirabu say in unison, then blink at each other.

Kuroo rolls his eyes. “He got a C-minus. I have my work cut out for me.”

“Run,” Kunimi tells Atsumu. “While you still have a soul.”

Shirabu solemnly nods.

Atsumu glances over his shoulder. Kuroo is smiling with the intensity of someone who alphabetizes their spice rack by molarity. He turns back to the worksheet with renewed urgency. Terrifying.

“The beaker, Miya,” Kuroo orders.

“R-right!” Atsumu yelps, scrambling to begin.

He can only hope he makes it back to the Sakusa residence in one piece—and without a chemical burn.

That night, Atsumu takes the 10 PM bus to the closest drop point and shuffles tiredly down the remaining two blocks to the Sakusa residence. His head hurts. His bag feels like a sack of rocks on his shoulders. Somewhere behind him, he’s certain the ghost of Kuroo’s expectations is stalking him to the grave.

Tomorrow is officially his first day of work, and he’s dreading the mental load of the manuals still sitting untouched on his bedroom desk.

He inches into the skyscraper housing Sakusa’s sterilised empire, past the derisive glance of an old businessman (undoubtedly at Atsumu’s audacity to exist in washed-out jeans) to the private elevator leading to the penthouse.

Atsumu swipes his card and tries not to pass out on the ride up. He’s tired. God, he needs sleep.

But first, of course, comes a scalding shower as mandated by His Highness Sakusa Kiyoomi.

The house is dimmed when Atsumu slips in, the only illumination coming from the genkan and the twinkle of the city beyond the ceiling-to-floor windows. He stows his shoes, places

his bag in the cupboard, and beelines to the designated ‘outside’ bathroom.

As he undresses and drops his clothes in the laundry basket, Atsumu pauses when he catches sight of himself in the mirror.

He’d long lost the muscle definition of his coaching days, but this—the wilted inanition of his frame, the soft belly nearly concave, the once-sharp line of his shoulders now slouched with exhaustion—makes his stomach drop. He traces the faint impression of his ribs and sighs.

Atsumu has never been skinnier in his life, not even as a high schooler. He knows the culprit: the terrible broke uni student diet. With a second sigh, he ignores his reflection and heads for the shower, scrubbing until the reek of stress is replaced by the gentle scent of lavender.

Tiredly, he slips into the second clean set of Friday’s loungewear—plain black slacks and a loose white shirt that dips low, baring the sharp cut of his collarbone.

It’s only as he’s switching slippers that he hears the quiet notes of piano drifting from the second floor.

He slows, stopping at the foot of the stairs.

The [jazzy tune](#) is... sad, Atsumu thinks, a wrench twisting in his chest. It sounds like heartbreak and regret, so unlike the unreadable Sakusa Kiyoomi.

Atsumu retreats to his room, to the contract, to Appendix A.

Sencha tea seems like an appropriate choice. (Standard green tea; to be consumed on weekdays and during reflective silences. Pairs well with solitude, rainfall, or minor existential crises—Sakusa’s notes indicate.)

Armed with this knowledge and the discomfitingly detailed instructions to use 80°C water and steep for three minutes (or face imminent destruction, probably), Atsumu sets out to prepare Sakusa tea.

It’s past his working hours—hell, Atsumu hasn’t even officially started. And yet, as he waits for the kettle and readies a thermometer (Precision, Atsumu, Kuroo’s voice echoes), he hears the same piano chords, repeated over and over again, as though determined to tug his weary heartstrings threadbare.

Quietly, with the tea in hand, Atsumu ascends the stairs.

Sakusa’s back is to him, fingers dancing across the keys. His broad shoulders are hunched beneath a plain white t-shirt, curls artfully disheveled—as though even they don’t know how to be messy.

Atsumu clears his throat, very softly, before stepping closer.

The notes halt, and Sakusa’s gaze snaps toward him. “Miya,” he says. His voice is rough. He sounds tired.

“Sakusa-san,” Atsumu replies, gently offering the sencha.

Sakusa stares at it before accepting it cautiously. “What’s this?”

“Sencha.”

Sakusa frowns. “No, I know that. But why?”

Atsumu bites his lip. “It sounded like... you could use tea for solitude.”

The crease between Sakusa’s brows smooths into something faint and surprised. “Oh.”

Atsumu nods, stepping back a little. He glances at the piano. It’s old—he can tell by the slight yellowing of the keys, despite the still-glossy surface. “I didn’t recognise the tune. But it’s... beautiful, like broken things are. I—I don’t know why I said that. But I meant it in a good way. It sounds sad, but in an enduring way. Like it refuses to break, even in silence.”

Silently, Sakusa turns back to the piano. Atsumu exhales shakily.

Then—

“I composed this when I was a first-year uni student.”

Atsumu’s breath catches. “Really?”

“Mm.”

Sakusa sips the tea. Then, to Atsumu’s surprise, he sets it atop the piano and resumes playing, fingers slipping back into muscle memory.

Up close, the music flutters between Atsumu’s ribs like a bird with a broken wing. It sounds even sadder now. Lonelier.

“What’s it called?”

Sakusa doesn’t look at him. Doesn’t answer. Just plays.

Atsumu feels like a voyeur, witnessing something not meant for him. A shard of Sakusa poking through the armour.

“I’ll Never Be the Same,” Sakusa says at last. “I don’t think I’ve ever told anyone that.”

Atsumu swallows, moved.

“And you’re right,” Sakusa adds softly as the melody begins to fade. “It’s a broken thing.”

Oh.

Atsumu hugs himself, suddenly cold. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Sakusa murmurs, his gaze drifting to the glittering skyline. His smile is faint and wistful, like a tear lingering in a corner of his eye. “It’s the companion of a very old story.”

Atsumu can’t help himself. “Old story?”

“More like the ghost of a short-lived one,” Sakusa replies, almost to himself. He sips the tea. “Go to sleep, Miya. You’ve got a long day tomorrow.”

“Right.” Atsumu nods. “Goodnight, Sakusa-san. I... hope your story heals. And finds a happy ending.”

Sakusa blinks. His dark eyes find Atsumu’s in mute surprise.

At last, he nods.

Atsumu turns and retreats quickly to his room, heart pounding.

What the hell was that?

As he slips into bed, the piano begins again—a [new song](#), slow and desolate. It clutches his throat with invisible hands, and he finds himself aching for the ghost of someone else’s forgotten love.

He shuts his eyes and wills sleep to come, while the music weeps into the night.

One key of mourning at a time.

Ghosts Don't Knock

Chapter Summary

“At work I’m surrounded by corporate-speak and false flattery.” Sakusa continues, gaze heavy. “My ex-housekeeper pretended to be honourable and dedicated. She started abusing my trust immediately, slacked off in my absence, and smiled to my face like I’d never notice.”

Atsumu swallows as Sakusa’s eyes darken—like black holes folding inward, collapsing under the weight of their own gravity.

“But you, Miya…” Sakusa shakes his head, as though he still finds it unbelievable. “That first day, in my office. When you opened your mouth and immediately stuck your foot in it—I have to say… I was pleasantly surprised.”

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the longest chapter of TMLTL yet! This one was a joy to write (see: going into a writing coma and emerging with 3.5k+ words).

I hope you enjoy! Can’t wait to hear everyone’s thoughts 🥰

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Sakusa is waiting for him at the foot of the stairs bright and early the next morning. All emotions and vulnerabilities are neatly tucked away, as if they never existed.

Atsumu briefly wonders if he hallucinated the sad figure at the piano.

“Good morning—” Atsumu begins, then stops himself. He can feel his mouth quivering with a faint smile as he amends, “I mean, polite greetings, Sakusa-san.”

Sakusa blinks.

Then very softly huffs. “‘Polite greetings’ to you too, Miya. I hope you slept well. I need to go through everything with you once—before I hand over the reins. I need your brain fully functional for that.”

Atsumu salutes. “Aye, captain. Seven hours of sleep successfully acquired. No abnormalities present, and brain functioning at full capacity… plus an inordinate amount of coffee.”

Lips twitching, Sakusa turns around—undoubtedly smiling a little, Atsumu tells himself, pleased.

“Where to?” Atsumu asks, falling into step with Sakusa, who ascends one elegant stair at a time. “The bat cave?”

“Miya, if I find a single bat in my bedroom, I’m burning the house down with its occupants. That includes you,” Sakusa says blankly, then throws Atsumu a look over his shoulder that spells quiet sarcasm and muted humour. “As previously negotiated: should you turn into a bat, do so off-premises.”

Atsumu snorts. “Yessir.”

Just to be safe, he pauses at the doorway to offer a prayer. “Oh merciful gods of Clorox and Dettol, grant me the strength to vanquish thy germs.”

Sakusa *rolls his eyes*.

New level of clownery: achieved. Atsumu has officially levelled up his game.

“I don’t even use Clorox,” Sakusa mutters, tone bordering on offended. “I use Kabi Killer. Have you even looked under the sink?”

“Sorry,” Atsumu rubs the back of his neck, trying—and failing—to look apologetic. “I spent the night cramming pH titration into my skull. Sanitation protocols didn’t make the cut.”

Sakusa gives him a look. “Clorox is sodium hypochlorite. So is Kabi Killer. You’re not memorising a new element, Miya.”

“Didn’t realise you were the periodic table police,” Atsumu mumbles, a little impressed despite himself.

Sakusa’s eyes narrow, deadly calm. “Bleach is alkaline. It denatures proteins. If you’re planning to bring pathogens into my house, the least you can do is understand the mechanism by which I’ll eradicate them.”

Atsumu blinks. “You memorised that?”

“Basic hygiene,” Sakusa deadpans, “and frankly, survival.”

Atsumu huffs, folding his arms. “Well, sodium hypochlorite is effective, sure, but it’s unstable in sunlight and degrades into saltwater. Hydrogen peroxide’s more environmentally safe and decomposes into water and oxygen. Bet your ‘Kabi Killer’ can’t boast that.”

Sakusa blinks. Once. Twice.

Atsumu grins. “Also, bleach can produce chlorinated VOCs in closed spaces, especially when mixed with acids. So I hope you’re ventilating the room properly, Sakusa-san.”

Sakusa stares like he's grown a second head. "...Did you just try to shame me with oxidative degradation?"

"No," Atsumu says, swallowing his smugness with effort. "I just assumed someone who sterilises their doorknobs twice daily would care about free radicals."

Sakusa's jaw ticks. He doesn't rebuff Atsumu. Instead, with an air of indignation (as if Atsumu has committed sacrilege—which, in Sakusa-speak, he probably has), he says: "Go stand in the corner."

Atsumu's jaw drops, scandalised. "Am I... being given a time out?"

"Maybe," Sakusa replies blankly, and slides open a cabinet cut into the wall and framed with sleek sliding doors. Atsumu had previously thought the large black panels were decorative.

"Here," Sakusa pulls out a truly magnificent household appliance. "I'll show you what cleaners to use. This is a vacuum cleaner—"

"I know what a vacuum cleaner is—"

"—equipped with a HEPA filter," Sakusa finishes with a mild glare. "You'll befriend my trusted Dyson. You'll use it to clean my room daily. This includes under the bed and behind furniture."

Feeling chastised, Atsumu nods, crossing his arms as Sakusa explains—pointedly—about the benzalkonium chloride-based disinfectant he uses: less harsh than bleach, still effective against bacteria and viruses. Atsumu must have touched a nerve.

Maybe Sakusa has a master's degree in cleaning chemicals he's failed to mention. Atsumu's eyes flick to the walls, wondering if there's a diploma hanging like a trophy. There isn't. Just pristine dark walls and silence.

The glass and mirror cleaner, Sakusa tells him with another pointed glare, is an ammonia-free, streak-free formula.

Atsumu *definitely* touched a nerve.

When Sakusa brings out a UV sanitising wand—without irony—Atsumu gives up.

They go through the room together, Sakusa narrating the cleaning process step by agonising step. Atsumu must dust first, vacuum last.

The ensuite bathroom doubles as a modest closet for industrial-grade cleaners, rivaling the kitchen downstairs.

He can hear Kuroo's voice whispering over his shoulder to take notes.

He pulls his phone out and starts typing rapidly.

When Sakusa looks over and sees him on his phone, his face begins to scrunch in annoyance—until Atsumu quickly interjects that he’s taking notes.

The disapproval vanishes, replaced with satisfaction. Atsumu exhales in relief. *Scary.*

Kuroo’s imaginary voice in the back of his head is somewhere between a documentary narrator and a deranged cheerleader: *‘Observe the diligent Miya Atsumu, taming the wild jungle of disinfection with nothing but sheer charm and mobile Wi-Fi.’*

They go through each room. Atsumu’s Google Doc bluntly tells him: 2,768 words. Jesus Christ. Sakusa had him write an *essay*—on his feet. But hey, at least he’s less likely to be beamed up by vengeful aliens, thanks to his detailed documentation.

...They’ll probably burn their alien-y eyes staring at the chemical formulas Atsumu is now accidentally memorising by sheer muscle memory and a pathological need to overachieve.

By the time they make it back to the kitchen, Atsumu’s head is spinning. He sets his phone down and runs his fingers through his now-soft—courtesy of Sakusa’s fancy shampoo—hair. “Okay,” he breathes. Then meets Sakusa’s tense gaze. “I think I got everything.”

“Think?”

“Uh. I meant I got it all down here.” Atsumu waves his phone, lungs seizing. “Down to the iota. Look—I even quoted you. ‘Scrub like your life depends on it, Miya.’”

Satisfied, Sakusa nods. “Good. Because I have to head to the office now.”

Right. Sakusa Kiyoomi is the CEO of a multi-million-dollar company. He can’t babysit Atsumu.

“Okay,” Atsumu manages, heading for the cupboard under the sink to retrieve the first set of cleaning agents. “I’ll start immediately.”

He’s pulling out the fourth product when Sakusa says—very softly—“Do you know why I hired you, Miya?”

Atsumu vaguely recalls being asked a similar question last week, but can’t remember a good answer. “Um... I guess... I guess ‘cause I’m studious enough to memorise your form of religious text from a manual?”

When Sakusa doesn’t even offer an amused huff, Atsumu’s spine straightens. “Sorry. I don’t really know. I’m still tryna figure out where I fit in your fancy mansion. It’s really, really intimidating.”

“That,” Sakusa says, short and factual.

“That...?” Atsumu parrots, confused.

“Your mouth has no filter.”

He doesn't say it like an insult, but indignation rises anyway. *Hey*. There's no need to call him out like *that*.

"At work I'm surrounded by corporate-speak and false flattery." Sakusa continues, gaze heavy. "My ex-housekeeper pretended to be honourable and dedicated. She started abusing my trust immediately, slacked off in my absence, and smiled to my face like I'd never notice."

Atsumu swallows as Sakusa's eyes darken—like black holes folding inward, collapsing under the weight of their own gravity.

"But you, Miya..." Sakusa shakes his head, as though he still finds it unbelievable. "That first day, in my office. When you opened your mouth and immediately stuck your foot in it—I have to say... I was pleasantly surprised."

What kind of goddamn backhanded compliment was that? Atsumu feels his face heat with equal parts mortification and flattery.

"I didn't realise how refreshing it would be to hear someone's internal monologue broadcasted so plainly. Unfortunately for you, I was reluctantly charmed. So I hired you, Miya—with the hope that my trust will be safe with you."

That lands like a weight in Atsumu's chest. He stares at his feet, trying to hide what is undoubtedly an open-book expression from Sakusa's dissecting eyes.

"I'm in a very confusing liminal space between flattered and insulted," he mutters. "In case you wanted to know."

"Hm. I had a feeling," Sakusa agrees, glancing at his phone. He turns on his heel—because of course he does. Atsumu's filter is made of tissue paper and Sakusa just walked through it.

"Look," Atsumu blurts, hands shoved in his pockets. Trying for aloof and failing by a mile. "I really value this job. Everything you've offered. I'll... I'll make sure to live up to your trust, okay?"

Sakusa's expression softens—barely. Atsumu hadn't realised he was tense until the tension began to unwind.

"Good. I'll see you in the evening, Miya. Keep your phone nearby should I need to contact you."

"Yessir," Atsumu calls to his retreating figure, then turns to face his new companions. "Interesting guy," he tells Kitchen Haiter.

Next to it, Toilet Haiter stands quietly judgmental.

"Don't look at me like that," Atsumu sighs, turning to the sink. "I don't have bleach in my veins like you."

Which—considering his current employer—seems like a fundamental flaw.

Briefly, Atsumu considers a life in which a harsh cleaning product envelopes him like a symbiote, making up for his shortcomings. Like Eddie Brock and Venom.

He eyes Toilet Haiter. Judging. “Miya Atsumu and Haiter. Not too bad.”

Toilet Haiter somehow manages to become even more aggressively judgmental.

Atsumu ignores it and turns on the tap. “You can’t turn into gross black goo though, or we’ll both be banished to the 9th circle of hell.”

At least *that* he can imagine Haiter agreeing with.

Atsumu nods to himself. They officially have an understanding.

And he’s officially gone clinically (cleaningly?) insane.

All in a day’s work.

Entering Sakusa’s bedroom in his absence feels like cracking open Pandora’s box.

A hush greets him, followed by a blast of cool air and tentative sunbeams pressing against the windows, like they’re afraid to invade a sacred space.

Atsumu inches in with bated breath, and pauses by the closet where Sakusa has his colour-coded electrostatic wipes because of course he does. Microdust is the enemy after all. Electrostatic wipes trap particles without spreading them. Sakusa wouldn’t tolerate a feather duster—too imprecise.

Atsumu smiles helplessly—he’s already learned the guy in less than 48 hours. If only his sponge of a brain can absorb titration formulas as easily.

He starts with the nightstands. They’re bare save for the lamps. No photos, no books, no trinkets. Atsumu’s bedside cabinet back at the apartment is crowded with water bottles and nearly expired vitamins, garnished with the occasional tissue when he has the sniffles. Sakusa would be scandalised if he saw it.

Just as he cracks open the drawer—with the intention of going above and beyond by wiping down the interior—Atsumu catches himself and shuts it abruptly. That would be... an invasion of privacy.

No matter how curious the aloof Sakusa Kiyoomi makes him—with those unreadable glances and muted undercurrents of sadness—Atsumu promised to hold his trust in safe hands.

No snooping.

Behind him, Sakusa’s cleaning products seem to hum with approval.

It takes him the better part of an hour, dusting, vacuuming, wiping down mirrors and windows, getting on his hands and knees to perform surgery on Sakusa's lamps, even ironing the bed sheets with the UV light that makes him feel like he's in a sci-fi movie.

The bathroom involves a tense reunion with Toilet Haiter—capitalised, obviously. They're on a first name basis now. Flicking open the cap splatters a drop his way though, which honestly, *rude*. "You'll warm up to me yet," Atsumu says and proceeds to shove the bottle in the bowl.

Small pleasures.

Cleaning the bathrooms takes... well. Atsumu loses track of time for a little bit. He retrieves his phone and earbuds at some point to blast upbeat music—read: Sabrina Carpenter—to stave off death-by-boredom. This must be how Cinderella felt scrubbing that mansion.

What's most surprising—or perhaps least surprising—is how minimal the trash is outside of Sakusa's personal bathroom and the kitchen. The rest of the penthouse is too... untouched.

Atsumu pauses outside the gym door and just... looks around. At the pristine, unlived-in couch, at the upstairs kitchen that looks more like a showroom than somewhere you'd make dinner. It's so... lonely.

Every corner feels steeped in it.

The tune from yesterday hums in the back of his head like a backdrop to the isolation tucked in the nooks and crannies of Sakusa Kiyoomi's penthouse.

While checking the gym (carefully avoiding his reflection and the reminder of all he gave up in the student-life grind), he finds himself... searching. For a trace of Sakusa. Something *real*.

It's as though only a ghost lives here.

Discomfited, Atsumu retreats to water the plants, the only other living organism inhabiting the place. It's all clean lines and structured growth and low pollen.

ZZ plants in the living room rest calmly on low tables. Fiddle-leaf figs, dramatic in their sculptural pots. And—of course—snake plants: NASA-approved air purifiers with the same uptight posture as Sakusa himself.

Atsumu is completely unsurprised by the Eucalyptus in the bathroom. It *smells* like antiseptic. Probably Sakusa's favourite scent after lavender. Atsumu has a vivid mental image of the man sniffing ethanol like a drug addict high on paint thinner.

Ludicrous. He briefly considers booking a neurologist to confirm he hasn't fully descended into clownery.

In the kitchen, there's mint growing in hydroponic pods because even *herbs* need to be elegantly contained, apparently. Possibly part of Sakusa's chemical obsession—edible plants

grown in nutrient-balanced water.

Nothing surprises him anymore.

Well. Almost nothing.

Because he is surprised by the white peace lily in the walk-in closet. It gives the impression of a rule-breaking plant, organic amidst the sterile surfaces. It's soft and alive—

And toxic to pets, actually.

But Sakusa doesn't have a pet. He has a Dyson.

Atsumu snorts.

He does a quick 'visual perimeter sweep to ensure no rogue socks, wrappers, or disasters remain unaddressed', and falters.

Because there it is again.

The hoodie.

That faded navy hoodie. Out of place among designer jackets, sticking out like a sore thumb.

It looks like something *he'd* wear to a high school reunion.

Drawing cautiously closer—as though disturbing the hoodie might awaken a closet skeleton, literally—Atsumu runs his fingers along the soft, worn material.

It's unexpectedly warm. Like someone had recently worn it.

Atsumu tugs gently at the collar—and spies the faded kanji on the tag.

飯綱 掌. *Iizuna Tsukasa.*

Iizuna?

He eases the hoodie further off the hanger, revealing large text across the back.

Itachiyama, Class of 2004.

So it *is* a high school hoodie.

When the hanger slips off the rack, Atsumu yelps and clutches the hoodie like a lifeline. "Jesus fucking christ," he says, heart pounding.

If Sakusa was here, he'd probably be fired on the spot.

Atsumu slides the hoodie back into place, preparing to flee the scene, when he notices a slip of paper poking out of the hoodie's front pocket.

He blinks. *Was that meant to be there?*

Before he can talk himself out of it, he plucks it free.

The paper is old, worn by time, folded into neat quadrants. Atsumu opens it carefully.

A notebook page ripped messily from the spine, so unlike anything the obsessively neat Sakusa Kiyoomi would keep.

Keep this safe for me until I make it big, will you?

The handwriting is hurried, but each stroke feels intentional. Thought out.

Atsumu blinks.

Then *drops* the paper like it burned him.

What the *hell* is he doing?

This is a *complete* violation of privacy, and undoubtedly a breach of trust.

Atsumu hurriedly returns it to the pocket the way he found it, and scrambles downstairs with his heart in his throat. Oh, God. Why is he like this?

He just has to shove his nose in everything.

The house is spotless now, meticulously scrubbed the way he'd been instructed by his duly notes.

When Atsumu absently checks the time, his heart nearly stops.

"Shit!"

Atsumu scrambles to the landline and fumbles with his phone for Tendou-san's number.

"Salut, bon aprèm!" greets a cheerful voice, and Atsumu almost trips over the counter in panic. *Is he supposed to order in French?* He wouldn't put it past Sakusa Kiyoomi to expect his *cleaner* to be a polyglot.

Atsumu pulls up google translate, sweating. "Er. Salut. Uh. Je dois...? passer une... um... commande?"

He's met by a loud incredulous laugh that makes his face hot and has his stomach flipping anxiously. Oh god. He's going to be mocked in *two languages*.

"Is this Miya-san?" The man asks in perfect Japanese, still chuckling.

Relief hits so hard Atsumu nearly collapses. "Oh thank *god* you speak Japanese. I completely lost track of time and I need to place Sakusa-san's order of the day—"

“Oh, *mon chéri*, fret not,” the man croons. “The brilliant, the wonderful, the ultimate saviour of jobs—Tendou-san—got you covered!”

“What?” Atsumu says, dazed. “Aren’t you Tendou?”

“Yep!” Tendou pops the P. “I thought you might have forgotten the menu choices, so I confirmed with Sakusa-san last night. His lunch has already been delivered.”

Atsumu sags against the wall. “Tendou-san I owe you my life.”

“Now now,” Tendou chuckles. “You can make it up to me by trying my chocolate sometimes! I’m opening my own *pâtisserie*.”

“*Anything!*” Atsumu promises, and is interrupted by his stomach growling so loudly he bets Tendou can hear it.

And indeed, Tendou gasps, delighted. “I hear the cries of your empty belly! Tell me, *mon chéri*, what do you fancy for a late lunch?”

Blushing, with his face hidden in his hands despite there being no one around to see his embarrassed expression, Atsumu mutters, “Food. Any food.”

Tendou chuckles again in that playfully sardonic unpredictable lilt that dances between mockery and genuine amusement. “Lucky for you that’s my specialty! *Bien!* Chef’s choice, coming right up!”

“Thank you, Tendou-san,” Atsumu exhales in relief. “Truly, you’re a life-saver.”

Tendou cackles again. “*Anytime~*”

There’s a slippery, sing-song quality to his speech—like he’s constantly toeing the line between charming and chaotic.

Atsumu wonders what he looks like. Probably the kind of man who could out-vibe Trench Coat Guy. The thought alone makes him shudder.

After the call, he dashes off for a much-needed shower. He’s drenched in sweat—and by Sakusa’s standards, that’s probably grounds for cremation.

It isn’t until later, while he’s collapsed at his study desk trying to get some readings done, that his mind drifts back to the note.

Iizuna Tsukasa.

The hoodie’s owner. An Itachiyama alumnus, judging by the text. It’s a prestigious school. Atsumu remembers playing against them at nationals. It’s not a stretch to imagine he and Sakusa were teammates.

But...

Atsumu leans back in his chair musing over the hidden implications.

The hoodie isn't Sakusa's. Yet he kept it. And the note. *"Keep this safe until I make it big."*

Class of 2004. Over two decades ago.

Atsumu, possessed by sudden curiosity, opens a new tab and types: *Iizuna Tsukasa Itachiyama*.

He doesn't expect much.

But result #3 leads to an Instagram profile.

@iizuna_official

 Head Coach | V.League D1: Black Jack Hornets

 Tokyo | Est. 1985

 Coaching life, match prep & recovery days

Curious, Atsumu scrolls.

There's a grid of clean, minimal shots: a courtside picture with his clipboard tucked under one arm, a blurry sunset taken from what looks like the edge of a stadium, and a black-and-white close-up of his hands taping up someone's wrist.

He's good-looking in that clean, coach-y way—youthful despite being old enough to yell at interns for tying shoelaces wrong. He seems like the kind of guy high school Atsumu would have followed on Instagram.

It turns out Iizuna retired from playing for the Hornets just a year ago, which is pretty impressive, Atsumu concurs. He knows the toll volleyball takes on the body, and—as Atsumu learns from further scrolling—Iizuna was a setter who played well into *thirty-nine* years of age.

Once upon a time, Atsumu used to set for his high school team.

He smiles at the nostalgic memories of Suna Rintarou chasing him and Osamu with a camera like they're part of a documentary about wildlife in the city.

He doesn't realise how far back he's scrolled until he hits the teenage years. Iizuna at the beach, grinning and bright. Iizuna clustered with a group of people around a bonfire. Iizuna hanging upside down from monkey bars. There's a picture of him doing a one-armed handstand.

Atsumu is a little jealous.

Then—

The blue hoodie comes into view.

It's in a photo with a boy tagged Komori Motoya. Half-hidden, but unmistakable. It's that same blue hoodie from the closet, still vibrant and young, stretched over Iizuna's broad shoulders to bring out the cool undertones of his skin.

Atsumu keeps scrolling—and freezes.

Oh.

Oh.

“Oh my God,” Atsumu whispers, zooming in.

Twin moles. Arched brow. Disapproving scowl.

Teenage Sakusa Kiyoomi.

His hair was longer then, styled in careful curls, but the expression was the same—like he'd rather be disinfecting doorknobs than mingling with other teenagers.

How fitting.

A few more photos feature Sakusa, scattered among group shots and event snaps—but they stop abruptly after one of Iizuna at the airport, mid-wave, boarding a plane.

After that, it's all Paris.

So, he moved abroad?

But when Atsumu scrolls back to Iizuna's profile, he sees it clearly: *based in Tokyo*.

Then... why? Why does Sakusa still have his hoodie, hung neatly like the ghost of a dream that never woke?

Atsumu chews at his bottom lip.

Maybe they were best friends. Close. Close enough to share clothes and private jokes.

But if that's true, why does it feel like Iizuna vanished entirely from Sakusa's life—leaving behind nothing but a threadbare hoodie and a quiet ache?

Keep it safe for me, the note had said.

It's been over two decades.

And still, it waits.

Still, it sits—untouched, unclaimed.

Waiting for someone who never came back.

Chapter End Notes

I tried to make a mock instagram profile for Iizuna and failed 😞 I leave it to your fertile imagination, dear readers.

Late-Night Variables

Chapter Summary

For the next week at the Sakusa residence, guilt gnaws at Atsumu.

Chapter Notes

Hello and welcome chapter 9, we're close to a tipping point where emotions meet sarcasm and the distance between SakuAtsu starts to shrink 🤔

Updates will likely be slower now while chapters grow longer (and I grow busier)

Doctors' appointments and starting my own side hustle is taking up a lot of time, so thank you for your patience ~

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

For the next week at the Sakusa residence, guilt gnaws at Atsumu.

Sure, the days are jam-packed with cleaning, studying and uni work, but at night, when he lies under comfortable sheets, his mind wanders. He finds himself lamenting how he broke Sakusa's trust by being a nosy bastard.

Sakusa let him into his house, trusted him, even told him about the ex-housekeeper who'd violated that trust.

Atsumu weighs the pros and cons of coming clean.

Pros: he might finally sleep.

Cons: he might get fired.

Atsumu sighs, tightly shutting his eyes, wishing he could use Sakusa's gym to work out the nervous energy thrumming under his skin.

His monitor stares him down from across the room—condemnatory, disappointed.

"I was curious," Atsumu groans into his pillow. "Is that so evil?"

You googled a stranger's name, stalked their Instagram, and found photos of your boss when he was a teenager, berates his subconscious.

Okay, *sue him*. He did. But it's not like he reached out to the man.

Not that finding him answered any of the burning questions in Atsumu's head. Ugh.

Then—like a mournful backdrop to Atsumu's private funeral—the piano begins its sad croon.

The heart-wrenching notes of *I'll Never Be the Same* float through the door like a caressing whisper.

He swallows, chest squeezing the way it had that night, a week ago.

Tentatively, for reasons he doesn't fully understand, he exits his room and sits at the edge of the stairs to listen.

It's not just a composition, Atsumu thinks, leaning against the cold glass banister. *It's an intimate conversation between pianist and listener.*

It unfolds like a delicate touch, each keystroke echoing a silent longing. Atsumu listens and listens and finds his breaths stuttering as the melody weaves an elegant tapestry of melancholy.

He doesn't realise he's crying until a hot drop slides down the bridge of his nose and lands on the faint scar at the back of his hand; A small white line, a remnant from a childhood scuffle with Osamu—back when skinned knees were the biggest tragedy and fighting over the last piece of cake their greatest war.

Now he sits in a house so big voices echo, listening to another man's heartache while nursing his own.

He gets up. Wanders into a kitchen that's slowly growing familiar to prepare Genmaicha—green tea with roasted brown rice—with careful, reverent hands. He doesn't know what compels him. It's midnight on a Sunday. He's technically off-duty, and tomorrow is his weekend.

And yet...

He boils the water to 80°C and steeps the tea for three minutes, just like Sakusa prefers it.

Then—because Atsumu can't help himself, because the music is dancing in his ribcage and tripping over his heartstrings—he grabs the hot cocoa from his bedroom cabinet.

A luxury he can't always afford, reserved solely for rock bottom. For blanket burritos and survival and finding the will to get through another day.

He prepares it too. Just in case.

Atsumu climbs the stairs quietly, bare feet on cool marble but stops at the last step, once again feeling like a voyeur at someone else's windowsill.

The lights are off, and Sakusa is another shadow in a dark empty room.

“Yes, Miya?”

His voice is soft, barely disturbing the hush.

The piano doesn’t falter, fingers strolling down the keys like they know every crack in the pavement.

A two-decade-old tune for a two-decade-old hoodie. How much of Sakusa still lives in the past?

“May I sit?” Atsumu finds himself asking, equally hushed.

Sakusa doesn’t answer, but he doesn’t say no either. Atsumu takes it as permission, padding to the couch and setting down the tray.

The music unfurls like a secret. A song of a heart once whole, now changed.

“Can’t sleep?” Sakusa murmurs.

“No,” Atsumu replies, honest. “You?”

“Hm.”

Sakusa, Atsumu notes, plays the piano with his whole body. He watches raptly the way Sakusa leans into the keys, the way his hair falls in his eyes, unkempt and soft.

The melody comes to an end. The keys sit, waiting, anticipating a return, but Sakusa’s hands retreat to his lap. “If your pillow is uncomfortable,” Sakusa offers, eyes still on the piano, “there are other selections in the laundry room—”

“I’m sorry,” Atsumu blurts.

“What?” Sakusa blinks, turning to him. “Why?”

Atsumu swallows. “I...”

Sakusa’s eyes flick to the tray, then back to Atsumu.

“You...?”

“That first day,” Atsumu says, trying to steady himself. “When I was cleaning. I looked at the hoodie in your closet.”

Sakusa’s face is, as always, unreadable. Atsumu doesn’t know which would be worse: anger or indifference.

“I... I saw the name on it,” Atsumu murmurs, swallowing hard. His head dips, gaze fixating on his hands as he twisted his fingers together until his knuckles turned white. “I couldn’t help it. Curiosity got the better of me.”

A weak laugh escapes. “I googled him. I don’t know why I did it. I can’t tell you what compelled me to scroll through his Instagram, but I did. And I’m sorry. I promised to honour your trust and I—”

His breath hitches.

“I’ll accept any punishment you give.”

He hears Sakusa stand. Hears footsteps.

Clutches his thighs, waiting.

For a moment, he wonders if he’s about to be punted through the window.

He shuts his eyes, readying himself.

“Miya,” Sakusa says, settling in the armchair beside him. Atsumu flinches at the unexpected presence, closer than usual.

“I’ve been wondering if you’d say anything.”

Atsumu’s head snaps up. “You knew?”

“The hoodie wasn’t the way I left it.”

“You noticed something that small?”

Sakusa’s mouth curves, just slightly. “I always do.”

“I...” Atsumu ducks his head again, ashamed. “I’m sorry.”

Sakusa exhales. “If I knew Iizuna’s hoodie would elicit this much curiosity, I’d have put it to rest earlier.”

“You don’t have to tell me about him!” Atsumu cuts in, embarrassed. “I’ve already invaded your privacy enough. I haven’t slept all week.”

Sakusa’s sigh holds the faintest trace of amusement. “You worry too much, Miya.”

“I have an anxiety disorder,” Atsumu blurts. Then claps a hand over his mouth. “Please forget I said that.”

“Consider it tabled for later discussion,” Sakusa says, expression as opaque as ever.

Oh god, Atsumu is going to die.

“Iizuna is my high school teammate. We played volleyball together.” Sakusa says at last.

“I... saw the note. About making it big.”

Sakusa hums, reaching for a drink.

“That’s hot chocolate,” Atsumu says quickly. “Not in Appendix A, I know, but… it’s my comfort drink. And I thought maybe you’d want to try it.”

Sakusa stares at him. Then takes a sip.

“It’s good,” he says, licking his lips. “Thank you.”

Atsumu stares back, startled.

“Iizuna went pro after high school. That’s what he meant by making it big. Not exactly a secret. So you can stop losing sleep over it.”

“That’s—” Atsumu stops himself. Should he? Should he really? “Honestly, I was wondering why you still have it. Since he did make it big.”

“Ah,” Sakusa says, gazing into the cup like it holds the answers.

“Actually—don’t answer that,” Atsumu interjects, flushing. “That’s rude. I’m being rude again.”

“Nosy, for sure,” Sakusa murmurs. “I still have it because he never came back for it.”

“Oh.”

A faint, self-deprecating smile. “Satisfied?”

“Not even a little.” Atsumu leans forward. “It doesn’t bother you? That he didn’t? It seemed like… you were close.”

“We were,” Sakusa hums, leaning into the warmth wafting from his drink. “But hearts grow apart.”

Hearts grow apart?

“Then why hold on to it?”

A beat. Then:

“Because I made a promise,” Sakusa replies. “And I try to keep my promises.”

This is shaky, unfamiliar ground. This is his boss. Atsumu hesitates. But distance is hard to maintain when you live under the same roof.

“Can I ask something personal?”

“You already are.”

“Were you… y’know. Lovers?”

Sakusa stares. Atsumu winces.

“Is that what this is about? Whether I’m gay?”

“No no no—no! I wasn’t— I didn’t even—!” Atsumu flails. “I was just... it seemed like he meant a lot to you. More than a friend. I didn’t even think about the guy thing, to be honest.”

“Huh,” Sakusa says, mostly to himself. Did Atsumu just unlock a new level of clownery? Perhaps court jester is on the table now. “That’s interesting.”

“It... is?”

“Anyone else would’ve factored that in,” Sakusa huffs, faintly amused. Atsumu’s shoulders loosen a bit. “Unless you never factor that into your romantic choices.”

What a terrible way to come out to his boss. By sticking his foot directly into his mouth. Atsumu licks his lips, unsure. “Um... I guess I exposed myself with that one. Yeah, I like guys and gals. Hope that’s not a big deal.”

“I don’t care what type of human you like as long as you keep them off-premise,” Sakusa deadpans.

Jesus Christ. Type of human? Is his boss an alien?

“No soul will make it past your door without permission, I swear it.” Atsumu bows at a 90-degree angle despite being seated. “Please forgive my nonexistent filter.”

“Your nonexistent filter is the reason you’re still here.” Sakusa sets his drink down and reaches for the Genmaicha. “And no. Iizuna and I weren’t lovers. It never got to that point.”

“Oh,” Atsumu breathes, intrigued. “So it was like a situationship?”

“A what?” Sakusa blinks at him, clearly perplexed. It’s a quick reminder: this man is thirteen years his senior, no matter how much he looks like one of Atsumu’s peers.

“Uhhh,” Atsumu rubs the back of his neck. “It’s like... a romantic—or sexual—thing that never gets defined. No commitment, no label.”

Sakusa frowns into his tea. The expression is oddly earnest. “Does it count if it was neither? Just mutual feelings that were never acted on?”

Atsumu scratches his head. “I... don’t think so. That sounds more like ‘the one that got away.’ Is... is Iizuna your one that got away?”

Sakusa tips his head back, eyes fixed on the ceiling. After a moment, he gives a small, rueful shake of the head. “I suppose he could be. Honestly, I’m still confused by your generation’s need for hyper-specific labels. *A situationship?*”

Atsumu laughs awkwardly. “Don’t look at me. I didn’t come up with it.”

“Back in my day, if you looked at someone too long, people assumed you were getting married,” Sakusa snorts.

Atsumu grins and joins him in laughter. The last thread of tension finally snaps and falls away.

“It’s kinda the opposite now,” Atsumu chuckles. “You could be tongue-deep in someone and people’ll still ask if you’re together or just friends.”

Sakusa gives him a sidelong glance. Atsumu can’t quite tell if it’s about his phrasing or the emotional grenade he’s just handed over like a bouquet.

He really should get some sleep.

Almost as if hearing his thoughts, Sakusa sets his cup down and stands. “Isn’t it time for bed for the youngsters?”

“I’m not a child,” Atsumu cringes. “I’m a med student. Bedtime is for crying. We run on coffee and tears. Sleep’s a myth.”

Sakusa gazes heavenward, possibly praying. “Your brain needs sleep to function, Miya. You’re a med student. You *should* know this. Chronic circadian disruption is linked to depression and anxiety.”

Atsumu doesn’t miss the emphasis on *anxiety*. “Yeah, yeah. I know. You become the human version of a corrupted save file and all.”

“That’s a good analogy,” Sakusa concedes as they start walking toward the stairs. “Essentially, lack of sleep turns your prefrontal cortex into Swiss cheese.”

“I hear enough science in uni, spare me,” Atsumu groans, hurrying down the stairs.

“Not my fault your prefrontal cortex is offline and your glymphatic system is weeping.”

“Speak Japanese, I beg.”

“You’re literally marinating in your own brain garbage,” Sakusa sighs.

Atsumu pauses. “...Yeah, okay. True.”

“Also, your circadian rhythm thinks it’s in Madrid.”

“Cool. Always wanted to travel.” At the bottom of the stairs, Atsumu turns toward the kitchen to rinse the mugs. “Wait a second—you’re awake too. Pot calling the kettle black?”

Sakusa follows him in. “Maybe.”

“Do you need anything?” Atsumu wonders when Sakusa doesn’t immediately leave.

Humming softly, his boss opens the right-hand cupboard and pulls out a carton of chamomile. “Here,” he says, gentler than Atsumu expects. “This should help you sleep better.”

Atsumu holds it like something sacred. “I, uh... thanks. I appreciate it. You’re—you’re a really good boss. Thanks for not firing me.”

To his surprise, Sakusa snorts, clearly entertained. “How to be a good boss: don’t fire people. Got it. Might run the company into the ground, I’ll let you know how that goes.”

Sniggering, Atsumu retreats with his tea in hand, pausing at the door to give Sakusa a genuine smile. “Good night, Sakusa-san. Hope you catch some sleep too.”

“I eventually do,” Sakusa murmurs, already halfway back to his bat cave. “Good night, Miya.”

Feeling inexplicably lighter, Atsumu slips back into his room and starts prepping the chamomile, hoping it works its magic.

He might joke about sleep, but he knows the truth. Lack of it impairs executive function. See: *inability to retain a single damn word out of Fukuda-sensei’s mouth*.

Then again, maybe that’s just because she’s insufferable and sounds like a cheese grater. A cheese grater shredding Atsumu’s brain into Swiss cheese.

Yeah. Probably the latter.

Kuroo is waiting for him like the angel of death the next morning, posted at the foot of Sakusa’s building with a squint of pure judgment aimed at the skyscraper.

“You live with your boss, you said,” he greets, voice laced with unrepentant skepticism.

He’s leaning against his Honda Civic, twirling his keys around one finger like he’s in the opening shot of *Fast & Furious: Organic Chemistry Drift*.

Atsumu snorts. “For work. I’m basically his live-in maid.”

Kuroo’s expression sharpens. “Uh-huh. If you say so. Come on, get in before Shirabu starts sending me death threats for being late.”

“He might actually be Sakusa’s long-lost child,” Atsumu mutters, thinking of the man’s obsession with punctuality down to the nanosecond.

They drive to campus together—Kuroo having graciously offered to “swing by” since Atsumu’s place is “on the way.” More likely, he’s planning to dump Atsumu’s body behind the chem lab to save him from the shame of botching pH 11 again.

Fifteen minutes early to class, Atsumu earns a rare look from Fukuda-sensei. Her usual glare is still firmly in place, but there’s a flicker of something suspiciously close to approval in her dark, calculating eyes.

“Sit,” Kuroo commands, already halfway through a worksheet. “We went over this last week. She’ll review it, then toss us into the lab. Try not to embarrass the species.”

“You care about my GPA way too much,” Atsumu grumbles as he pulls out his battered laptop and prays it doesn’t give out on him today.

“Oh, don’t flatter yourself,” Kuroo says mildly. “I’m trying to become a TA. Thought I’d practice emotionally damaging students in advance.”

Atsumu gives him a thumbs up. “A++. You’ve already mastered the smug, soul-crushing TA aesthetic.”

Kuroo beams like he’s just been complimented on his knife collection.

“Yo,” Kunimi says as he drops into the chair beside Atsumu. “Your roots are showing.”

“Wow. Good morning to you too,” Atsumu mutters.

“If he bleaches it any further he’ll fry what’s left of his brain,” Shirabu snipes as he claims the seat behind them, sliding into place like a passive-aggressive poltergeist.

Atsumu pulls a face. “What is this, International Bully Miya Day? Did I miss the group email?”

“We rotate weekly,” Kunimi replies without looking up. “You’re the designated verbal punching bag this round. Shirabu’s turn is next week. Team bonding.”

“I swear, I should check you guys into the psych ward,” Kuroo muses, then leans over to Atsumu. “They mean well. Think of it as communal stress relief.”

Atsumu groans and slumps dramatically in his chair. “Fine. Life already punts me in the teeth on a regular basis—what’s a little peer abuse on top?”

“Atta boy,” Kuroo says, grinning.

To his credit, Atsumu doesn’t fuck up pH 11 that day. But for his efforts, he’s rewarded with another worksheet, another titration, and the thrilling promise of yet another lab report.

The universe is indeed very loving to Miya Atsumu this fine Monday.

He’s going to spend his “day off” writing a report he can only pray won’t get him clowned by Haraguchi-sensei again.

The Sakusa Residence is as still as the night when Atsumu slips in at 7 PM to take his mandated shower. It’s a routine now. Wash, rinse, loungewear, repeat until soul-dead.

He wipes down his laptop and lugs it to the library because... well. Sakusa did say he could use it—provided he leaves it exactly the way he found it.

Atsumu is hoping that being surrounded by academic tomes will bless him with divine knowledge through osmosis.

He makes room for himself on the plush carpet and sets his laptop on the low table.

Part of him wonders if Sakusa will have an aneurysm upon discovering him tucked between the sofa and the table like a gremlin.

But Sakusa isn't here.

And the carpet holds a gentle sort of comfort Atsumu's pretty sure he hasn't felt since his Ma used to scoop him up off the floor as a toddler.

He exhales, legs stretching beneath the table, toes scrunching into the soft fur. For a moment—just a moment—he lets himself enjoy the quiet.

Then reality taps him on the shoulder in the form of a blinking cursor.

“Right,” he mutters, cracking his knuckles. “Science mode.”

He opens his notes and rereads the lab objective: *Quantitative analysis of weak base titration with a strong acid*. Riveting.

His gaze skims downward. *Reference at least one published source outside the assigned texts*.

Atsumu squints at the towering wall of books behind him.

“Oh, why not,” he sighs, standing to browse.

Sakusa's library is absurdly resourceful. His fingers trail across spines embossed in muted golds and silvers—half of them sound like they belong in a wizard's grimoire.

Then one catches his eye: *Acid-Base Equilibria and Analytical Chemistry*. A modest hardcover. Less dusty than the rest.

He flips it open. The preface smells like paper and pretension, but the diagrams are clean. The explanations, blessedly human.

Jackpot.

He returns to the carpet, settles again, and starts typing.

Time melts. Between skimming graphs and trying to write a sentence that doesn't sound like it was composed by a sleep-deprived monkey, Atsumu forgets the hour.

So he doesn't hear the door open. Doesn't notice the quiet footfalls.

Not until Sakusa's voice floats in, smooth and amused:

“You raided the acid-base section? Should I be concerned or impressed?”

Atsumu startles like he's been caught stealing cookies. The cursor blinks, accusing. So does he.

"Jesus—can you not glide around like a ghost? Some of us are fragile."

Sakusa raises an eyebrow. "You're on the floor."

"It's comfy," Atsumu defends, curling instinctively over his notes. "And I'm being productive. Look—real science, actual thinking happening."

Sakusa eyes the open textbook. "That one's a good reference. My grad school advisor wrote it."

Atsumu blinks. "Wait. Seriously?"

Humming, Sakusa moves to the far shelves, pulls out another book, and places it beside him: *Quantitative Chemical Analysis by Daniel C. Harris*.

"This is also a solid reference," he says casually.

Atsumu squints at the cover. Then at Sakusa, who's standing there like the protagonist of a luxury loungewear ad.

"Should I be worried about the amount of acid-related books in your collection? Are you planning a murder by titration? 'Cause listen, university lecturers are already trying to kill us slowly. You don't need to sully your hands."

Sakusa sighs—long-suffering—and beelines to the armchair across from Atsumu. "Miya, I too had to use references in my undergrad lab reports."

Atsumu blinks again, trying to mentally rearrange everything he thought he knew. "Wait, wait. You said advisor? What did you even major in?"

"Undergrad in biochem. Grad school in neuroscience/psych."

He says this like it's the weather. Cloudy with a chance of whiplash.

No. This is outrageously unfair. Completely unforgivable.

Smart, rich *and* looks like a demigod? This is villain origin story material.

Sakusa glances up at his silence. "You look offended."

"Nah. Just... didn't expect that. You give off, I dunno. Boardroom energy. Not '*brain goo*.'"

A pause.

"That's the official term, yes. *Brain goo*."

"It's..." Atsumu checks the time. "Twelve-thirty. My prefrontal cortex is basically Swiss cheese right now. Cognitive function starts dipping after 10 PM. People get more impulsive."

Emotionally open. Inhibitions drop. Basically? I'm tipsy on exhaustion. So if I say something stupid, it's not legally admissible in the Sakusa court of law."

Sakusa looks amused. "Ah. I see you've also minored in law—with a concentration in mouthy sarcasm."

"Hey, I'm just citing cognitive science. You can't prosecute biology." Atsumu mutters, already typing again. He turns back to his lab report—and the book Sakusa brought him.

They settle into silence. A soft, comfortable one.

And for the first time in a long while, Atsumu thinks—

This isn't too bad.

Not bad at all.

Chapter End Notes

Would you like to have a cameo as a random background character in TMLTL? 🙏🙏

[Click here!](#)

Cracks in the Regiment

Chapter Summary

Then, there's movement. A quiet rustle. Warmth settles beside him. Atsumu opens his eyes and sees Sakusa on the carpet, elbows on knees, gaze soft and thoughtful.

"It's perfectly valid," he says. "To feel sad about that, Miya."

Chapter Notes

Since the last *TMLTL* update, I have:

- had three full-blown meltdowns,
- seen three different doctors who still can't figure out what's wrong with me,
- been broken up with,
- cried in the post office while mailing my first—and last—anniversary gift to my (now ex) girlfriend,
- cried again in the cereal aisle,
- told people I was constipated just so I could cry in a bathroom for three uninterrupted hours,
- put on a full face of makeup, still mourning my grandmother, to shoot a last-minute photography gig for my sister,
- tried very hard *not* to cry at a party full of beautiful women in beautiful dresses...
- ...and only marginally succeeded.

On the bright side: excellent emotional ammunition for AtsuSuffer™.

On the not-so-bright side: please refer to the list above.

Welcome to my sanctuary. Enjoy.

They cross paths at the library sometimes, Atsumu nestled in his favourite spot on the carpet, and Sakusa making his way to his armchair with a book and pencil.

"Miya," Sakusa says when he encounters him, soft and non-disruptive. "Tadaima."

"Sakusa-san. Okaeri," Atsumu responds distractedly, finger following the words on the page. *Chains of Meaning: A Molecular Exploration of Genetic Code* is not an assigned reading per se, but it aligns with Fukuda-sensei's introduction to DNA/RNA biochemistry—a topic of

personal interest to Atsumu. It's the branch of biochem that drew him in, despite the financial stress and the move away from home, from Ma and Granny, and now Osamu.

DNA is not destiny—it is potential, the text allures.

While the sequence of nucleotides may remain fixed, their expression is anything but. The molecular on-off switches known as epigenetic markers—such as DNA methylation and histone modification—can silence or activate genes based on external conditions.

What we eat, how we sleep, the air we breathe, the stress we endure, the love we receive or are denied—all of it leaves molecular traces. Like annotations in the margins of a book, these modifications change how the story is read, without altering the letters themselves.

Atsumu swallows, lingering over the words.

This is the language of inheritance beyond genetics. A mother's trauma, a grandfather's famine, a lifetime of chronic stress—they echo across generations, not as fate, but as chemical memory.

Atsumu shuts his eyes, fingers finding the ring hanging in front of his chest to trace the withered engraving.

Even if it fades to nothing, Atsumu's thumb has memorised the grooves: *For all the stories we'll keep*. His grandfather had it engraved before proposing to Granny—a bedtime story she used to tell when they were young, a lullaby even after her husband passed. Maybe especially after. Her way of keeping him alive.

He carries these stories in his chest like a stone he can never set down—not when he was entrusted with a memory that now has to live on through him, as Granny continues to lose pieces of herself to her illness. He wishes, like he always does in the small hours, that he'd asked her more questions.

He remembers a time when a doctor mentioned genetic markers, how stress may have accelerated her decline. Stress, the silent killer standing at Atsumu's back, hums ominously, like a promise.

“Miya?”

Atsumu startles, breath catching.

Sakusa is watching him, brows furrowed. “Are you okay?”

“What—” Atsumu clears his throat, voice rasping. “Sorry. Did you say something?”

The concern deepens between Sakusa's brows. “Never mind that. What's going on?”

Atsumu stares somewhere past Sakusa's shoulder. “Nothing,” he murmurs, letting go of the ring. “Just tired.”

Sakusa's eyes fall to where the ring hangs exposed against his chest. They widen. "Is that... a wedding ring? Are you married, Miya?"

It knocks Atsumu clean out of his spiral. "What? No. It's not mine. It belonged to Granny." He tucks it back under his shirt.

"Oh," Sakusa says, closing the book in his lap.

Atsumu catches a glimpse of unfamiliar letters. German? Dutch? Something even more obscure? He wouldn't put it past Sakusa to study dead languages for fun.

"Miya?"

Atsumu blinks. "Sorry."

Sakusa gets up, strides over, and gently slides *Chains of Meaning* from his hands. "That's enough reading for today," he says gently, bookmarking the page and setting the book on the low table.

Atsumu looks up, uncertain. "Why?"

Sakusa lowers himself onto the couch, close enough that Atsumu can feel the warmth of his presence.

"You don't look well, Miya."

Atsumu scrubs a hand over his face. "I'm just tired."

A pause.

"I don't think it's just fatigue."

It's not. Atsumu traces the edge of the book's cover. "Sometimes I remember why I'm doing this, and it feels heavier than ever."

"This?" Sakusa prompts.

"Science. Biochem. Med school." Atsumu curls his toes into the carpet. "This wasn't what I always envisioned for myself... but then Granny got sick."

A hand lands on his shoulder. Atsumu stiffens, startled, meeting Sakusa's eyes.

"You don't have to tell me. I didn't mean to pry."

Sakusa is touching him.

"Tit for tat," Atsumu says, his voice unsteady. Sakusa pulls his hand back quickly, as if surprised himself.

"Do you ever wonder if stress is going to kill you?"

Sakusa blinks. “What?”

“Stress,” Atsumu says again, tapping the book. “Prolonged, crushing stress alters your DNA expression. Shortens your telomeres. That’s cellular aging. Higher risk for heart disease, diabetes, cancer...”

“I know,” Sakusa replies. “Each time a cell divides, it loses a bit of its telomeres. Telomerase can replenish them, but chronic stress reduces your supply.”

“Yeah,” Atsumu breathes. “It makes me wonder about my lifespan. Considering everything. Kinda makes me sad.

“Samu jokes my hair’s falling out from bleach, but it started way before that.”

He closes his eyes again.

Sakusa doesn’t speak for a long beat.

Then, there’s movement. A quiet rustle. Warmth settles beside him. Atsumu opens his eyes and sees Sakusa on the carpet, elbows on knees, gaze soft and thoughtful.

“It’s perfectly valid,” he says. “To feel sad about that, Miya.”

Sakusa is... comforting him?

“Yes, trauma, poor sleep, stress—those things can leave epigenetic imprints. But here’s the hopeful part: they’re reversible.”

Atsumu knows this. Theoretically.

Still, something in him cracks open when Sakusa continues: “Unlike mutations, epigenetic changes aren’t fixed. They’re dynamic. Living, breathing annotations. Your choices can rewrite some of the damage. Your past wrote the prologue, but you’re still holding the pen.”

Atsumu whispers, “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because it’s true,” Sakusa says. “And because I’ve spent twenty years trying to heal trauma. Sakusa Industries has a therapeutics branch that develops treatments for neurological and psychiatric disorders. We fund epigenetic research. It’s a personal interest of mine.”

Atsumu’s mind reels. “Really?”

“Mmh.” Sakusa rests his chin on his palm. “So, as far as I’m concerned, you can change the script.”

Atsumu hides his face in his hands. “I know what I should do. I used to manage stress by working out.”

“Why’d you stop?”

Atsumu shoots him a look. “When do you think I have time to go to a gym?”

Sakusa shrugs. “Then use the one here. Just sanitise after.”

Atsumu blinks. “Wait. Seriously?”

“Of course.” Sakusa smirks. “No excuses left now, mm?”

Atsumu swallows. “Thank you. That’s... actually kind of you.”

“You’re not trapped in your inheritance, Miya,” Sakusa says gravely. “You’re the culmination of it—but also the divergence. Every step you take now—toward healing, purpose, connection—it’s not just psychological. It’s *molecular*. You’re actively reshaping your future biology.”

Atsumu stares. Sakusa is no longer the aloof CEO—he’s offering a lifeline.

There’s too much to say, and no words to reach for. No joke strong enough. No platitude honest enough.

They hold each other’s gaze, something warm and unspeakable pulsing between them. Atsumu thinks, *in another lifetime, we could’ve been friends*.

Atsumu licks his lips. Sakusa’s eyes flicker, brief and sharp.

“Thanks,” Atsumu whispers, looking away. “I appreciate a good pep talk.”

Sakusa snorts. “Might be my first one.”

“Wow. That was immaculate,” Atsumu grins. “Did you rehearse in the mirror?”

With a soft laugh, Sakusa stands and smooths out his sweatpants. “Maybe I should. Get up, Miya. I’m sending you to bed.”

“It’s past my work hours. You can’t order me around.”

“We’ll see about that,” Sakusa says, and walks away.

Atsumu follows him anyway, silently judging himself as he trails after Sakusa all the way to the second-floor kitchen.

He watches Sakusa withdraw several bottles. “What’s this?”

“Vitamins,” Sakusa says. Atsumu eyes the Vitamin C, D, Magnesium, and Omega-3 arrayed on the counter.

“Vitamin C at night isn’t recommended,” he says automatically. “It’s energising.”

“Which is why you’ll take it in the morning. Magnesium’s for night. Circadian support.” Sakusa shuts the cupboard. “You know to take D after a meal, right?”

Atsumu gasps. “These are for me?”

“Yes,” Sakusa replies, calmly lining them up. “D for serotonin modulation. C for inflammation. Omega-3 for cognition and memory. Magnesium for nervous system regulation and sleep. Take them.”

Atsumu gapes, stunned. “I—You’re giving me your vitamins?”

“I have more,” Sakusa waves him off. “Take care of yourself. You’ll be fine.”

Oh no. Oh god. Atsumu might actually cry.

Sakusa squints at him. “It’s not Saturday. Your scheduled cry session isn’t today.”

So he had noticed that.

“Shut up,” Atsumu mutters, then stammers. “I mean—thank you. I’ll pay you back—”

“Don’t insult me.” Sakusa waves him away. “Take your vitamins and go to bed, Miya. Before I punt you there.”

Atsumu bows with exaggerated flair. “Yessir!” and sprints off.

Sakusa Kiyoomi is going to give him whiplash.

He calls Osamu the next morning.

“He gave me vitamins.”

“Good morning to you too,” Osamu says, chewing on something crunchy. Probably cereal. “I’m doing okay, thanks for asking.”

“Samu, he gave me *vitamins*,” Atsumu repeats, like he’s revealing the plot twist of a thriller.

“Okay...? I mean, let’s not act like yer not deficient in something. Probably brain cells.”

“God, you’re such an ass,” Atsumu groans, putting his phone on speaker and propping it on the sink as he begins his morning routine. “What I’m tryin’ ta tell ya is, I’m beginnin’ ta suspect he has *human emotions*.”

“Ah,” Osamu intones with the flat finality of someone who’s already read the ending. “You have a crush on your boss. This is Kita-san all over again.”

Atsumu drops his toothbrush in the sink. “What.”

“What? It’s true. Someone shows ya a shred of caring and ya fall head over heels.”

Oh my god. His brother is an actual dumbass. “I think the one deficit in brain cells between the both of us is you, Samu. Jesus Christ. I don’t have a crush on my boss. I’m not insane.”

“Mhmmmm.”

“My *point* is,” Atsumu stresses, squirting toothpaste on his brush like he’s preparing for battle, “despite his cleaning regimen from hell and back-breaking household chores, he actually cares about human needs.”

“I sure hope so,” Osamu says, and Atsumu can hear the eye roll through the phone. “I gotta run in ten or I’ll miss my lecture. You comin’ to the apartment today?”

“Uhh,” Atsumu checks his phone. It’s Wednesday. His ‘day off,’ allegedly. Which is funny, considering every day is crammed with work and uni. “Maybe? Depends if I finish all my assignments in time.”

“Mm. Let me know.”

“Yeah, alright. See ya,” Atsumu says, ending the call with his pinky before vigorously scrubbing his teeth. He’s still groggy, but food will fix that.

A breakfast he’s going to prepare himself because—miracle of miracles—it’s the weekend.

He hurries to the kitchen in his pyjamas: dark shorts, a comfy white tee, and a headband pushing his overgrown hair out of the way. God, he needs a haircut. And maybe a touch-up, too.

Eggs are the obvious choice. But today, he has time. And flair.

He digs out tomatoes from the fridge and dices them into precise little cubes, mixing them into his eggs. Salt. Pepper. Flip the eggs. He realises he’s humming under his breath, the melody looping unconsciously:

That day

The ball you threw struck me on the forehead

The moment I fell

I distinctly saw

A vapor trail streaking across the navy-blue sky

I realised this was love—

He slides the eggs into a plate and turns—only to find Sakusa already seated at the kitchen island, perched on one of the high chairs with a small, entertained smirk.

“Preppy this morning, aren’t we?”

“Sakusa-san—!” Atsumu flushes. “Uh. Good Mor— Polite greetings.”

“You’re never going to let that one go, huh?” Sakusa drums his fingers on the counter. “Did the magnesium help you sleep?”

“Yeah, it did,” Atsumu admits sheepishly. “Thanks again.”

“Mm.” Sakusa glances at his watch. “You have time? Class starts at ten, right?”

“Yeah.” Atsumu grabs a fork, then pauses. “Um... do you want some?”

“My food will be here soon,” Sakusa says, watching him with some amusement. “Nice headband, by the way.”

Atsumu groans softly. Of course. It’s that headband—the orange fox-eared one. “I need to keep my hair outta my face while I cook, okay?”

“Oh no, I approve.” Sakusa chuckles—low, genuine. It always catches Atsumu off guard. He’s come to realise that Sakusa laughs more here. Maybe because here, he feels... safe?

They lapse into a quiet rhythm—Atsumu eating, Sakusa typing on his phone—until Sakusa breaks the silence.

“My least favourite time of the month is here.”

Atsumu pauses mid-bite. “Okay, I don’t know what you’re about to say, but that sounds suspiciously like your period is almost here and you’re dreading it even though it happens every month.”

Sakusa arches an eyebrow. “I suppose the... unpleasantness is comparable. Just with less blood, thank God.”

Atsumu blinks. “Should I expect... some blood?”

“Depends on whether Morisuke-san cuts himself on a pastry knife again,” Sakusa replies, perfectly deadpan, setting his phone down. “I host a business gathering every month.”

“By choice?”

“Have you *met* me?”

Atsumu snorts. “Okay, so you’re forced at gunpoint.”

“Worse,” Sakusa sighs. “By society.” He rests his chin on his upturned palm, lips pursed in mild petulance—and for a fleeting second, he looks boyish. Almost... cute.

“I don’t do it for *them*. I do it because if I let it lapse, they’d whisper about how the bloodline’s gone soft.”

“The what?”

Sakusa grimaces. “It’s a tradition my grandfather started. Strategy dinners. At the old Sakusa estate. Now it’s mine to keep alive.”

“I... see.” Atsumu isn’t sure he does. “So what’s on the agenda when your symphony of doom arrives?”

“Nothing fun for you, unfortunately.”

Sighing theatrically, Atsumu takes another bite. “Didn’t think it would be. So... stuck-up old businessmen? How many?”

“Eleven,” Sakusa says, visibly displeased. “I’ll prepare an itinerary and attendee file for you. You’ll mostly be on bartending duty, but I’d appreciate if you greeted guests and guided them to the terrace. Prevent rogues from wandering into my laundry room. Or—God forbid—the library. Tendou-san and his team will serve dinner. You’ll liaise with them.”

“Right,” Atsumu says, uncertain. “Smile and look pretty, hunt down trespassers, bully the catering staff. Got it.”

“Any incident with pastry knives will result in a 24-hour ban from the premises—for you or the guests,” Sakusa adds with mock severity. “And please—don’t make me explain the importance of etiquette.”

“I wasn’t raised by wolves, y’know. Despite what my eating habits might suggest.”

“Business etiquette is not your average dinner party. We’ll go over it together this weekend. The gathering’s next Friday.”

More work. So much work. Atsumu briefly considers crying in the bathroom.

Once Sakusa’s instructions wind to a close, Atsumu rinses his plate, rips off his headband, and stalks off to get dressed (in the *designated* outside bathroom, obviously).

He’s just slipping on his shoes and shouldering his monstrous backpack when Sakusa reappears.

“Miya, hold up.”

“Mhm?” Atsumu double-checks that his phone is in his pocket and the resident access card is tucked in his wallet.

A sleek black credit card enters his field of vision.

Atsumu blinks. “Um. What’s this?”

“You’ve completed your one-month probation,” Sakusa says, as if that explains why Atsumu is suddenly being handed what looks like a platinum MasterCard with *Sakusa Industries* engraved on it. “I don’t have time to approve every sponge and dishcloth. Use this. Keep the receipts.”

Atsumu takes it hesitantly. “Oh. Are you... sure?”

“I trust you,” Sakusa says simply, already turning to leave.

Atsumu stares after him, stunned.

What.

His phone buzzes with an alarm warning him he’ll be late if he doesn’t move *now*.

He tucks the card into his wallet and bolts for the elevator, doing his best not to think about the fact that he’s now carrying a miniature vault that could rival Gringotts.

Whiplash before 10 a.m. should be illegal. Honestly.

Jazz for the Worried

Chapter Summary

“Oh my god. Oh god, no no no no—”

Osamu’s head swivels toward him. “What? Did ya fail yer lab report?”

“Fuck, no. Worse.” Atsumu’s hands are shaking as he dials Sakusa. “I have ten texts from Sakusa and he’s really mad.”

Chapter Notes

Welcome to chapter 11! Thank you so much for the love and well wishes 🥰

A/N: accidentally made a whole discord server for my fic

People are joining. There are roles and games. I fear this is becoming a community.

Come join our little chaos corner ♥

[Discord Link](#)

“Samu,” Atsumu calls out. “’M home!”

Osamu’s head peeks out around the corner. “Oh, yer alive.”

“Were you hopin’ I wouldn’t be?” Atsumu chucks his bag in the genkan in a small act of defiance. Hey, he can be messy in his own apartment.

“Ya might as well be, since I rarely see yer mug these days,” Osamu grumbles, disappearing into the kitchen. “Come in, I made onigiri.”

“’Course ya did. Just say ya miss me,” Atsumu grins, following the smell of rice and soy.

And there it is: his favourite fatty tuna onigiri. Atsumu might be tearing up. Just a little. “God, I missed your onigiri.”

He gives his hands a quick scrub and digs in like a man starved. “Itadakimasu!”

Osamu shakes his head ruefully but he’s smiling. “Ya only love me for my food.”

Atsumu gasps. “How did you know!?”

Reflexively, Osamu smacks him. “Yer such a scrub.”

“Hey, I finished my lab in record time ta come back to the apartment. If that ain’t love, then I dunno what is.” Honestly, the things Atsumu does for his twin. He left the bedroom of his dreams to come sleep in his shitty bunk bed just so Osamu wouldn’t feel lonely. Not that he’d tell him that.

“Are ya stayin’ the night, or do ya gotta run back before yer smited?”

Atsumu snorts. “Stayin’.”

His phone gives a cheerful chime.

He reaches for it with his clean hand. A text notification lights up his screen—

**Dear Customer, ¥650,000.00 was credited to your account *610. Your available balance is ¥651,284.00.*

Atsumu drops his phone.

“What?” Osamu asks, confused.

“I—” Atsumu’s eyes must be bugging out. “Oh my god.”

It would appear that, in his relentless quest for survival, Atsumu has forgotten one very important fact: it’s payday. He’s earning money. Living with Sakusa. As in—he’s getting *paid* to be there.

“What?” Osamu demands again, snatching the phone. His eyes bug out. “... holy fuck, Tsumu.”

Atsumu carefully sets down his onigiri, sucks in a deep breath, and screams so loud Osamu jumps.

“Oh my god, are ya gettin’ smited by the gods now?”

“Samu.” Atsumu grabs him by the shoulder, dirty hands be damned. “*Samu*. There’s money. In my bank account. Lots of money. More than I’ve ever had.”

“Hey, no need to rub it in my face,” Osamu whines, though he smiles a little. “Congrats, scrub. Guess ya earned it, workin’ for a man possessed by a cleanin’ demon.”

“Hell yeah, I did,” Atsumu grins and goes to wash his hands. “Fuck eatin’ onigiri, let’s grab dinner at Yakiniku!”

Osamu should be offended, but instead he grins. “Yer treatin’ me to barbecue? I knew there was a reason I didn’t eat ya in the womb.”

“Right?” Atsumu enthusiastically smacks him upside the head and runs to their room. “Come on, get dressed! Wear yer sluttiest outfit!”

“To Yakiniku? What am I gonna do, seduce the meat?”

“Idiot, to seduce the pretty waitress!” Atsumu cackles. “Though maybe it *will* end in seducin’ yer meat.”

“Yer so fuckin’ disgusting, Tsumu.”

They go grocery shopping after dinner, pleasantly full of grilled meat and buzzed on sake.

“First things first,” Atsumu declares, leading Osamu to the hygiene aisle. “We’re gettin’ you real shampoo. None of that sixteen-in-one bullshit.”

“It’s *three* in one,” Osamu says, but doesn’t stop him. “Since when do ya care about shampoo?”

“Since I got access to Sakusa’s stash. The man’s got, like, twenty brands of shampoo and body wash. It’s magic.” He shamelessly grabs an outrageously priced shampoo bottle.

“Oi, oi,” Osamu says, gawking. “Yer not buyin’ shampoo for *2,000 yen!*”

Atsumu grins roguishly, dropping it into the cart. “Watch me.”

Osamu stalks after him as Atsumu casually grabs an equally expensive conditioner. “Miya Atsumu, stop.”

“Or what?” Atsumu challenges.

Osamu’s jaw clicks shut. Then, expression suddenly serious, he reaches out and grips the hem of Atsumu’s shirt.

“Tsumu. Seriously.” His voice softens. “Save yer money. Ya won’t have this job forever. Don’t spend it recklessly.”

Atsumu’s chest tightens. He gently unclenches Osamu’s fist from his clothes. “Relax, Samu. It’s my *first* paycheck. I think I deserve to spoil myself a little. We’re stockin’ the apartment without lookin’ at prices tonight. Ya hear me?”

“This isn’t spoilin’ yourself, though,” Osamu says quietly, eyes on the cart. “It’s spoilin’ me.”

Atsumu flicks his forehead. “Idiot. We’re twins. Spoilin’ you *is* spoilin’ me by proxy.”

Osamu’s lips quiver. Atsumu wonders if he’s gonna cry. Instead, he casually scrubs at his eyes and mutters, “How did you even get into med school? That’s so dumb.”

“Mmhmm,” Atsumu hums, dragging him down the aisle toward the razors. Screw it—Osamu deserves a taste of the luxury Atsumu gets at the Sakusa residence. Not that he’ll admit it, but he feels a little guilty.

Osamu might not know it, but this is as much for Atsumu as it is for him.

He’s buying peace of mind. Silencing guilt.

So damn it—he’s gonna spend half his paycheck on Osamu if that’s what it takes.

Fifty-fifty.

The way they were split in Ma’s womb.

Cradle to grave.

Like muscle memory, programmed by desperation and the divine call of the noodle gods, they find themselves in the instant ramen aisle.

Atsumu squints at the red and yellow packaging of one of the offerings. “This one says ‘Hellfire Challenge.’”

Plucking it out of his hand, Osamu tosses it into the cart. “Perfect. I wanna feel regret tomorrow morning.”

“You mean like usual?”

“I meant from the ramen, not my entire life.”

Atsumu sniggers. “Might need to offer a blood sacrifice to some obscure god.”

But Osamu is already beelining down the aisle. “Is that a free samples tray?”

Atsumu hurries to catch up with him. “Ooh, fancy cheese, my beloved.”

“Fancy cheese, the expensive hooker you fell in love with, ya mean.”

“I can’t hear you over the wedding bells,” Atsumu says, and blissfully pops a piece of Manchego into his mouth.

Osamu copies him, chewing thoughtfully. “Kinda tastes like cheddar’s mysterious older cousin.”

“Right!?” Atsumu grins, reaching for a sample labeled *Humboldt Fog*—goat cheese with a line of edible ash through the center.

It earns him a dubious look from Osamu. “This looks like a geology sample.”

Atsumu studies it more closely. “Hmm... cheese with an emo phase.”

“Yer ridiculous,” Osamu snorts, reaching for the third and final sample: *sakura cheese*. He chews for a solid thirty seconds before his face scrunches up. “Tastes like springtime and regret.”

“Did you just say cheese has vibes?”

“Not this one,” Osamu says. “I definitely don’t vibe with this one.”

“I think the sake might’ve gone straight to your brain,” Atsumu diagnoses. “Race ya to the frozen foods? Or will ya faceplant?”

“I’m not drunk,” Osamu scoffs—and dashes off.

“Hey, that’s cheating!”

“Only losers say that~”

Standing at the bus stop, laden with ten bags each, Atsumu finally says, “I think we should’ve accounted for the fact that we don’t have a car.”

“No shit.” Osamu squints into the distance, where the bus is crawling toward them. “I just hope they have an open seat.”

Atsumu whines. “We should’ve taken a taxi—”

“—Nu-uh. Nope. No more spending! Or I’m confiscating yer card. Jesus, Tsumu, we already spent *forty thousand yen!*” Osamu’s glare could level a building. Good thing Atsumu’s immune.

“Not my fault we live in a capitalist hellscape,” Atsumu sniffs, hauling his bags up to board the bus. “Hurry, ’s almost eleven and we’ve got class tomorrow.”

Miraculously, there are open seats, which they collapse into with all the grace of fish flopping out of water. Atsumu checks his phone, only to groan when he finds it dead.

“My battery is dead.”

“Aren’t yer battery always dead?”

“Not *me*, I meant my *phone’s* battery,” Atsumu rolls his eyes, tucking grocery bags more securely under his seat as the bus engine purrs to life.

Osamu shrugs. “Tough luck.”

Heartless. Absolutely heartless.

They don't make it home until eleven thirty, and by then both of them are exhausted, labouring up two flights of stairs with enough bags to restock a small convenience store.

"I'm never shopping again," Atsumu groans once they're in the apartment and he's dumped all the bags on the kitchen counter.

"Ya don't even live here," Osamu grumbles, peeking into the haul. "We should probably put these away tonight or the frozen foods will spoil."

"Yeah yeah, gimme a sec to plug in my charger."

Atsumu beelines to his study desk and sighs. Wednesdays are so draining. He wishes he had a day off. Just one day to sleep in and do nothing.

His iPhone blinks to life—and then floods with notifications.

Atsumu's heart drops when he sees they're all from Sakusa. All ten of them.

"What the fuck."

He opens the messages, dread curling up his spine like a vice.

6:00 PM

Miya, what time are you coming back?

6:37 PM

Base to Miya Atsumu, should I send an ambulance?

7:05 PM

Miya?

7:45 PM

You better be dead in a ditch somewhere and not ignoring my texts.

8:30 PM

Miya. Answer your phone.

9:20 PM

Did you just switch off your phone!? Rude as hell, I'm giving you a time out when you get back. (I'm really beginning to worry, pity my greying head.)

9:45 PM

Did you fall asleep? Is your phone dead? It's been 3 and a half hours. Are you in a coma?

10:02 PM

... Miya I swear to god, I will file a missing person's complaint if you don't respond in the next hour.

11:02 PM

I'm trying to give you the benefit of the doubt and keep my trust in you, but this is starting to look bleak on my end. Were you planning to receive your first salary and bolt?

11:30 PM

I'm really disappointed in you, Miya. I thought you were different.

The bottom falls out of Atsumu's stomach.

"Oh my god. Oh god, no no no no—"

Osamu's head swivels toward him. "What? Did ya fail yer lab report?"

"Fuck, no. Worse." Atsumu's hands are shaking as he dials Sakusa. "I have ten texts from Sakusa and he's really mad."

"Oh shit," Osamu says, abandoning the groceries. "Are ya calling him right now?"

"Yes, but he's not picking up!" Atsumu paces, foot tapping out an anxious rhythm on the floor as the call disconnects. "Shit! What do I do?!"

"Maybe he's asleep?" Osamu offers. "It's almost midnight, y'know."

"No," Atsumu mutters, ringing Sakusa again. "Sakusa's an insomniac. He's *definitely* awake. Fuck, maybe he's ignoring my calls on purpose."

"Just text him?" Osamu suggests.

Atsumu doesn't need to be told twice. He pulls up their thread and starts typing frantically.

11:48 PM

I'm so so so sorry!

I was out with Samu and forgot my phone on silent!

11:49 PM

I wasn't ignoring your texts Sakusa-san, I swear.

My phone died and I just got home.

11:50 PM

Please answer the phone I want to properly apologise.

11:51 PM

It's my day off, I didn't expect a text, please Sakusa-san.

“He’s not answering,” Atsumu whispers hoarsely.

“Tsumu, breathe,” Osamu says. “Maybe he’s not near his phone. You’re catastrophizing again.”

“Yeah, well, I really fuckin’ need this job!” Mind made up, Atsumu heads to the genkan, his only companion now his dying phone at 7%.

Osamu chases after him. “Tsumu, where the hell are ya going?”

“The residence. I’m going to fix this and apologise.” Atsumu jams his phone and wallet into his jeans and flings open the door. “Don’t wait up.”

“Tsumu!” Osamu yells after him, exasperated—but Atsumu is already flying down the stairs, two at a time.

He vaults the last railing, hits the ground running. He doubts he’ll make the last bus in time, so he doesn’t even try. Sakusa’s place is a forty-minute walk—he’ll make it in twenty-five if he runs.

He’s spent the last eight years of his life running like this. From job to class to library to class again. This, right here, is muscle memory. Another deadline he can’t afford to miss.

By the time Sakusa’s building comes into view, Atsumu’s calves are screaming and his lungs burn. He gasps in shallow, painful breaths as he waves his ID at the entrance scanner and dashes toward the elevator, ignoring the startled security guard. Thirty-five floors up.

He bends over, clutching his knees as sweat trickles down his back and his heart tries to claw its way out of his chest. His anxiety sinks its teeth in deeper.

At the door, he falters.

It feels wrong to let himself in now. Like a violation.

“Dammit.”

Sakusa’s already mad. But ringing feels... safer.

He rings the bell. Once. Twice. Seven times.

The door finally swings open to reveal a ruffled Sakusa. “What.”

He blinks. “Miya?”

Atsumu drops to his knees in a sloppy dogeza. “I’m so, so, so, *SO* sorry.”

“Miya!” Sakusa gasps. “Get off the floor right now.”

Atsumu rises, barely able to stand. “I’m sorry,” he repeats, lips trembling. “I swear I wasn’t ignoring you. I forgot to take my phone off silent. It really died. I didn’t get home till thirty minutes ago—”

“Miya, breathe,” Sakusa says, frowning. He pulls the door wider. “I saw your texts. I was bathing when you responded.”

His hair is damp, a towel slung around his neck, cheeks flushed.

“Oh.”

“Did you *run* here?” Sakusa eyes him, arms crossed.

“I missed the last bus,” Atsumu admits. “I needed to see you. To explain.”

Sakusa sighs. “You’re completely out of your mind... but I suppose this is my fault for overreacting.”

Atsumu slumps in relief, letting out a shaky breath. He gives a tired, sheepish smile. “Can’t have ya think I’m bolting off with your credit card. You can have it back.”

“I didn’t actually think you were stealing from me, Miya. That’s a felony. You’re smarter than that.”

“Not sure about the smart part, considering my dumbass forgot to charge my phone and left it on silent. Truly, Sakusa-san, I’m sorry. I didn’t expect a text, it’s my day off. I swear I religiously check my phone during work hours.”

The look on Sakusa’s face softens—just a little. Is that... guilt?

“Go shower, Miya,” he says. “We can talk inside.”

Atsumu blinks. “I can stay?”

“Yes?” Sakusa raises an eyebrow. “I’m not sending you back out this late and risk you actually getting kidnapped.”

Atsumu bows deeply. “Thank you thank you *thank you!*”

Before Sakusa can respond, Atsumu bolts to the bathroom.

It’s not a Saturday, but he’d like to cash in his weekly cry session now, thanks.

There’s nothing quite like dissociating in the shower of a rich CEO’s home after almost getting fired.

This day has been batshit insane, and Atsumu would really like it to end now, please.

Atsumu pads into the second-floor living room in trepidation, following the jazzy notes of the piano. It’s a different [composition](#) this time, one he hasn’t heard before. Soft—like Sakusa’s usual late-night piano pieces—half-asleep, as if it didn’t mean to be overheard.

The melody doesn’t beg for attention. It just exists—cool, collected, slightly bittersweet. Like jazz for people who don’t know they need jazz. Like falling into a memory he hasn’t lived yet.

Climbing the stairs is muscle memory now, Sakusa’s back coming into view a familiar scene.

“Hey,” Atsumu says softly.

Sakusa’s fingers don’t falter. “Na’eeman.”

Atsumu frowns. “What?”

Sakusa hums, leaning into the keys the way he always plays—with his whole body. “It’s what they say in Arabic to someone after they shower or shave. To congratulate them on their clean state. A ‘may you be refreshed’. The literal translation is ‘blessings.’”

Atsumu can’t help it—he falls into a fit of giggles, equal parts amusement and a much-needed release of tension. “Of course that’s a word you’d know.”

The tune shifts into [something else](#)—nostalgic and drowsy, like a melody you’d slow-dance to in a kitchen at 2 a.m., rain softly pattering the windowpane.

Atsumu lowers himself onto the couch, shoulders unwinding. He’s tired. He thinks he could fall asleep right here, sitting up. He waits for Sakusa to speak, to say what he needs to say.

“I wanted to apologise,” Sakusa says eventually, fingers gliding over the keys with effortless grace. Atsumu’s eyes follow them—the graceful knuckles, the elegant wrists. It’s mesmerising. “For overreacting.”

Atsumu swallows. “S okay. It happens.”

Sakusa is quiet for another beat. Then: “Something you need to know about me, Miya, is that I don’t do well with breaks in routine.”

Like Atsumu hasn’t already noticed Sakusa’s pedantic relationship with time.

“You’re usually home before nine. I know when your classes end. You didn’t mention you wouldn’t be coming back tonight. I... I worry.”

The tune morphs again, slipping into a sleek, warm [melody](#).

Cool, slightly breathy, intentionally laid-back.

Atsumu notices that he’s breathing a little easier. Feeling a little sleepier. “I’m sorry I worried you. You probably have enough on your plate already.”

“Hm. Ethical boundaries of neurochemical intervention. Liability and regulation. Scientific integrity versus investor pressure—just to list a few. But it’s not your fault I am like this. I’ve been like this long before you started working for me.”

“How reassuring,” Atsumu says, licking his lips. Sakusa stops playing as the tune winds to an end, turning his body Atsumu’s way. “And here I thought I was the chronic worrier between the two of us.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” Sakusa’s lips crook up. “Did you tell your brother you’re not coming back? I think we’ve had enough scares tonight.”

“I shot him a quick text in the bathroom to make sure he doesn’t come marching in,” Atsumu reassures. “He might not act like it, but he’s also a chronic worrier. That’s why I went to see him today, y’know. I’m worried about him being on his own.”

Sakusa’s expression softens into something bittersweet. “You and your brother are very different from my siblings and me.”

Atsumu blinks. “You have siblings?”

“Hm. An older brother and sister. They both live abroad with their families.” Sakusa rises to prepare tea in the open-plan kitchen, where Atsumu can still see him. “Last time I heard from them was... probably Christmas.”

“That was seven months ago!” Atsumu exclaims, aghast.

“Like I said—we’re different from you.”

The kettle kicks to life, humming into the silence as Sakusa moves from cabinet to cabinet.

“Then again,” he adds, “they’re a decade older. They rarely visit Japan.”

“Where do they live?”

“Takuma-nii-san operates our branch in Korea, and Nozomi-nee-san runs the one in the States.” Sakusa pours hot water into two cups, letting the tea steep before he rejoins Atsumu.

Atsumu accepts his cup reverently. “Oh. Thanks.”

He blows gently at the steam. “So how come you’re the one who stayed in Japan?”

There’s a complicated look on Sakusa’s face. “They probably wanted as much space from Father as they could get.”

Oh.

The look on Sakusa’s face is shuttered—like a door closing. A silent warning not to ask. So Atsumu lets it go. It’s none of his business anyway.

They drink their tea in companionable silence, Sakusa staring pensively out the window.

The texts still weigh on Atsumu—one in particular—and he finds himself asking in a tentative mutter, “Do you still trust me, or did I irreparably break that trust today?”

Sakusa’s cup pauses halfway to his lips. He lowers it.

“You didn’t irreparably break it, Miya. I’ll just need a moment to silence this.” He taps his temple. “There’s a lot of unpleasant history with ex-employees that gave me trust issues.”

“Right,” Atsumu nods. “Okay. That’s okay. I’ll work on fixing it.”

Sakusa smiles—small and genuine—and hides it behind his tea, but not before Atsumu sees it.

“I’m not worried anymore.”

Success.

Atsumu’s mad dash here was worth it, in the end.

Together, they sit back and sip their tea, settling into the quiet familiarity that exists only between these walls.

A safety Atsumu can feel blooming from the cracks in Sakusa’s exterior—cracks he can’t help but chase in his relentless pursuit of the unknown.

And Sakusa is his greatest unsolved mystery yet.

The Scale of Insufferability

Chapter Summary

His gaze drifts down to the open binder between them—and halts. “Wait. Is this a graph of... how insufferable each guest is?”

“Yes,” Sakusa says, tone perfectly flat. “I’d like you to be fully prepared for any disasters.”

Chapter Notes

Welcome to TMLTL chapter 12, strangely the rising threat of a third world war has yet to derail me from writing about SakuAtsu

In this chapter, 2 minor background characters are introduced—those are two of your fellow readers who were randomly selected to make cameos in TMLTL, I hope you give them some love ♥

If you haven’t yet, join our [discord server](#), we have games, memes and sneak peeks~

Last but not least, thank you for 600+ kudos 🥺♥

Sakusa is already gone when Atsumu rises the next day, muscles sore from yesterday’s cardio-fueled brush with death.

There’s a text from Sakusa asking him to stop by the office *any time before class*, which immediately sounds like a trap.

Still, after yesterday’s PR disaster, Atsumu doesn’t dare delay. He shows up bright and early—hair messy, brain half-functioning, and dignity questionable.

Tsukishima looks deeply amused as Atsumu hands over his ID.

“Sakusa-san said you’d drop by sometime today. Didn’t think you were the ‘sunrise repentance’ type.”

“I’m sorry if my face is the first thing you’ve seen today,” Atsumu deadpans. “And that my roots are visible enough to signal aircraft.”

Tsukishima's gaze flicks up. "Yeah," he says dryly. "They're starting to form their own zip code."

Atsumu huffs and marches to Sakusa's office, enduring the curious stares that follow. He knocks once before entering.

"Ah, Miya. Good morning."

"We don't know that yet," Atsumu replies. "It could still go to shit. *Polite greetings*, Sakusa-san."

"You are the dictionary definition of insufferable," Sakusa mutters—but the smirk playing at the corner of his mouth gives him away. "Sit."

"I'm getting war flashbacks," Atsumu grumbles, sinking into the expensive leather chair like it might bite him. "Am I here to sign another contract? Is this one gonna summon a demon?"

Sakusa rolls his eyes and swivels his chair with dramatic CEO elegance, lifting the office landline like it's a prop in a villain monologue. He dials a short extension.

"Shimizu-san, send Kanako-san in, please."

Kanako-san, it turns out, is a baby-faced driver who looks barely older than Atsumu. This is somehow the most intimidating part of the morning.

"Kanako-san, as of today, you're officially assigned to Miya Atsumu."

Atsumu's head snaps around so fast he nearly dislocates something. "*What.*"

"Another Sakusa Industries privilege. Kanako-san will drive you wherever you need to go. Please liaise directly."

"I get a personal chauffeur?" Atsumu echoes, as if he's just discovered the concept of monarchy.

"Yes," Sakusa says flatly. "I hired her today for that specific purpose."

Kanako bows crisply. "Thank you for existing, Miya-san."

"...You're welcome?" Atsumu says, bewildered. Sakusa's faint smile says *this is the highlight of my week*.

"Now run along," Sakusa waves him off, already returning to his keyboard like this conversation never happened.

Still blinking, Atsumu follows Kanako out. They make it all the way to the lobby before she offers a hand for him to shake.

"Miya-san, nice to officially meet the reason I have a job. Please call me Oat-san."

“...Oat?”

“My name’s Kanako, and I use the kanji 禾—it means grain.”

“You nicknamed yourself after a breakfast cereal?”

“Why not?” she says with a shrug. “Now, where am I driving you?”

“Uh. Probably back to the residence.”

She nods and leads him to a dark Lexus parked underground.

“Good gods, this car is *sexy*,” Atsumu says once inside, running a reverent hand over the buttery leather. USB ports. Backseat screens. The car smells like ambition and very expensive upholstery.

“Right?” Oat-san beams, climbing into the driver’s seat. “I still can’t believe Sakusa-sama hired me. It’s like being drafted into a K-drama.”

She drives smoothly, the engine silent as sin. Atsumu watches her in the rearview, noting her soft pink bangs and coffee-toned hair.

“Nice hair, by the way.”

“Oh, thanks!” she says brightly, clearly pleased.

Atsumu stares out the window, suddenly hyper-aware of his own neglected mop. His roots are staging a coup. But bleaching his hair at Sakusa’s residence feels like an HR violation waiting to happen.

“If you want,” Oat-san breaks the silence, “I can take you to my stylist. She does my hair—she’s my cousin twice removed, so I get discounts. If I say you’re my friend, I bet she’ll do the same.”

“You’d do that?”

“Absolutely! Thursdays are slow. I’m sure Yachi-chan has a chair free.”

“I’ve... never been to a beauty salon before,” Atsumu admits, like he’s confessing a felony.

Oat-san gasps, scandalised. “Then we *must* go. It’s a moral imperative. Pedicures, facials, eyebrow threading—she even has this magical foot spa. And I’m so jealous of your eyebrows, by the way. They’re like fluffy little dreams.”

Atsumu awkwardly scratches his nose. “Er. Thanks? No one’s ever complimented my facial hair distribution before.”

“So?” she prompts. “Salon?”

Atsumu hesitates. “You don’t mind waiting?”

“Nope! Sakusa-sama might be my employer, but *you’re* my boss now.” Her grin is wicked. “And thank God. You’re way less scary, Miya-san.”

“Atsumu,” he says without thinking. “You can call me Atsumu. And yeah. Fuck it. Let’s do it. Want a touch-up too?”

Oat-san looks shocked. “Me?”

“Sure. You’ll be waiting anyway.”

“*Che figata!*” she practically sings. “You’re the best boss ever.”

Atsumu blinks. “Che... what now?”

“*Che figata*. It’s Italian. Means ‘how cool!’”

“Wait, are you bilingual? Is that, like, a job requirement at Sakusa Industries?”

She laughs. “Half-Italian. So... optional perks?”

“That’s really cool.” Atsumu leans forward. “Have you lived in Italy? What’s it like? Is the pizza actually better? I’ve always wanted to go.”

Oat-san giggles, clearly delighted.

They spend the rest of the ride trading stories, with Oat-san promising to teach him Italian curse words. The day, somehow, is already looking up.

The salon they arrive at is tucked into a side street like a secret clubhouse for the aesthetically blessed. The windows glimmer. The name—*Salon Bianchetta*—is spelled out in delicate cursive, flanked by pastel vines and a sign that proudly declares *We speak hair. And Italian.*

Atsumu stares at the door like it might ask for his credentials. “Are you sure I should walk in *there?*”

“You’ll be fine,” Oat-san grins, grabbing his arm. “Just smile and look rich.”

They step inside. It smells like rosemary, ambition, and hair products that cost more than rent.

A petite woman with a cloud of blonde hair zips over like a caffeinated bird. “Oat! *Sei in anticipo!* Who is this gorgeous creature?”

“This is Atsumu,” Oat-san says. “First-time visitor. Be gentle.”

Yachi—who somehow radiates both joy and danger—clasps Atsumu’s hands. “*Benvenuto!* You have such good bone structure. I’m going to ruin other clients for myself.”

Atsumu blinks. “Uh. Thanks. I think.”

He's ushered into a sleek chair that looks more like a spaceship cockpit. Yachi drapes a cape around him like she's about to knight him for services to hotness.

"Roots, bleach, tone, maybe a little hydration mask," she mutters, inspecting his scalp like an archaeologist unearthing ruins. "Oh, you poor darling. This hair has seen things."

Atsumu gapes. "*Hey*, my hair's fine! It's just... lived."

"Your ends are whispering for help," Yachi says gravely. "Begging for protein. We should put them out of their misery."

He tries to catch Oat-san's gaze for help, but she's already reclining in a chair, cucumber slices slapped over her eyes like she's in a romcom dream montage.

"I love this place," she sighs.

Atsumu is dragged into a back room and force-lowered into a reclining washbasin. A warm towel is laid over his forehead like a benediction.

Then the washing starts.

It's... intimate. Confusingly spiritual. His scalp is being massaged like it owes money. He catches himself moaning once—*just once*—and prays no one heard it.

Yachi returns with gloves and the unmistakable air of someone about to commit alchemy.

"Bleach time, baby."

Atsumu swallows. "...Be gentle?"

"Of course!" she chirps.

The chemical smell hits him like betrayal and peroxide. He sees his reflection—cape on, head foiled, ears slightly pink from heat—and briefly questions every choice that led him here, including that fateful Google search to divorce his dignity a month ago.

Two chairs over, Oat-san peeks through her eye mask. "You're doing great."

"I look like the human version of tin foil," Atsumu mutters.

"You look like a pop idol caught in a transformation arc," she corrects. "Just enjoy the process, Atsumu-san."

Two and a half hours later

His hair is a flawless platinum halo. His skin has been exfoliated to the point of religious clarity. Someone shaped his eyebrows with terrifying precision.

He looks—*fucking phenomenal*.

He stares at himself in the mirror.

“...I can never go back to 500-yen box dye, can I?”

“No,” Yachi says serenely, handing him a complimentary espresso. “That life is behind you now.”

Atsumu gets dropped off at the residence with a few hours to spare before class—just enough time to clean. His skin glows, his hair looks like it walked out of a shampoo commercial, and his feet feel like cloud pillows. It’s almost a crime to go from being pampered like royalty to scrubbing the bathroom floor.

Alas. Duty calls.

After some high-speed tidying and a quick change into gym wear for Anatomy Lecture + Lab (as instructed last week), he’s back in Oat-san’s Lexus. She, too, is radiant. Post-salon afterglow suits them both. Beauty salon buddies. There’s no stronger bond.

“Thanks,” Atsumu says as he hops out of the car. “For everything, really.”

Oat-san flashes him a thumbs up like she’s just dropped him off at summer camp. “You’re very welcome!”

The clinical lab space he walks into is a cold slap of reality after the buttery sunlight of the salon. White fluorescents. Metal stretchers. The soft whirr of AC. Everyone in dark athletic gear, stretching or yawning.

Shiori-sensei claps once, clipboard in hand. “Alright, folks. Partner up. You’ll be palpating the deltoid, sternum, and PSIS today. Respectful touch only. Gloves on.”

Atsumu glances around. No sight of his usual lab partners. He feels like a high schooler who came late to a group project presentation. Great.

Then the door hisses open. In strolls Haito Kagehira, looking like he lost a fight with a pillow and barely survived. His fiery red hair is artfully disheveled, lab coat flapping like a cape.

He yawns like he’s trying to unhinge his jaw, then scans the room with annoyingly alert grey eyes—until they land squarely on Atsumu.

“Well, well, well...” Haito drawls, sauntering up like a cat who’s just found a mouse to mess with. “Look who fate handed me.”

They’ve barely exchanged three words all term. (“Hi, I’m Atsumu.”) That’s it.

Atsumu blinks at him. Haito eyes him slowly, then grins. “You’re cuter in real life.”

“...In real life compared to what?” Atsumu asks, suspicious.

“Dreams, obviously.” Haito’s grin is both smug and sincere, like he thinks he’s doing Atsumu a favor by existing.

Atsumu groans. “Oh god. You’re one of those. You flirt during *lab*?”

“Only with people above a seven,” Haito says, already snapping his gloves on. “Shirt off, sunshine. We’ve got bones to trace.”

Atsumu levels him with a stare. “I’m reporting you.”

“Which department?” Haito asks, entirely unfazed. “Anatomy or flirting? I’m tenured in both.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this,” Atsumu mutters, peeling off his hoodie, “but please just touch me and get it over with.”

Haito hums, guiding him onto the stretcher. “You could at least ask me to dinner first.”

“Yer not my type,” Atsumu says, eyes shut as cool fingers press against his scapula. “But I might share my fries if you stop being weird.”

Haito gasps in mock offense. “Me? Weird? Slanderous.”

Atsumu sighs, letting the stretch of silence settle as Haito carefully palpates the bone markers. His nails catch the overhead lights—glossy, perfect.

Well. If nothing else, he’s got great cuticles. That’s something.

“Pssst!” Oat-san stands outside the building in her secret agent get-up that all of Sakusa’s employees seem legally required to wear. “Over here!”

Atsumu flushes as several students glance his way.

“Oat-san,” he laughs nervously, “you don’t have to wait out here for me.”

“Oh! Oops!” she backtracks to the Lexus, and Atsumu does his best to ignore the curious stares as he slips into the back seat.

“Where shall I wait in the future?”

“In the car’s fine,” he sighs, tossing his bag aside and deflating like a popped balloon. “AC, please, or you’ll need a bucket to scoop me out.”

“Let’s not give Sakusa-sama an aneurysm on my first day,” she replies, smoothly merging onto the main road. “Destination, sir?”

“Home,” he sighs, eyes fluttering shut.

A beat later, they snap open. He catches Oat-san’s gaze in the rearview.

“I, uh— I meant the residence.”

Bless her, she doesn’t say a word.

Atsumu arrives at the Sakusa Residence at 8 PM. He mentally underlines that twice. The Sakusa Residence. He may sleep here, but this mansion is not his house.

He’s still in the doorway, gym clothes and all, when Sakusa passes by en route to the kitchen—and comically backpedals to squint at him.

“What?” Atsumu asks, suddenly self-conscious.

“...You look like someone who moisturises now,” Sakusa says, disturbed. “It’s unsettling.”

He vanishes around the corner.

“Hey! I *do* moisturise!” Atsumu calls after him.

“...When I remember,” he mutters, shaking his head and tucking his bag away.

Sakusa reappears just as Atsumu is slipping on his shower slippers, holding a slim binder.

“I compiled a brief on the dinner guests. Join me in the library once you’re done—we’ll go over them.”

Atsumu gives a mock salute. “Yessir.”

Sakusa’s lips twitch into a smile he quickly hides by turning on his heel and heading upstairs.

He really should stop pretending Atsumu isn’t growing on him.

Atsumu grins to himself and heads for the shower, eager to wash off the faint imprint of the palpation lab—the feel of vinyl pillows, clinical lighting, and the awkward intimacy of guided touch exercises. He scrubs thoroughly, like he’s exfoliating anxiety and secondhand embarrassment, replacing it all with lavender body wash and a brisk splash of aftershave.

Afterward, he runs a hand over his freshly steamed face and hums under his breath.

Who knew facials could feel this close to magic?

On the way to the library, he detours to make them Spanish lattes and scavenges some leftover rice pudding for Sakusa. It’s a quiet, impulsive gesture, but one that feels oddly significant.

When he reaches his study nook, Sakusa looks up, a little startled—then pleasantly surprised—as Atsumu sets the drink and dessert down in front of him. Without a word, Sakusa shifts over and pats the seat beside him in open invitation.

Atsumu hesitates. That's... close. Closer than usual. But Sakusa looks relaxed, like he doesn't mind sharing the space. Maybe even wants to. So Atsumu settles beside him, leaving a polite little gap.

Sakusa takes a sip, then hums—quiet, pleased, like it snuck up on him.

“Good?” Atsumu asks.

“Acceptable,” Sakusa replies primly, not quite meeting his eye.

God, he's such an ass. Atsumu snorts. “So excellent, in Sakusa-speak. Got it.”

Sakusa doesn't reply, but there's the tiniest upward twitch at the corner of his mouth. Not quite a smile—more like the idea of one. Atsumu counts it as a win.

His gaze drifts down to the open binder between them—and halts. “Wait. Is this a graph of... how insufferable each guest is?”

“Yes,” Sakusa says, tone perfectly flat. “I'd like you to be fully prepared for any disasters.”

Atsumu leans in, eyebrows climbing. “This one exceeds the chart,” he says, pointing to a particularly angry red column labelled *Tanaka Goro*.

Sakusa sneers with rare, unfiltered distaste. “Yes. *That* guy.”

They flip to the profile, the heading already promising chaos:

The Outdated Alpha Male

- **Name:** Tanaka Goro
- **Occupation:** Retired executive, now a “consultant”
- **Traits:** Loud. Uncomfortably touchy. Calls Sakusa “*the germ guy*.”Laughs at his own jokes. Mansplains wine to the sommelier.

There's a glossy photo paper-clipped to the page—a bald man with unsettlingly dark eyes and skin so smooth it borders on uncanny.

Atsumu recoils slightly. “How much Botox is in that face?”

“I shudder to ask,” Sakusa replies, eyes narrowing. “He insists he's ‘aged naturally.’ As if I haven't known him since I was your age.”

Atsumu grins. “Spill the tea.”

“...Tea?” Sakusa echoes, brow furrowing.

“Gossip. Drama. The goods.” Atsumu makes a pouring motion. “It’s a Gen Z thing. Don’t question the sacred slang.”

Sakusa snorts, quiet and reluctant. “Who in the world decided to call it tea?”

“Don’t look at me,” Atsumu says with mock innocence. “I’m just a victim of my generation.”

Sakusa rolls his eyes, but there’s a tiny, defeated smile tugging at his lips as he turns the page. “I feel ancient.”

Atsumu hesitates, then mutters under his breath, “Well… ya don’t look ancient.”

He hopes Sakusa doesn’t catch it. He hopes Sakusa *does*.

The Vaguely Threatening Heiress

- **Name:** Kurobane Sayaka
- **Occupation:** Heiress to an old-money zaibatsu
- **Traits:** Wears gloves indoors. Smiles like she knows your browser history. May or may not have people followed.

Atsumu squints at the page, then recoils. “Gloves? Indoors? *Here?* Your house is cleaner than a surgical theatre!”

“I’ve informed her—*repeatedly*—that the residence is meticulously sanitised,” Sakusa says with the sigh of a man who’s tried reason and been punished for it. “She still insists on the gloves. Claims it’s about aesthetics.”

Atsumu leans closer to the photo, then immediately regrets it. “She looks like she eats broken dreams for breakfast.”

“And your remaining dignity for dinner,” Sakusa mutters darkly. “She’ll tell you your pants are wrinkled, your lips are dry, your cufflinks are fake—and then laugh as though she’s just delivered a punchline. No one’s ever sure if she’s joking, which is the most dangerous kind of humour.”

“God. She’s like an anime villain in a Birkin.”

“Precisely,” Sakusa says, almost approving. “Right up there with overly chatty taxi drivers on my personal scale of hell.”

Atsumu blinks. “Wait—you’ve been in a taxi?”

There's a pause. Sakusa's expression turns glassy, like he's experiencing mild PTSD. "... Once. In university. Not by choice."

Atsumu chokes on a laugh. "You say that like you were held hostage."

"I was," Sakusa replies evenly. "By circumstance."

That earns a full-bodied laugh from Atsumu, warm and surprised. "Man, you're so dramatic."

Sakusa gives a modest shrug, as though he's merely stating facts. "It was raining. I survived."

Atsumu shakes his head, grinning. "You're so weird."

"And you're entertained," Sakusa notes, dry but not unkind.

Atsumu's smile lingers. "Well, yeah. Who's next?"

The Pretentious Intellectual

- **Name:** Dr. Nishikawa Rei
- **Occupation:** Philosopher, TED Talk speaker, part-time sommelier (self-proclaimed)
- **Traits:** Quotes obscure philosophers in casual chat. Critiques the art on Sakusa's walls. Forces everyone to read his 200-page paper on *insert obscure topic*.

Atsumu tilts his head at the photo. "Why's he on the list? He looks... I dunno. Weirdly normal. Like someone's cousin at a wedding who offers unsolicited stock tips."

"Looks are deceiving," Sakusa says. "He once turned a cheese board into a lecture on moral psychology. Don't ask me how."

"That's... almost impressive in a terrifying way."

"He talks for fifteen minutes without saying anything," Sakusa mutters. "And still manages to make you feel like *you're* the idiot."

Atsumu leans a little closer, scanning the profile—and catches it. A quiet, grounding scent: clean cedar, something faintly spiced, sharp around the edges like a winter morning. It takes him a second to place it.

Sakusa.

Not cologne, exactly. Just... him.

Atsumu blinks, startled by the softness of it. It doesn't match the cutting lines of Sakusa's jaw or the precision of his posture. It's warmer. Quieter.

It tugs at something under his ribs. He swallows and leans back subtly, like the distance might undo the shift in his chest.

“Yeah,” he says, recovering. “That sounds insufferable. Like getting mansplained by a thesaurus.”

Sakusa’s mouth twitches. “Or condescended to by a wine label.”

Atsumu snorts at the unexpected remark. “Lemme guess. He drinks stuff that smells like vinegar and calls it ‘elegant.’”

“‘Expressive,’” Sakusa corrects, deadpan.

Atsumu laughs again, the kind that bubbles up before he can stop it.

Their eyes meet—briefly—and something lingers there. Amusement. Ease. Something unspoken but not uncomfortable.

Then Sakusa flips the page, and the moment passes like steam from a cup.

Our Inescapable Oily Benefactor

- **Name:** Renji Tachibana
- **Occupation:** Pharmaceutical and neurotech investor. Owns half of Tokyo’s exclusive rooftops.
- **Traits:** The creep no one calls out because he signs the checks.

The mugshot is of a man with shellacked hair, a velvet-lapelled suit, and unsettling hazel eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses. He radiates oil tycoon—but evil.

“I take it we hate this guy?”

“Immensely,” Sakusa confirms. “He thinks we’re intellectual equals. Once said dopamine was *‘basically liquid ambition.’*”

Atsumu makes a face. “So, on a scale of one to ten—how creepy? Should I pack an emergency parachute to launch myself several feet away?”

“Definitely,” Sakusa says. “He talks in insinuations. Flirts with plausible deniability. He’s... repulsive.”

“But you have to invite him.”

“He funds one of our neuroplasticity divisions. Cutting him out would delay progress by over a year. Believe me, I’ve considered it.”

“Has he been creepy with you?”

Sakusa glances at the ceiling, voice unnervingly calm. “He once touched my lower back. I ‘accidentally’ elbowed him in the groin. No further advances were initiated ever since.”

Atsumu gapes. Sakusa stares, expression unreadable.

“Oh my god,” Atsumu wheezes, breaking into laughter. “You legend! Can ya do it again this Friday? Maybe we can catch it on camera.”

Sakusa chuckles, quiet but genuine. “You’re ridiculous.”

“One of my finer qualities,” Atsumu grins. “So, who’s next?”

Sakusa doesn’t answer right away. His gaze flicks back to the page, then to Atsumu.

“If Tachibana says anything inappropriate,” he says—carefully, like he’s testing the weight of the words—“tell me.”

Atsumu blinks. “What, like report to HR? Or to you, the CEO-slash-groin-elbower?”

Sakusa’s fingers drum once against the table. Then stop. “Both.”

There’s a beat of silence. Not awkward—just... different. Loaded.

“Seriously,” Sakusa adds, more softly this time. “Don’t brush it off.”

“...Okay,” Atsumu swallows, caught off-guard by the serious sincerity in Sakusa’s eyes. He clears his throat, grasping for a line to pull himself back to safer shores. “So, this binder—everything I need to memorise before Friday?”

“Not even close. Starting tomorrow, we’ll review business etiquette.”

“I feel like I’m in *The Princess Diaries*,” Atsumu says drily.

“It’s for your own good.”

“Alright, People Pleasing 101 starts tomorrow,” he sighs, flipping through the binder. “I better be getting a degree out of this.”

Sakusa just shakes his head and gets up to retrieve a pen.

“Let’s finish the binder before we worry about your degree.”

“Yessir,” Atsumu says, accepting the inch closer that Sakusa sits when he returns—now hyperaware of that proximity. “Now spill the rest of the tea.”

“I never spill anything.”

“I meant the metaphorical tea.”

“Even metaphorical.”

“...Okay then, give me the deets.”

“Much better.”

Threads of Proximity

Chapter Summary

“We’ll get you a suit tomorrow,” Sakusa continues briskly. “Then liaise with Tendou-san about—”

“Wait. What?”

Sakusa blinks at him. “What?”

“You’re getting me a suit?”

Sakusa raises an eyebrow. “Did you think you’d greet my guests in pyjamas?”

Chapter Notes

Welcome back beloveds, I come bearing SakuAtsu goodies!

TMLTL officially has a [cover illustration!](#) 🥹

Am I crying? Yes. Are you crying? You better be. Are we all crying? Probably. Let’s form a prayer circle and bottle our tears as an offering to the SakuAtsu gods.

Just a quick note, I have a feeling next chapter will take me a bit longer to write because, well, it’s gonna be a longer chapter. So thank you for your patience in advance!

If you haven’t yet, join our [discord server!](#)

Why? Because Kiyoomi said so. 🙋

[Sakusa’s fit + his car + Atsumu’s navy suit inspiration for this chapter.](#)

When Sakusa tells Atsumu to come to his study the next day, his first emotion is alarm.

Sakusa’s office. The office. The room Atsumu hasn’t been allowed into since he started working here. He approaches the door with the same caution he might reserve for a suspiciously glowing artifact—half expecting it to explode on contact, or worse, to open into an alternate dimension where cats don’t exist and people say things like “circle back” unironically.

He opens it with bated breath—and falters.

The home office is sleek, cavernous, and quiet in the way cathedrals are quiet. Sakusa sits behind his desk like an art installation—composed, symmetrical, backlit by the floor-to-ceiling window that casts him in near-reverent light. Twin chairs are arranged before the desk with the kind of symmetry that screams intentionality.

Atsumu hesitates at the threshold, half-expecting to trip a silent alarm just by breathing too hard.

The bookshelf behind Sakusa towers like a monolith, filled with hardcovers that look like they've never been opened twice. It's intimidating—soaring, clinical, curated to within an inch of its life.

It feels like stepping into Sakusa's mind: ruthlessly organised, aesthetically flawless, and beautiful in a way that warns against touching anything.

Atsumu looks down at himself—home slippers, loungewear, hair slightly damp from his shower—and feels like a stray post-it drifting through the pages of *Architectural Digest*.

And then.

And then he sees it.

Atsumu blinks. Then blinks again.

In the far corner of Sakusa Kiyoomi's cathedral of dark marble and glass sits... a banana. No—a couch. Shaped like a banana. Outrageously yellow, plush, anatomically correct, and sporting throw pillows. One is tucked lovingly into the curve, like it's part of a fruit-themed luxury catalogue aimed at billionaires with unresolved potassium issues.

He gawks at it for ten full seconds before remembering how to breathe.

It's not even pretending to blend in. It's loud. It's cheerful. It looks like it came with a laugh track and a safety warning. And worst of all—it looks comfy. Dangerously comfy. Like the kind of couch that lures you in with whimsy and then swallows your soul into an afternoon nap.

Atsumu turns slowly to Sakusa, as though sudden movement might cause the banana to vanish into smoke.

"...You good?" he asks, gesturing helplessly. "Like—mentally?"

Sakusa looks up from his laptop without missing a beat. "It's ergonomic."

"It's a fruit, Sakusa-san."

"Technically a berry."

Atsumu stares at the couch. Then at Sakusa. Then, as if driven by forces beyond comprehension, he drops onto the couch out of sheer disbelief.

It is, to his horror, the most comfortable thing he's ever experienced.

"I'm betrayed by potassium," he mumbles.

"You're sitting on the berry," Sakusa says calmly. "On my berry."

"I'm so sorry," Atsumu says, wide-eyed. "But I'm physically incapable of locating my feet. I think I'm having an aneurysm."

Sakusa sighs, long-suffering, as if spontaneous cerebral events are merely annoying scheduling hiccups. He stands—graceful even in loungewear—and drags a whiteboard closer to the banana couch like he's about to lead a corporate summit in slippers.

"This is my emotional regulation couch," he says. "I'm allowing you to use it because you need therapy more than I do."

"Wow," Atsumu deadpans. "Thanks for the generosity."

"You're welcome," Sakusa replies primly, uncapping a marker and writing at the top of the board:

SOCIAL SURVIVAL: DINNER EDITION

"Let's begin with the fundamentals."

"Should've brought my notebook—"

"No need," Sakusa says. "You're not leaving until you get a full score."

"You're kidding," Atsumu says, flat.

Sakusa doesn't dignify that with a reply. "First lesson. What do you do when someone hands you a business card?"

"Uh... compliment the font?"

Sakusa blinks. "Worryingly close. But no. You take it with both hands. Look at it. Then place it carefully on the table. Do not shove it in your back pocket like a grocery receipt."

"Got it. Treat biz cards like tiny paper gods."

Sakusa moves on.

- **Never talk about religion, politics, or your high school volleyball stats.**

(Atsumu: Aren't you even a little curious about my stats? Sakusa: No.)

- **Don't ask about someone's salary. Even if you're dying to know.**

(Atsumu: Not even yours? Sakusa: Especially not mine.)

• **Do not say ‘that’s crazy, bro’ when someone describes their hedge fund.**

(Atsumu: But what if it is crazy? Sakusa: Leave the room. Scream internally. Return only when emotionally regulated.

Atsumu: Do I strike you as emotionally regulated? Sakusa: Alarmingly, no.)

Atsumu nods along—surprisingly focused for someone still half-absorbed into a banana.

“We’ll get you a suit tomorrow,” Sakusa continues briskly. “Then liaise with Tendou-san about—”

“Wait. What?”

Sakusa blinks at him. “What?”

“You’re getting me a suit?”

Sakusa raises an eyebrow. “Did you think you’d greet my guests in pyjamas?”

“N-no! I just didn’t think it was gonna be this formal.”

“It’s a suit,” Sakusa says, as though that explains everything. “I’m not asking you to arrive in a sequined Gucci turtleneck. We’ll get something simple. Respectable. Befitting my status.”

Right. Sakusa: CEO of Sakusa Industries. Atsumu: technically staff. A reflection of said CEO’s image. Atsumu sometimes forgets that—ridiculously—this is still a job.

“Okay,” he mumbles. “I can ask Oat—Kanao-san if she knows any good shops.”

“There’s no need,” Sakusa says, already turning back to his board. “I’ll accompany you myself.”

Oh. Atsumu blinks. His insides draw taut, like a string waiting to be plucked.

“Wait, really? Aren’t you too busy? I can totally go alone—”

“Just be ready by 10 AM,” Sakusa waves him off. “If you’re lucky, you might get your first emotional breakdown in a high-end store.”

“Hey,” Atsumu protests, mortified.

Atsumu doesn’t sleep until 3:30 a.m., wired with nervous excitement.

Sakusa had said he’d accompany him.

Which means Sakusa will be *there*—judging each suit, picking out choices, watching Atsumu try them on—and that’s...

He shivers.

When his alarm rings, he trips over a slipper scrambling to the bathroom for a quick shower that leaves him squeaky clean and somehow even more anxious.

What does one even wear on the way to *buying* a suit?

His options are bleak: dark cargo pants, a white tee, and a black cap. It feels far too casual, but the alternative is gym shorts. And that's not happening.

He rounds the corner toward the entrance, absently checking the time. Five minutes to spare. Maybe just enough for a banana.

En route to the kitchen, he glances up—and freezes.

Sakusa is standing in the genkan. And Atsumu is not prepared.

He halts mid-step, gawking. No, really—this is just disrespectful at this point. Atsumu is trying to function like a normal human being with a functioning prefrontal cortex. But instead, he's walked straight into a Sakusa who apparently thinks the genkan is a runway.

He's wearing a clingy, ribbed black shirt that hugs his frame like it's been tailored by the gods of restraint and good taste. Not tight, exactly. Just... *honest*. The kind of fabric that doesn't lie.

Atsumu's gaze catches on the carved line of muscle in Sakusa's arms, the way the short sleeves sit high and don't dare roll down. Glasses looped around the collar give him that infuriating *professor-but-make-it-criminally-hot* look, and Atsumu swears he forgets his own name for a second.

Sakusa is holding his jacket in one hand like he's just stepped out of a minimalist noir film—sharp black slacks, a sleek belt, and a silver watch flirting with the soft light. His posture is effortless, but there's something *calculated* in the way he stands so still. Like he *knows*. Like he caught Atsumu staring... and doesn't mind one bit.

Of course he looks good. Of course he does.

“Ready?” he asks.

“Yes,” Atsumu answers too quickly, praying Sakusa doesn't catch the breathless edge in his voice.

Sakusa's gaze flickers over Atsumu's outfit—not judgmental, just... considerate. Which is somehow *worse*, because Atsumu has no idea what's happening behind those thoughtful, penetrating eyes.

When they take the elevator to the garage, Atsumu half expects Oat-san to leap from a corner with a preppy greeting, or maybe the same imposing driver who brought him to the penthouse that first night.

Any driver, really.

Instead, they stop in front of a Mercedes-Benz S-Class.

Atsumu has seen fancy cars before—sleek, sharp-edged beasts that belong in action flicks or behind red velvet ropes. But this?

This is something else.

This isn't just fancy. It's quiet power.

The kind of car that doesn't need to growl to command respect—it *purrs*. Understated and impossible to ignore. Obsidian black, polished to a mirror, with lines so smooth they look like they were drawn by hand. Not flashy. Just... *perfect*. Like Sakusa.

And the inside?

Jesus.

It's like stepping into a spaceship. Rich leather that probably costs more than his apartment's rent. Ambient lighting shifts like mood swings—subtle purples and crimsons pulsing around carbon fiber panels and touchscreen displays. Even the clock on the dash looks like it can tell time in Geneva.

Atsumu slides into the seat carefully, breath caught in his throat. His fingers hover over the controls that adjust the seat in so many directions he's convinced the car could fold him into a hug... or a coffin.

Honestly? Either's fine.

"This isn't a car," he mutters under his breath as Sakusa rounds to the driver's side. "It's a damn batcave on wheels."

Sakusa slides in with one smooth movement, shutting the door behind him with a satisfying click.

Then he leans over Atsumu to open the glove compartment.

Atsumu freezes—struck by the sudden proximity, the warmth of body heat, the coconutty scent of Sakusa's shampoo, the curls brushing close. It's there and gone in a moment—like a dissipating dream. Lingering just long enough to miss.

Sakusa pulls out a pair of leather gloves and begins sliding them on, adjusting one finger at a time, flexing each elegant knuckle with the deliberateness of a ritual.

Atsumu swallows. Mouth suddenly *very* dry.

"You look like you're about to pass out. Are you getting sick?" Sakusa glances at him from the corner of his eye.

It takes Atsumu a second too long to find his voice.

“Uh—y-yeah. I’m alright.” He fumbles with his seatbelt. “I didn’t realise we were taking... your car?”

“One of them.”

“H-how many do you have?”

“I have an SUV for the occasional trip,” Sakusa shrugs, shifting into gear. “And a four-wheeler for rougher terrain. Do you like it?”

“Are ya *kidding*?” Atsumu exhales, wide-eyed. “This is the sexiest car I’ve ever seen in my goddamned life.”

Sakusa chuckles, pressing the ignition. The engine hums to life—velvety, confident. It’s *mesmerising*, the way he reverses with precision, pulling his sunglasses on in one fluid motion as they emerge from the underground garage into bright morning light.

Atsumu has the deranged urge to eat his own fist and has no idea why.

Sakusa drives one-handed, of course he does—flicking the blinker with a single finger as he glides into a left turn.

“Do you drive, Miya?”

The question jars him from his internal crisis. “Um. I guess? Samu and I got our licenses right out of high school but never got around to buying a car.”

Sakusa hums.

“We used to borrow Ma’s,” Atsumu adds, rambling now. “It’s a Toyota hatchback so blue it could give passersby a headache. Maybe even signal aircraft.”

Sakusa’s lips twitch. “A blue Toyota Corolla hatchback... seems strangely on brand.”

“Yes, we broke folks love our economic cars,” Atsumu says dryly. “Nothing sexier than 4.5 litres per hundred and a trunk that fits two rice cookers.”

Sakusa snorts. “Indeed.”

A moment of silence stretches between them, just long enough to tempt Atsumu into fidgeting.

“So where *are* we going?” he finally asks. “Does this car not have a radio, or do you just prefer a ghostly glide through town?”

“You can turn it on if you want,” Sakusa says mildly. “We’re going to a store I trust. They offer in-house tailoring.”

“In-house tailoring? Like... bespoke?”

“Not exactly.” Sakusa looks faintly amused. “Bespoke suits are custom-made from scratch and require multiple fittings. Armoury’s in-house tailor will make any needed adjustments to ready-to-wear pieces.”

Atsumu squints. “I *bet* you follow the [menswear guy](#) on Twitter.”

Sakusa smirks. “Everyone follows the menswear guy.”

Touché.

They park outside *The Armoury Tokyo*, a minimalist, modestly sized haven for well-dressed men.

Atsumu walks in expecting chandeliers and wall-length mirrors, but it’s more like a Japanese tea room mated with a European tailor’s soul. It’s... calming. More akin to a private atelier than a sprawling department store.

“Wow,” he says, hushed, as they enter. There’s no ambient music, no bustle—just the soft rustle of fabric. Shelves line the walls, suits hanging in a neat racket of colour that reminds Atsumu of Sakusa’s obsessively orderly closet.

The air smells faintly of cedar, pressed linen, and expensive silence. Muted lighting casts each fabric in the glow of a curated museum exhibit.

“Sakusa-sama.” A greying man steps out from the back. Short and stocky, with a measuring tape draped around his neck. He bows. “Is this the young man you mentioned?”

Atsumu jumps when Sakusa’s hand lands between his shoulder blades, steering him forward. “Yes. Sawamura-san, this is Miya Atsumu. We’ll need two suits for functions and dinners.”

“Ah.” Sawamura gestures him closer.

With a quick glance at Sakusa, Atsumu follows him into the fitting area, where another man—closer to Sakusa’s age—appears with a notepad.

“Do you have a preferred style, young man?” Sawamura hums, unwinding the tape and immediately beginning to take a series of befuddling measurements.

“Um, this is kinda my first time getting a suit,” Atsumu admits, flinching slightly when Sawamura loops the tape around his neck.

The assistant pipes up. “Sir, would you mind removing your shirt? The cotton distorts the shoulder slope.”

Sakusa appears just behind Sawamura, his tone thoughtful. “I believe single-breasted with soft shoulders would work best—for comfort and ease of movement at a dinner party.”

Atsumu strips off his T-shirt, stiffly turning his back to Sakusa as Sawamura measures his sleeve length.

“Any fit preference?”

Atsumu’s mouth opens, ready to ask what that even means—but Sakusa answers for him, voice calm and precise: “Classic fit. He’s broad-shouldered. The jacket will need adjustment.”

Atsumu flushes. His eyes snap to the wall, trying to avoid the sensation of Sakusa’s gaze dissecting every inch of his back as Sawamura’s hands keep working.

Then come the slacks. Apparently, showing up in cargo pants was a rookie mistake. Sawamura hands him measuring trousers and gives him a moment to change.

About thirty measurements later, Sawamura nods, satisfied. “Would you like to pick some base suits now?”

“Wait here,” Sakusa tells him, and departs with Sawamura to one of the display racks. Atsumu is left alone, standing in the soft hush of the fitting room, back to a floor-length mirror.

“...Black would look too severe,” Sakusa is saying. “It’s not a black-tie affair. Perhaps this midnight navy?”

“Excellent choice, Sakusa-sama. The contrast with the young sir’s hair will be striking.”

They continue discussing fabric blends—*super 120s wool-silk*, breathable, soft shoulders. No tie.

Atsumu tries not to fidget as they agree the jacket should accentuate his waist without being “body-hugging.”

When they return, everything Sakusa carries is a deep, midnight navy. The fabric is smooth, rich.

Atsumu swallows, fingers tracing the collar, searching in vain for a price tag.

“Try them on,” Sawamura encourages.

His assistant helps him dress: slim-cut trousers with a sharp crease, a silky button-up shirt in the same navy, a matching jacket, and a sleek leather belt. Atsumu smooths the lapels, turns to the mirror—and stops.

The suit isn’t extravagant. It’s elegant, with a quiet softness that transforms him. He looks... like the men he sees on Instagram. Evening-wear models. He looks like someone.

When Sawamura hands him a pair of dark brown wholecut leather shoes, the look is complete.

Sakusa's eyes are unreadable as they take him in. To Sawamura, he says, "May I see what burgundy pocket squares you offer?"

"Most certainly, Sakusa-sama." The tailor vanishes into the back, leaving behind a silence thick with electricity.

"Would I be right to guess the reason there are no price tags is to prevent heart attacks?" Atsumu tries, voice light. It falls flat. His laugh is more nervous than amused.

"The suit is a company expense," Sakusa says. "The price shouldn't concern you."

Atsumu swallows. So this too is part of the job? Does Sakusa take all his employees suit-shopping? Housekeepers included? He almost asks. He's not sure which answer would be worse—yes or no.

Sawamura returns, setting a velvet-lined tray on the counter. Sakusa takes one look and steps into Atsumu's space, pocket squares in hand.

He lifts them one by one, holding each against the lapel of Atsumu's jacket with practiced precision.

The scent hits him first—clean cedar, crisp linen, and something warmer underneath. Human. Present. Too close.

Atsumu forgets to breathe.

Sakusa speaks softly, murmuring to Sawamura about colour theory, about contrast and undertones—but Atsumu barely hears it.

All he can focus on is the quiet surety in Sakusa's voice, the smooth drag of fabric over his chest, the heat radiating off his body.

It's absurd. It's a suit fitting.

But something about it feels like the world narrowing to just this: Sakusa's hands, his voice, and the stunned, silent space between them.

"This, and burgundy socks," Sakusa decides, crisp and final.

His silver watch catches the light as he gestures, and Atsumu's gaze lingers on Sakusa's hands. Naked, elegant—and rough.

His knuckles are slightly scarred. Not the hands of a businessman.

A fighter's hands. They mirror Atsumu's own—years of gymnastics, volleyball, and gym coaching etched into skin.

"Do you do gymnastics?" Atsumu blurts.

Sakusa glances at him, head tilted. "No. Kickboxing. Why?"

Atsumu licks his lips, eyes still fixed on those hands. “Your knuckles. Not just a pianist’s hands. I can tell you use them for training.”

Sakusa blinks. “I’m not a pianist.”

Atsumu huffs a soft, disbelieving laugh—part nerves, part deflection.

“Sure. And I’m not a med student. I just freelance in the lab for funsies.” He rolls his eyes, stepping back as Sakusa finally retreats from his personal space.

Sawamura reappears to mark the suit for final tailoring, noting where adjustments are needed.

“It will be ready in 24 hours,” he assures Sakusa.

Of course it will. Sakusa can get whatever he wants, can’t he?

But it’s not just the money, Atsumu realises, watching him swipe a platinum credit card.

It’s his presence. The way people want to please him.

Atsumu changes back into his clothes in a quiet daze, still half-lost in the moment.

He sneaks glances at Sakusa and Sawamura as they murmur over finishing details—refined, composed, like they do this every day.

This has got to be the most surreal experience of his life.

And he’s been inside Sakusa’s batcave.

He texts Osamu:

you won’t believe what just happened.

Here we go again. What.

I’m at this high-end store getting a suit with Sakusa.

He dragged ya to the store with him to buy a suit? What, he needs yer opinion on what ta wear now?

No no, not for him, Samu. For me. A suit for me.

The fuck ya need a suit for???

Dinner party, apparently.

Okay hold up... he went with you. To get you a suit. From a high-end store.

Yes, that’s what I said, keep up Samu! I’m close to freaking out, I think the machine said 350,000 yen 🤪

Are ya fucking kidding me right now. 350k on a suit for you. Does yer boss shit money?

Starting to think ya.

Did you at least get a picture???

Didn't get the chance. They had me try it on and immediately took it off to start tailoring it.

They're TAILORING the suit. That you got. From the high-end store. That cost 350k yen.

Yes.

Tsumu.

Yes.

I'm going to have a stroke.

How do you think I feel???

“Miya?”

Atsumu looks up so abruptly he almost drops his phone. Sakusa is staring at him.

“Y-yeah?”

“Let's go.” Sakusa nods toward the door like Atsumu's been dawdling. “I have to pick up my suit now.”

Atsumu hurries after him, face flushed. “Where from?”

Sakusa smirks faintly. “A bespoke.”

“Of course,” Atsumu mutters. “God forbid you wear the same outfit twice.”

“You haven't made the pleasant acquaintance of Kurobane Sayaka yet.”

And—well. Fair enough. “Does that mean I need a new suit every time you host Her Majesty? Because I need to emotionally prepare for a repeat of this.”

Sakusa absently opens his car door. “Was it that traumatising?”

Atsumu stares at the elegant hand on the handle for a long, bewildered second before sighing in defeat. He's officially living out some K-drama heroine's fever dream, and there's nothing he can do about it.

“I'm not used to luxury,” Atsumu says once Sakusa is in the car, once again leaning close to withdraw an ethanol spray bottle from the glove compartment. “You and I come from very different worlds. I wore my graduation suit to funerals and weddings until I outgrew it. And we're talking an Aoyama 50k yen suit... that I got when it went on 50% off.”

Sakusa says nothing as he pulls into the main street. “Does it bother you?”

“Does what bother me?”

“Luxury.”

“No?” Atsumu says, brows furrowing. “Who would be bothered by luxury? I’m just saying I’m not used to it. So yes, maybe this was a little traumatising. A good traumatising though, for sure.”

““Good traumatising,”” Sakusa echoes, deadpan.

Atsumu grins, embarrassed but unrepentant. “Yes. Good traumatising. Outrageously so.”

“I feel like we’re losing the plot here,” Sakusa says gravely. “Shall we continue to the hospital next? Maybe check you in for mental damage?”

“My clownery would break the MRI machine,” Atsumu replies solemnly.

“Good thing I can pay for it,” Sakusa murmurs, revving smoothly down the road. “First things first though, the bathrooms are waiting for their daily scrub.”

“From tailored suits to kneeling on the bathroom floor. This job really will give me whiplash.”

“You can complain to Toilet Haiter about it—you always do.”

“Hey!” Atsumu yelps, mortified. “Those were private conversations!”

“My bad,” Sakusa says, not sounding the least bit sorry. “I shouldn’t have eavesdropped on your couple quarrels. Doesn’t seem like a very healthy relationship to me. Too codependent, with a side of insanity.”

Atsumu covers his face with both hands and groans. Numbly, he says, “Please just take me home. I’ll gladly scrub anything to get out of this conversation.”

“You know,” Sakusa says, “I’m pretty sure we offer couple’s therapy at the office if Toilet Haiter is so—”

“Sakusa-san, I *will* fling myself into oncoming traffic.”

Sakusa’s car slows dramatically. “Okay, maybe sleep on that thought first? Roadkill isn’t on my to-do list this Friday, and I’m not scraping you off the pavement.”

Atsumu sighs theatrically. “There goes my dream of a rich CEO peeling me off the side of the road and sending a fruit basket the size of Hokkaido.”

“You have very disturbing dreams.”

Atsumu nods grimly. “You have no idea.”

Signs of Infection

Chapter Summary

Atsumu knows something is wrong the moment he opens his eyes.

His mouth tastes like sawdust and despair. His head is pounding with the rhythm of a drum hellbent on vengeance, and his limbs feel heavy, slow, too distant from command. Beneath it all, his body can't seem to decide if it's burning or freezing.

Chapter Notes

So... guess who's sick 🤒

As the saying goes, the greatest form of love is projecting your suffering onto your favourite fictional character. So Atsumu, too, must suffer.

Welcome to TMLTL's longest chapter to date 😊

And I'm not even behind schedule! Who cheered 🤩

Before I let you go, please take a look at this wonderful gorgeous stunning [fanart](#) I received from unoduetre 🥰♥

Without further ado, please enjoy!

Being granted access to Sakusa's office was strangely like being escorted to the restricted section Trench Coat Guy was looking for. The first time Atsumu visited, he'd been too disarmed by the banana couch—and then too focused on Sakusa's lecture—to take in the finer details.

Now, reporting for the second time with tea and news about Tendou-san's curated menu and staff list, Atsumu takes a moment to let his eyes rove.

There's a photo frame on Sakusa's desk that he can't see into. Perhaps the first sentimental sign Atsumu has found in this penthouse—what with the glaring absence of any photographs save for the portrait in the library.

Well... there *is* the banana couch. It stares at him curiously as he shifts his weight and relays Tendou-san's suggestions.

His gaze drifts to the walls.

There are paintings here too, like the ones adorning the hallways. One in particular catches his eye—a portrait of an older man, angled just enough to catch the sunlight. Dark eyes, elegant suit, aristocratic cheekbones. Neatly coiffed silver-streaked hair, and a stare sharp enough to slice.

With a jolt, Atsumu realises—it's the same man from the library. Sakusa's father? Grandfather?

When he trails off mid-sentence, Sakusa follows his gaze. "That's my grandfather," he answers the unspoken question.

"The founder of Sakusa Industries?" Atsumu asks, inching closer. The brush strokes are precise, almost mathematical, yet softened by golden light. The artist painted him with reverence.

"No," Sakusa says, eyes on the canvas. "My maternal grandfather."

Oh.

That's... interesting, Atsumu thinks, studying the man's features. Come to think of it, Grandpa Sakusa is the *only* family member displayed anywhere in the house. You'd expect the founder of the company to be in the office.

"Did you commission this?"

"Yes," Sakusa replies, stepping to his side, carrying warmth beneath the crisp scent of cedar and winter. "I met an artist in Serbia many years ago. We bonded over food. Most of the pieces in the residence are hers."

"Oh," Atsumu says, intrigued. He peers closer. There's a signature in the corner—*Lora. 2013*. "Serbia? Wow. Have you travelled a lot?"

"Mmh," Sakusa hums noncommittally. "Mostly for work. Or to visit friends."

You *have* friends? Atsumu wants to ask, but it feels too rude. Sakusa's sharing this with him, and he wants to hold it gently. "What parts of the world have you been to?"

Sakusa scratches the side of his nose—strangely adorable—and looks up in thought. "Most of them, really."

He moves to the bookshelf and begins pulling out albums. Atsumu joins him, curiosity piqued. Each album is meticulously labelled, of course.

Italy, 2006–2016

France, 2009–2017

Portugal, 2005–2013

Russia, 2014–2018

Egypt, 2009

Uzbekistan, 2016

China, 2019

Syria, 2005–2009

“You’ve been to Syria?”

“To Damascus, mostly,” Sakusa nods, plucking out the relevant album. “Before the war.”

Atsumu peeks over his shoulder, hyper-aware of their proximity, and carefully keeps it unchanged. He stares at the photo Sakusa reveals.

The street in the image is narrow and cobbled, sloping downward like it’s leading into something ancient. Buildings lean inward with age and affection, casting shade over glowing lamplight. Shops spill into the street—rugs, brass lamps, beadwork, paintings, spices in woven baskets. The place isn’t cluttered. It’s *alive*.

Strings of lights cross overhead, tangled in vines and trinkets. The whole street looks like a festival that never ended.

“Pretty,” Atsumu murmurs. “Though you strike me as someone who hates crowds.”

“I’m fine as long as no one touches me,” Sakusa replies, flipping the page.

“Right.” Atsumu leans back an inch. “So was that a business trip, or... friends?”

Sakusa’s lips curl. “Neither. At first. It’s one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. I’m fond of history.”

Atsumu blinks. He *should* have expected that. Sakusa often reads like luxury personified—but underneath the polish are glimpses of something else. Scholar. Polyglot. Researcher.

“So you went to... explore?”

“Mhm.” Sakusa flips to a photo of ancient ruins. “Damascus saw the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Greek, Roman, and Ottoman empires. There’s something... grounding about standing in the birthplaces of civilization.”

“I... didn’t know you were that into history,” Atsumu says, genuinely fascinated.

“I am.” The next photo is of an old man perched on a high wooden chair inside a café. Mosaic tables, steaming brass samovars, and sun-stained walls create a tapestry of time. “This place fascinates me.”

“A... café?” Atsumu squints. “You really are a coffee guy.”

Sakusa chuckles, fond. “It’s over a hundred years old.”

“*What?*”

“Some say older. Its roots may stretch back to the mid-nineteenth century.”

Atsumu tries to imagine it—Sakusa, elegant and distant, sitting in a centuries-old café, sipping Arabic coffee.

“They have a traditional storyteller there. A *hakawati*.” He points at the man in the picture. “He recites tales passed from father to son over generations. I attended one recital, even though I barely understood the language.”

Sakusa closes the album, and Atsumu lets out a breath. “Every time I think you can’t surprise me anymore, you do.”

Sakusa raises an eyebrow, amused. “Oh?”

Atsumu smiles, small and helpless and charmed despite himself. “You’re like a magic trick that never turns out the same way twice.”

There’s a flicker of something delicate—Sakusa blinks, and a faint blush rises in his cheeks.

Atsumu stares. Disbelieving. Fascinated. *Did he just make Sakusa Kiyoomi blush?*

His brain promptly short-circuits.

Right on cue, Sakusa’s phone rings. He turns away, clearing his throat.

“Tell Tendou-san to go ahead with the menu. I need to take this.”

Taking the hint, Atsumu nods and slips out in a daze.

There’s no understanding Sakusa Kiyoomi. Only the endless web of fascination he leaves behind—just waiting for Atsumu to trip into, over and over again.

That Monday, while Atsumu is elbow-deep in what should’ve been a straightforward RNA extraction, he thinks about the portrait in Sakusa’s library. About the picture albums. The mysterious frame on the desk. All of them are puzzle pieces he still can’t place—

The centrifuge makes a noise it definitely wasn’t supposed to make. Something between a dying cat and a blender full of spoons.

Across the bench, Kuroo turns around slowly, latex gloves snapped on tight, one eyebrow arched. “You didn’t balance the tubes, did you?” he says in that tone reserved exclusively for scientific disappointment and older-brother exasperation. “We talked about this, Atsumu.”

Atsumu yelps and scrambles to try again, shaking his head clear of Sakusa-related thoughts.

The biochem lab carries that special tang of bleach, scorched gloves, and existential despair. Atsumu goes back to hovering over the centrifuge like it might explode. Kuroo's migrated to his side, arms crossed, watching with the calm detachment of someone waiting for a train wreck. Again.

They're attempting RNA extraction—*attempting* being the operative word—because someone, somewhere, thought it was a good idea to give them pipettes, phenol, and one of the most fragile molecules in the human body. At 10 AM. On a Monday.

Atsumu's gloves are already powdery with stress sweat. Fukuda-sensei's last words—*"Treat your RNA like a house cat: don't scare it, don't touch your face, and for the love of Science, don't breathe on it."*—are echoing ominously in his head.

Ha ha. Atsumu is going to die.

The centrifuge doesn't explode. Kuroo nods once, gravely. "Now do it again. You've been spaced out all morning—don't think I didn't notice."

"Uh..." Atsumu almost fidgets. "Kinda got a lot on my mind."

"Oh? Pray tell, what busies thy two brain cells this fine morning?"

Atsumu squints. "My two brain cells do not consent to being psychoanalysed before lunch."

"Tell him or he won't stop asking," Shirabu calls from the next aisle over.

Lovely. "My boss is hosting a dinner party this weekend and... I've been warned—with *diagrams*—how insufferable each guest is going to be. Guess I'm nervous."

"The same boss that's letting you stay at his place?"

"How many bosses do you think I have? One is already enough to give me white hair before thirty. And I told you—my job is to keep the house in shape. I kinda have to stay there. It's in the contract."

Kuroo hums, drawing it out with a skeptical lilt. "Sure."

Seriously, what does he think Atsumu's job is? Feeding Sakusa peeled grapes? The image is so ludicrous he snorts. Yeah, right. Like Sakusa would ever eat food someone else touched.

He sighs, heading to the back of the lab to fetch another sample for lysis prep.

When he woke up that morning, he'd felt bleary and foggy but chalked it up to another late-night study session.

Two coffees and breakfast later, the fatigue stuck around, now paired with a headache that feels suspiciously like a hangover.

He better not be getting sick.

As the lab session winds down, Atsumu yawns so hard his jaw aches, then slumps against the station. He's starting to feel lightheaded. That's... not a good sign.

He grimaces. He absolutely doesn't have time to be sick. The semester ends in two weeks—which means *exams*, and *presentations*, and *final assessments*. He needs every ounce of brainpower to survive it.

Ugh.

When Oat-san picks him up, she takes one look at his sour, exhausted expression and wordlessly offers him an orange juice box.

Atsumu accepts it without a word, punches the straw in, and takes an agitated sip. He knows these symptoms—body aches, fatigue, drowsiness. All flashing neon signs of an oncoming flu.

He glares out the window at nothing in particular, brain sluggishly running contingency plans. Okay. It's not the first time the universe threw a wrench in his semester. He'll just have to power through as much of his bioethics presentation as possible before he crashes.

Which is why—after arriving at the residence and showering—he crunches down a protein bar, swallows a painkiller, and beelines to the library with his laptop.

His slides are still open where he left them last night, blinking back at him:

The Ethics of Informed Consent in Clinical Trials: Navigating Vulnerability and Volition

Atsumu swallows. It's a heavy topic. He almost regrets choosing it. Almost. But it's personal. And Atsumu has never been one to shy away from the things that make him flinch.

Sakusa's library remains absurdly resourceful. Soon, he's surrounded by four textbooks, countless tabs, and a highlighter clenched between his teeth. He's chasing every angle he can think of.

Slide 1: *Understanding Consent — The Illusion of Choice in Clinical Trials*

He starts typing his notes:

When a patient signs a consent form, we assume they understand what they're agreeing to. But what if the real question isn't whether they gave consent—but what kind of consent they were capable of giving in the first place?

Informed consent is built on respect for autonomy—the principle that individuals should make decisions about their health with full understanding and free will. In clinical trials, it's not just a courtesy; it's an ethical and legal imperative.

But autonomy only exists if the person giving consent is:

- **Informed** — truly understands the risks, benefits, and alternatives
- **Competent** — has the cognitive capacity to evaluate the information
- **Voluntary** — free from coercion, pressure, or undue influence

This is where the complications begin.

Atsumu's fingers fly over the keyboard. For a moment, the headache fades. This part—the ethical responsibility of researchers—is the heart and soul of his presentation. Researchers aren't just data collectors; they're stewards of trust.

They have to simplify complex information into something digestible. But how much simplification is too much? Where does clarity become vagueness?

He rubs at his eyes, absently reaching for his water bottle. Just a few more slides, and then he'll nap.

He's already picked his case studies. One covers ethical grey zones during COVID-19's emergency trials, when informed consent was sometimes waived due to critical illness. The other? More personal.

Case Study: *The “Sleeping Pill” Request*

He blinks blearily at the screen.

A woman in the early stages of Alzheimer's signed an advance directive, requesting no life-prolonging treatment. Years later, in late-stage dementia, she could no longer communicate—but she smiled often, seemed content, and responded to music.

The dilemma: Which version of her “self” should be honoured? The lucid one who feared dementia? Or the present one who seemed peacefully unaware?

Atsumu rubs his eyes again. The screen swims. He starts typing—

The advance directivehs skao:/) agodowq. Sajshs—

Thunk.

“Whuz?”

He jolts upright. He's face-planted into the keyboard.

Fuck. He's so sleepy. Maybe... just a quick nap, after all. Just a moment of rest and then he'll...

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“Tsumu!” Granny’s voice rings out from another room, warm and cheerful. “Food is ready!”

“There’s my sunshine boy,” she says, crouching to kiss both his cheeks. Her lips are dry, but the gesture is honey-sweet. She hands him a stack of mismatched plates, edges slightly chipped from years of use. “Put these on the table fer me, and get yer brother.”

The afternoon light slants lazily through the thin curtain, golden and sleepy, draping over the furniture like a well-worn quilt. The house is quiet. Safe.

He finds Samu in the living room, legs splayed out, head bowed over a half-finished doodle of a cat that looks suspiciously like a potato. An empty juice box is tipped on its side beside him.

“Food’s ready, Samu,” Atsumu says.

Samu immediately drops his colouring pencils and bolts up without protest, bare feet thudding softly against the wood floor as he races to the kitchen.

Granny’s fingers in his hair are knobbly and warm. She cradles the back of his head with practiced tenderness, her wedding ring cool where it rests against his scalp. She hums something—a tune he half-remembers, like something from a distant TV show or the radio playing faintly in a car.

“Granny?”

“Mm?”

“Will ya always play with my hair like this?”

“Always, my darlin’.”

“Even when I’m big?”

“Especially when yer big.” Her voice is firm with love. “You’ll always be my little sunshine boy, Tsumu.”

The moment blurs like a page turned too quickly.

“Granny, tell us a bedtime story!” Samu chirps, clambering up onto the bed, limbs lankier now.

Atsumu joins, elbowing his brother aside with zero shame. His legs are too long, awkwardly sprawled over the edge. He wedges himself in anyway, curling close and resting his head on Granny’s lap like it’s still allowed.

She laughs, running a hand through his hair again—softly, lovingly, as if she’s smoothing away the years. Her fingers know the pattern, even in dreams.

“My big boys,” she says, “no matter how old ya get, you’ll forever be my babies.”

She pats Samu’s cheek in invitation. “Settle down, my darling.”

Samu, who no longer has quite as much baby fat in his face, still melts against her side. His eyes flutter shut like muscle memory.

Atsumu remains where he is, cheek pressed to her thigh. He catches her hand in both of his and kisses the back of it, careful and reverent.

“Tell us ’bout Ma when she was a baby,” he murmurs. “Bet she got into a world of trouble.”

Granny’s chuckle is low and conspiratorial. She starts threading her fingers gently through Atsumu’s hair again.

“Yer Ma *was* a menace,” she confirms, voice like creased parchment. “Nowhere near as troublemaking as you two boys, certainly, but a little menace nonetheless.”

“We’re angels,” Samu says, nose in the blanket.

“I dunno what yer talkin’ about,” Atsumu says, stifling a grin. “We’re good boys.”

Granny snorts. “Oh, you cheeky eejits,” she says, her laughter like something crumbling and beautiful. “My good, precious boys.”

She ducks down to pepper their heads with kisses, one after the other, like she’s sealing in a blessing.

“The only thing more precious than your child is your child’s kids,” she says, slow and serious, but smiling. “Never forget how much I love you.”

The room pulses warm again—sunlight, maybe, or memory. Somewhere in the distance, the sound of her laughter echoes like it’s bouncing off old walls, refracted through time.

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“Miya?”

Atsumu blinks blearily. His neck is stiff, and his mouth is desert-dry. The world feels half a second off-kilter as he pushes himself upright from his hunch over the laptop. A shiver ripples down his spine. His skin is clammy, and his head feels stuffed with cotton.

“Mm?” he mumbles, voice gravelled with sleep.

Another blink. Sakusa is crouched beside him, brows drawn.

“Sakusa-san?” Atsumu croaks, half-confused.

“Did you fall asleep sitting up?”

Atsumu wipes at his face hastily, just in case there’s drool or worse, and startles at the dampness on his cheeks. Had he been crying? He scrubs harder.

“I was only plannin’ to close my eyes for a minute,” he mutters. “What time is’t?”

“Almost nine.”

Atsumu startles so violently he knocks his knee into the underside of the table. “What?”

Has he really been asleep for two hours?

Sakusa’s frown deepens. Then, without a word, he starts tidying the table—closing books, stacking loose papers, gently shutting Atsumu’s laptop like it’s something fragile.

“What are you doing?” Atsumu asks, blinking the fog from his eyes.

“That’s enough studying,” Sakusa says, voice quiet but sure. Not a command. Not quite. “Go sleep in your bed, Miya.”

Atsumu wants to argue. He wants to pry the laptop open again and power through his notes with sheer willpower. He wants to get ahead on the presentation, maybe even finish it tonight so he can get feedback before bioethics class on Wednesday.

But the exhaustion in his bones has settled in deeper now, pressing down on him with quiet insistence. It isn’t just sleepiness—it’s something heavier, more cellular.

“...Okay,” he murmurs, rising on shaky legs.

A wave of dizziness crashes into him like static. He stumbles forward a step.

“Easy.” Sakusa reaches out instinctively, warm hand sliding under Atsumu’s elbow to steady him.

Atsumu finds his balance, chuckling under his breath. “Guess I overdid it, huh?”

The touch withdraws.

Sakusa lingers for a beat, eyes scanning his face. “...You feel a little feverish.”

Atsumu meets his gaze, slow and uncertain. “Um. It’s probably nothing. I’m just tired.”

Sakusa doesn’t argue, but his mouth pulls into a doubtful line. Still, he steps back and nods once. “Okay. Go get some rest. There’s a medicine cabinet in the laundry room if you end up feeling worse.”

Something blooms in Atsumu's chest—small, warm, undeserved. He looks away, smiling faintly. “Thanks, boss. I’ll see ya.”

“Goodnight,” Sakusa says after a pause, voice softer now. His face is unreadable, save for the furrow between his brows. “Careful not to fall down the stairs.”

“I do parkour in my free time,” Atsumu quips with a crooked grin, waving over his shoulder before Sakusa can tear into him for his coordination—or lack thereof.

He walks off with sleep tugging at the edges of his mind. There's a flicker of something at the forefront of his memory—a dream, maybe—but it slips through his fingers like steam.

All he knows is that it felt warm. And safe.

Atsumu knows something is wrong the moment he opens his eyes.

His mouth tastes like sawdust and despair. His head is pounding with the rhythm of a drum hellbent on vengeance, and his limbs feel heavy, slow, too distant from command. Beneath it all, his body can't seem to decide if it's burning or freezing.

He groans and turns on his side, curling in on himself like a pill bug. His head throbs. There's a deep, pulsing ache behind his eyes, and his shoulders are bunched with painful tension.

Worst of all, he's soaked through his clothes with sweat.

He gropes blindly for his phone. 6:58 a.m. Blinking notifications.

He checks his schedule.

Laundry, dishes, vacuuming, the batcave, disinfecting the gym...

Fuck.

Dragging himself upright feels like dragging a corpse out of bed. He staggers to the shower on autopilot, leaning heavily against the tiled wall as hot water pounds down on him.

He stands there like a drowned cat, waiting for the heat to make him feel human again.

It doesn't work.

Instead, clarity brings bad news: one side of his nose is completely clogged.

Atsumu grimaces. “Fucking flu,” he mutters bitterly. Of course it would choose *this* week—exam week, presentation week, perfect-score-or-perish week—to make its grand appearance.

He spends the last five minutes of his shower blowing his nose so aggressively the sound could register as a domestic disturbance. The effort only floods his sinuses more.

He steps out of the steam, wet, miserable, sniffing like a broken tea kettle.

If Sakusa sees him like this...

Atsumu shudders. No. Damage control must be swift and ruthless.

He gets dressed and lurches to the laundry room like a man on a mission.

Face mask: secured.

Gloves: acquired.

Cold compress: strapped to his forehead like a questionable fashion accessory.

Tissues: shoved into his pockets with such vicious efficiency that it looks like he's just robbed a hospital bathroom.

Maybe he should deep throat a lemon while he's at it and pray it exorcises whatever demon has taken up residence in his immune system.

It might even impress Toilet Haiter enough to go easy on him.

He swallows, wincing. His throat is raw. His pride is already compromised.

But the chores won't do themselves. And so, Atsumu begins his day: slightly pathetic, somewhat heroic, and fully allergic to functioning like a regular human being.

That's how Sakusa finds him three hours later: geared up like a man on the brink of a medical emergency slash a fashion crisis. A cold compass is taped to his forehead using black scotch tape, anchored by his fox-shaped bandana for stability. He's vacuuming the living room carpet with grim determination, shoulders hunched, eyes glassy, and nose red. He's fighting for life and breath.

He doesn't even notice Sakusa at first. The buzz of the vacuum is a low, vengeful roar in his skull, aggravating his already splitting headache. *Fucking hell*, he thinks, *this is how I die. Death by carpet hygiene.*

"Miya."

Atsumu jumps like he's been shot, nearly dropping the vacuum cleaner.

"Sakusa-san!" he gasps, whirling around and shutting the machine off in one motion. "We *talked* about not sneaking up on me like a ghost. I'm fragile."

"You look like you're two seconds away from collapsing," Sakusa says grimly, and, without ceremony, confiscates the vacuum cleaner.

"What are you doing?" Atsumu demands, wobbling forward. "I still need to vacuum the *other* living room—!"

“You need to go back to bed,” Sakusa interrupts, maddeningly calm.

“What. The hell I do!” Atsumu croaks. “I’ve got a whole checklist left!”

Sakusa exhales, sharp and controlled, like he’s dealing with a very small, stubborn animal.
“Come with me.”

Atsumu blinks, confused but too weak to argue, and follows him to the laundry room.

“Sit,” Sakusa says, already swinging open the medicine cabinet like a man on a mission. He grabs a thermometer, clicks a disposable sleeve into place, and unceremoniously sticks it into Atsumu’s mouth.

“Whuf—Sakus—?” Atsumu garbles, startled, nearly dropping it. He barely has time to recover before Sakusa’s palm—large, dry, and cool—presses against his fevered forehead.

Atsumu freezes.

His thoughts stutter to a halt. The touch is firm, grounding, impossibly gentle. He finds himself leaning into it, eyes fluttering shut. It feels so good. So good he could cry.

“You’re burning up,” Sakusa mutters, low and tight.

The thermometer beeps. Atsumu stirs, just enough to try peeking at it—only for Sakusa to snatch it away and inspect it with a scowl.

“38.7 degrees,” Sakusa reads out, his voice rising a touch with incredulity. “Miya, why the hell are you working?”

Atsumu blinks. “What? It’s... my job?”

“You’re sick,” Sakusa says, officially stressed. “You should be in bed.”

“I can still work,” Atsumu insists, because being sick doesn’t feel like enough of an excuse.
“It’s just a flu—”

“*Just* a flu?”

Oh, *shit*. He said the wrong thing.

“I-I mean—” Atsumu stammers. “It’s not that bad? I didn’t realise there was a protocol against working while sick—”

“There’s no protocol,” Sakusa snaps, glancing heavenward like he’s pleading for strength.
“There’s *basic human self-preservation*, which you appear to lack.”

Atsumu rubs the back of his head, cheeks hot for more than one reason. “Sorry.”

Sakusa stares at him for a beat, then sighs through his nose. “Did you seriously *tape* a cold compass to your forehead?”

“Necessity is the mother of invention,” Atsumu mumbles, casually peeling off his ridiculous contraption like it’s not held together with desperation and delusion.

“Take the rest of the day off,” Sakusa says, already rummaging through the shelves like a man trying to fix a fire with a first-aid kit. “Do you have a cough?”

“A little.”

“Wet or dry?”

“Dry.”

“Is your nose congested?”

“A bit... what are you doing?”

“Making sure I have everything you need,” Sakusa says, efficiently pulling out cough syrup, a nasal spray, an antipyretic, and—after a pause—ibuprofen. “Is your throat sore?”

Atsumu stares at him. “Yeah. Kinda.”

“Okay. Ibuprofen helps with that.” Another box joins the pile.

“Sakusa-san, seriously, I’ll be okay,” Atsumu says, his voice quieter this time. “I can take care of myself.”

Sakusa stills, looking at him for a long second. “I know,” he says. “But that doesn’t mean you don’t deserve a helping hand when you need it.”

Atsumu’s heart gives a strange thud in his chest.

Sakusa gathers the boxes into his arms like a makeshift pharmacist and nods toward the kitchen. “Come on.”

Atsumu follows. He takes the meds as instructed—no protest this time—and only realises what Sakusa is doing when the kettle begins to whistle.

Then comes a mug. Steam curling gently from the surface. Ginger. Lemon.

Sakusa slides it to him like it’s a peace offering.

“Here. It should help you feel better sooner.”

Atsumu wraps both hands around the mug and blinks down at it. Something swells, full and quiet, behind his ribcage.

“...Thanks.”

Sakusa shrugs, organizing the meds on the counter like it’s a normal thing to do. Like he’s not just casually being the most thoughtful person Atsumu’s ever met.

“Take tomorrow off too,” Sakusa says, offhand.

“Sakusa-san, seriously—”

“That’s an order.”

Atsumu opens his mouth. Closes it. Smiles into his tea like a man who just lost a battle he never really wanted to win.

“Thanks.”

“Now go to your room.”

“Yessir.”

Atsumu retreats with his mug in hand, and the moment he steps into his bedroom, the exhaustion hits him like a freight train. His body practically sings at the sight of his bed.

Stupid pretty boss with his stupid pretty concern, he thinks fondly.

He finishes the last sip of tea—warm, citrusy, laced with care—and sinks into bed with a sigh. The pillow cradles his head like a lullaby. His eyes flutter shut before he can even form another coherent thought.

Sleep claims him instantly.

And this time, it feels safe.

Symptoms May Vary

Chapter Summary

“Why are you reading this?”

Sakusa pauses, pen hovering in midair. “I’m going to summarise it for you.”

Atsumu stares. “You’re... going to help me study?”

Chapter Notes

Hello and welcome back, thank you for 800+ kudos!

This fic is officially 50k words long and uh... I’m completely normal about SakuAtsu. Evidently.

I hope you enjoy this chapter! Join TMLTL’s [discord](#) server for sneak peeks~

The shadows are thick the next time Atsumu fully wakes.

He’s been drifting in and out of sleep for so long that his internal sense of time has all but disintegrated. It takes checking his phone to register reality—and even then, the numbers don’t make sense at first.

Almost twenty hours. He’s been in bed for almost twenty goddamn hours.

He groans, palm dragging across his face to dislodge the grit from his lashes. His eyes are crusty. His nose is still a little stuffy. But at least the sharp, splitting pain in his skull has finally dulled to something less homicidal.

So much for powering through his presentation.

He missed Tuesday’s organic chem lecture. And today’s medical ethics class.

“Fuck,” he whispers. Then louder, “Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck, I’m so fucked.”

He stares at the ceiling for a long moment, chest hollow with defeat.

His phone buzzes again in his hand—five texts from Kunimi, four from Shirabu, and three missed calls from Kuroo that he pointedly ignores. The sheer weight of responsibility makes

him feel ill all over again.

With a groan, he peels himself from the damp, clammy sheets and staggers toward the shower like a sleep-deprived cryptid, hoping a change of temperature and clean clothes might resurrect him.

The presentation is his top priority—deadline’s under twenty-four hours now. And then...

He shudders. He’s going to have to email Fukuda-sensei for the missed slides.

God. He’d genuinely rather die.

(If he’s being honest, though, it’s Kuroo’s “I expected better” tone that really has him on edge. When did that man become so... Dad-adjacent?)

The apartment is just as pristine as he left it—maybe even cleaner—when he finally shuffles out. There’s no sign of chaos, no trail of vacuum tracks, not a single out-of-place mug or speck of dust.

Has... Sakusa cleaned?

That shouldn’t be surprising, and yet it is. Atsumu’s stomach flutters uncomfortably at the thought.

He creeps into the kitchen, bleary-eyed and starving, and opens the fridge in search of sustenance. What he finds instead knocks the air right out of him:

A small pot of soup. Neatly labelled. With a Post-it.

Heat for 4:25 minutes in the microwave

Consume before meds

Add lemon for extra immunity boost

— Sakusa

Atsumu blinks. And blinks again. He opens the fridge and shuts it. Opens it again.

Still there.

His lips wobble.

Oh god, he thinks, am I about to cry over soup?

It’s humiliating. Infuriating. Touching. Where the hell does Sakusa get off being so considerate and thoughtful and responsible and *so fucking pretty?*

He heats the soup. He drinks it. It’s warm and savoury and tastes like something someone made by hand. It’s... *homely.*

Did Sakusa make this?

Atsumu tries, earnestly, to imagine Sakusa in the kitchen. Dressed down in loungewear, sleeves pushed to the elbow, face impassive as he stirs a pot of broth like it's an experiment he intends to perfect. The mental image is—

He flushes. Hard.

Jesus. I'm fantasising about my boss cooking.

He slaps his cheeks lightly, trying to reset his brain. There's no time for that. The clock's ticking, his presentation is far from finished, and he has enough academic guilt to drown in.

Anything else—fantasies, feelings, fever-induced sap—can wait until bedtime.

Or preferably, fuck off indefinitely.

By the time Atsumu finishes his presentation and finally gets a reply from Fukuda-sensei—grudging, clipped, and suspiciously prompt—he realises with a sinking heart that the assignment was the least of his problems.

The email contains sixty-five slides from a biochem lecture. And a worksheet. Of course there's a worksheet.

“Oh God,” Atsumu whispers, staring blankly at the screen like it just punched him in the throat.

That's... so much content, he doesn't even know where to start.

His headache flares back to life, pulsing behind his eyes like an angry grenade. The brightness of the screen makes him wince, but there's no escaping it now. Exams are next week. This isn't the time to rest. Or flounder. Or spiral into a mental breakdown, tempting as that sounds.

He opens the slides with trembling hands, grabs a pen like a lifeline, and begins to read. He tries to jot down notes, as if handwriting the words might force them into his fogged-up brain through sheer muscle memory.

DNA Methylation in Development and Disease.

Atsumu squints. The title alone feels hostile.

He *wants* to learn this. God, he came here for this. And he *missed it*.

His eyes sting as he tries again.

What's written in the genome isn't always what gets read.

DNA methylation is the addition of a methyl group ($-CH_3$) to the 5' position of the cytosine base, typically at CpG sites. It's carried out by DNA methyltransferases (DNMTs) and is heritable through cell division.

It's like a sticky note slapped onto a gene saying: "Don't open unless necessary." It doesn't alter the genetic code—it changes whether, and how much, that code is expressed.

He blinks down tears—hot and heavy and humiliating. He can't tell if they're from the fever or the frustration.

When methylation goes wrong, so does gene regulation. In cancer, tumour suppressor genes can become hypermethylated and silenced, while oncogenes may escape silencing. Abnormal methylation may also trigger inappropriate immune responses, contributing to autoimmune diseases.

His thoughts drift. To books he read in first year. To case studies and lectures and those early, wide-eyed days when he saw biology as a language of meaning.

Cells remember stress, they'd said. Methylation leaves scars—molecular echoes of trauma. Like people. Like him. The body carries damage forward, long after the moment has passed. It changes how genes express. It changes who you become.

Atsumu stares at the screen and wonders, *Where does that leave me?*

Every time he opens his textbooks, he's confronted with it: the cold, clinical proof that the body keeps score. No matter how hard he works—how much he pushes—there's always a cost.

And he's beginning to fear the price might be higher than he can afford.

How long until he breaks something irreparably?

How long until he triggers one of the genetic bombs waiting in his blood like sleeping dogs?

He thinks of Granny, cheerful in her sunflower apron, dusted in flour, humming as she baked cookies. He thinks of her smiling fondly as she talked about how Grandpa loved peanuts and how she'd grown to love them too, just because he did.

And then he thinks of Granny now. Who can't remember the recipe. Who can't remember that she used to hate peanuts. Who sometimes forgets she ever loved anyone at all.

Atsumu scrubs at his eyes again, overwhelmed. Being sick always makes him miserable, but this—this feels cruel. He tries not to hate his body as it coughs and aches and shivers, trembling with exhaustion. He probably shouldn't be sitting on the cold floor, but the thought of standing again makes his knees weep in protest. He's pretty sure he has a fever, and not the mild kind.

The door to the library opens with a soft creak. The sound is so subtle he almost misses it—until Sakusa speaks.

“Miya,” comes the quiet greeting. Calm and even, like always.

Atsumu turns his head slowly, gaze swimming. Sakusa’s already halfway to his usual armchair.

“Feeling any better?”

Atsumu looks up at him through a haze of pain and fatigue and emotional wreckage.

“Hard to feel better,” he rasps, “when I have to catch up on a three-hour lecture I missed because I was sick.”

“Ah,” Sakusa replies. It’s not dismissive. Just... neutral. A quiet acknowledgement of fact.

Atsumu turns back to his laptop with a sigh that feels heavier than it should. He glares at the diagram on his screen with the full force of academic vengeance.

By god, he is going to *stuff* this information into his brain even if it kills him.

And at this rate, it just might.

He powers through thirty more slides before the headache finally cuts him down like a guillotine. With a grunt of frustration, Atsumu slams the laptop shut and presses the heels of his palms into his eyes, hard.

“Fuuuuck.”

The pressure doesn’t help. His skull still feels like it’s trying to split in half. His joints ache. His body throbs with dull, miserable heat. The wetness blooming behind his eyelids isn’t just from pain—it’s exhaustion, hopelessness, the feeling of drowning in expectations with no lifeboat in sight.

“Miya?”

Sakusa’s voice drifts over from across the desk, calm and inquisitive.

Atsumu tries to respond, but all that comes out is a croaky, unintelligible rasp.

The armchair creaks. Soft footsteps pad across the library floor, and then Sakusa is there—bringing with him the quiet scent of cedar and winter. Steady, grounding.

“What’s happening?” Sakusa asks. There’s a note of concern woven into the smoothness of his voice. Then—unexpectedly—a warm hand lands gently on Atsumu’s shoulder.

It’s too much.

The tears come fast and hot.

“My head’s gonna explode,” he mumbles, blotchy and broken behind his hands. “And I still have thirty slides left.”

Silence.

Then he hears his laptop being nudged open again. He peeks through his fingers to find Sakusa leaning over the screen, eyes scanning the content with brisk, focused efficiency.

“DNA methylation, right?” Sakusa asks.

“Y-yeah.”

“Mm.” Sakusa scrolls. Once. Twice.

“What are you doing?” Atsumu croaks, voice cracking with both confusion and embarrassment.

“Reading,” Sakusa replies simply, sinking cross-legged to the floor with a quiet exhale. “Give me a second.”

Without ceremony, he takes Atsumu’s pen and starts jotting into his notebook, his handwriting neat and methodical. His eyes never leave the screen, even as the page fills with notes.

Ten minutes and five slides later, he speaks again. “Miya.”

Atsumu blinks blearily at him.

“Go wash your face. Make ginger tea.”

“I—what?”

“I need a bit more time to finish this.”

“Why are you reading this?”

Sakusa pauses, pen hovering in midair. “I’m going to summarise it for you.”

Atsumu stares. “You’re... going to help me study?”

“I did this course in uni,” Sakusa says, like it’s nothing. “I’ll review it and explain it to you. You won’t need to stare at a screen for that.”

Atsumu doesn’t know whether to cry again or laugh. He stands up just to escape the moment—just to hide the emotion welling up in his throat.

In the bathroom, he dunks his head under the tap and whispers at his reflection, *get your shit together, Miya*. Then he takes his meds, scrubs his face raw, and makes two cups of ginger tea—one with Sakusa’s preferred specs from Appendix A.

When he returns to the library, Sakusa hasn't moved, now donning a pair of sleek blue-light glasses that make Atsumu nearly trip. He looks like the handsome professor every student secretly fantasises about in some K-drama. And he's doing Atsumu's readings.

He almost slaps himself. *Focus.*

Setting the drinks down, he murmurs, "You really don't have to do this, y'know."

Sakusa glances up. "Mm."

Then he scrolls to the last slide and shuts the laptop. "Okay. I've skimmed through everything."

"Whoa! That fast!?"

"I told you. I've done this course."

He taps his notebook with the pen. "I'll explain. Drink your tea."

Atsumu obediently sips, blinking at him in disbelief.

Sakusa starts, voice slipping into something formal but familiar—measured, low, clear. "DNA methylation is essentially a way your body controls which genes get turned on or off.

"It doesn't change the DNA itself—just how it's read. Imagine the genome is a book. Methylation adds little sticky notes saying, 'Skip this paragraph,' or, 'Don't read this page unless necessary.'"

Sakusa is confident, composed. He just read the slides, but it's obvious he knows this.

He gestures to the notes. "It's done by enzymes—DNA methyltransferases—that stick methyl groups onto cytosine bases, usually at CpG sites. That's how your body knows to make a neuron here and a liver cell there. It's how cells specialise."

Atsumu stares. "I... actually understood that."

Sakusa tips his head. "You didn't before?"

"You just translated that to human," Atsumu says, amazed.

Sakusa blinks. Then again. "...Ah."

Their eyes meet, something unspoken stretching in the quiet. Then, Sakusa looks away first.

"Right," he says, tapping his pen. "So the next part talks about..."

They get through all thirty slides over the next hour, Sakusa guiding the pace with quiet precision. He doesn't just lecture—he asks sharp, targeted questions, nudging Atsumu gently toward understanding until each concept finally clicks into place.

“You don’t need to memorise every mechanism,” Sakusa says, flipping the page of his notes. “Just grasp the principle: your body remembers. Even at the cellular level.”

Then he stands.

Atsumu blinks, startled by the sudden movement. “Huh?”

Without answering, Sakusa crosses the room, opens a cupboard, and pulls out a neatly folded blanket. He walks back and drops it over Atsumu’s shoulders without ceremony.

“You really need to stop sitting on the floor if you want that flu to go away.”

“Uh.” Atsumu fumbles to gather the blanket around him. It’s warm and soft, like a gentle hug, and smells faintly of laundry detergent. For some inexplicable reason, that makes him smile. “Thanks. Are you gonna sleep now?”

Sakusa gives him a strange look. “No? We still have the worksheet.”

Atsumu blinks again, caught off guard. “Oh.”

“I’m just going to get us some snacks,” Sakusa adds, already walking toward the library doors. “Start looking at the questions while I’m gone. I won’t be long.”

Atsumu watches him leave, heart thudding fast in his chest.

What... What is this?

What’s going on?

Later that night, when Atsumu finally crawls into bed, he lies awake for hours, eyes fixed on the ceiling as the minutes blur in silence.

The ring around his neck feels heavier than usual, its engraving pressing against his chest like a quiet echo. He runs his fingers over the chain absently, over the worn metal that holds too much of him.

He can still feel Sakusa’s presence beside him—ghostlike but tangible, as though the stillness of the room is not quite his own. It lingers. The quiet steadiness. The inexplicable gentleness. It’s... disconcerting, to be this aware of someone else, even in their absence.

That night, he dreams of Granny again.

She hums the old lullaby she used to sing when he was little, her voice as soft and warm as the light filtering through summer curtains. She strokes his hair the way she always did, slow and soothing.

And when he wakes, that touch lingers behind—like a seal of love pressed into his skin, meant to carry with him wherever he goes.

An annoying buzz of notifications wakes Atsumu at ass o'clock.

(Okay, it's actually eight. But his flu-ridden, aching body insists it's an hour that should be illegal. Especially since Sakusa had granted him the morning off.)

He squints one eye open and blindly pats around for his phone.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖, the screen declares.

Atsumu groans and opens the (13) texts.

The last is a photo of Osamu—grinning beside none other than Suna Rintarou.

Atsumu: What?

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Look who I ran into!

Atsumu: People don't usually get that excited over running into old classmates, Samu.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Yeah well Sunarin doesn't count.

Atsumu: Sunarin, huh. I see, I see.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Shut up.

Atsumu: Where are ya?

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Sunarin part-times at that new bakery across the street. Gave me a free donut 😊

Atsumu: Wow. She flirts like a preschooler.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Ur just jealous no one's giving YOU donuts 🍩 (he goes by he/him now btw)

Atsumu scoffs. Right. Sakusa gave him vitamins. Osamu can keep his donut and his bakery flirt to himself.

Another buzz.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Anyway, texting to say we're planning a high school reunion.

Atsumu blinks. Then blinks again. Maybe he's still asleep and this is some bizarre dream.

Atsumu: I'm sorry what.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Y'know! Like a hangout with Kita-san and the others.

Atsumu: I know what a reunion is, Samu. In what abundance of free time do you think this'll happen? We don't even live in Osaka anymore.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Yeah well Kita and Aran are visiting Tokyo next week. And anyway, we're gonna visit Ma over summer break.

Atsumu: Samu... I've got work. I dunno if I can.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Figure it out. Ma called earlier and asked when we're coming. Either way, Kita-san asked about ya, so you better show. We're going out next weekend after finals.

Atsumu swallows. *Kita-san asked about me?*

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Mm. Said something about his favourite troublemaking kouhai.

Heat floods Atsumu's face, completely uninvited. He's just about to slap a hand over his gut to calm the flurry of traitorous butterflies when his phone buzzes again.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: Gotta run. Let me know. Also Sunarin says hi.

Atsumu: Hi Sunarin 🙌 Bye scrub 🙌

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: 😊 🙌

Atsumu snorts and finally drags himself out of bed. He's feeling... better, he guesses. Still fatigued, but manageable. The vitamins and ginger must be helping. He's grateful—especially since tomorrow is Friday, and Friday is promising insufferable guests.

He finds Sakusa at the kitchen island, sipping coffee. A pen is tucked behind one ear; glasses perch neatly on his nose. Tablet open.

"Morning," Atsumu mumbles, trying not to stare.

How the hell does someone look this good half-awake?

Sakusa's hair is a little messy, the strands casually falling over his brow. His white shirt is plain, sleeves rolled up. The glasses are frameless—honestly kind of dad-core. And yet—

"Miya. Good morning. How are you feeling?"

At the prolonged pause, Sakusa glances up.

"U-uh. Fine. Thanks. A lot better. I should be all good for tomorrow."

Sakusa's eyes narrow slightly, scanning him head to toe like a biometric scanner. Whatever he finds seems satisfactory—he nods. "Very well. Your suit's in my closet. You can try it on after breakfast."

Right on cue, the doorbell rings.

Atsumu drags himself to the door, expecting Tendou's usual delivery guy and over-the-top greetings.

Instead, he's met with twinkling grey eyes and a cheerful, "Buongiorno! I'm here to deliver Sakusa-sama's breakfast."

"Ah, Bennie," Sakusa calls from behind, making Atsumu flinch. "Buongiorno. And we talked about this—'-san' is fine."

"Però..." Bennie shifts her weight, ginger curls bouncing. She looks young. Maybe Atsumu's age. "Are you sure? My Japanese courses really drilled honorifics into us. I wouldn't want to be rude!"

"*Non si preoccupi, Bennie,*" Sakusa replies gently. And of course he speaks Italian.

Atsumu wants to bonk his head against the doorframe. Instead, he accepts the package and flees, leaving the two to chatter fluently. He catches a few words—*venerdì, cibo*—probably talking about tomorrow's arrangements.

He peeks into his breakfast: soup, rice, tamagoyaki, tsukemono. The aroma is warm, rich, familiar. Comforting. He hadn't been in to work for two days. He didn't confirm the menu.

Did Sakusa order this for him?

Just as he's settling in, Sakusa returns and takes the seat across from him.

Atsumu watches him unpack his meal with precise movements. Every motion deliberate. Clean. Quiet.

He blurts it out before he can stop himself. "Did you order this for me?"

Sakusa glances up. "Mm? Oh, that. Yes. I thought you could use a proper breakfast." He waves a hand, unbothered.

His own meal mirrors Atsumu's, but with a side of natto.

Atsumu stares. "Why are you doing this?"

Sakusa pauses mid-motion, his gaze lifting. "Doing what?"

"Taking care of me."

There's a brief frown, like the question doesn't compute. "Do I need a reason to do that?"

Yes, Atsumu thinks. You do.

"I-I guess not," he says aloud.

"You live under my roof," Sakusa replies matter-of-factly, splitting his chopsticks. "You're under my care."

That... is not what the contract said.

Atsumu wonders—does Sakusa treat all his employees like this?

The thought inexplicably makes something curl in his stomach.

Then Sakusa stills, like a realisation just hit. “If I’m making you uncomfortable, tell me at once.”

Atsumu jerks upright, almost dropping his chopsticks. “What? No! Of course not! I’m not uncomfortable, I’m just... painfully grateful and I don’t know what to do with that. I don’t know how to repay you.”

Sakusa’s frown deepens—but not in anger. Just... confusion.

“I don’t expect payment.”

“I know, I just...” Atsumu exhales sharply, cheeks hot. “I mean, like. Return the kindness.”

“Oh.” Sakusa blinks. As if the idea had genuinely never crossed his mind. “Don’t worry about that. Taking care of someone is... strangely fulfilling, on its own.”

Oh.

Atsumu’s ears are on fire now. Fulfilling?

They stare at each other, the moment stretching. Quiet. Heavy.

Sakusa’s words hang in the air like a blessing Atsumu isn’t sure he deserves.

Then Sakusa breaks eye contact and takes a dignified bite of rice. Reflexively, Atsumu does the same.

Well. If Sakusa’s set on taking care of him...

Who is Atsumu to stop him?

Pretty Boy in the Shark Tank

Chapter Summary

“Tada!” Atsumu announces, finger guns loaded, grin shameless. “Don’t I look like a functioning member of society?”

Sakusa raises a single unimpressed eyebrow at the comparison, but his gaze drifts—slowly, critically—over Atsumu. It doesn’t linger, but it *lands*, and when their eyes meet, Sakusa gives a faint, almost formal nod. “Indeed. Quite the transformation. From ‘disaster university student’ to ‘handsome young man.’”

Atsumu blinks. “Oh.”

Chapter Notes

This is the first TMLTL chapter where I can’t quite tell if it’s good or bad, so I’ll await your verdict.

I hope you enjoy ♥

Special thanks to Lee for birthing Dave the Banana Couch and for the discord peeps who formed a cult around it 😊

Bennie is the final IRL character I’m introducing, it’s one of my darling readers. So that makes three: oat-san, Haito and Bennie ♥

[Kiyoomi’s suit.](#)
[discord](#)

Atsumu adjusts the lapels of his jacket, turning slowly in front of the full-length mirror in Sakusa’s boutique closet. To his pleasant surprise, the suit hugs him like it was made with obsessive affection.

The mirror greets him with the reflection of a tall, blond man who—for once—looks like he has his life together.

He twists sideways. *Damn*. His ass looks fantastic.

The belt is a particularly dignified touch. It screams “man with a filing cabinet and a dental plan.” A belt was the final boss of adulthood, and somehow, Atsumu had equipped it.

He’s still admiring himself when Sakusa returns at his summons and stops at the doorway.

“Tada!” Atsumu announces, finger guns loaded, grin shameless. “Don’t I look like a functioning member of society?”

Sakusa raises a single unimpressed eyebrow at the comparison, but his gaze drifts—slowly, critically—over Atsumu. It doesn’t linger, but it *lands*, and when their eyes meet, Sakusa gives a faint, almost formal nod. “Indeed. Quite the transformation. From ‘disaster university student’ to ‘handsome young man.’”

Atsumu blinks. “Oh.”

He glances at his reflection again. The silky button-up. The way the jacket sits clean across his shoulders. His pants show just enough thigh to suggest a gym membership without screaming it. And yes, the belt absolutely seals the deal.

Handsome, Sakusa said.

The thought is louder than it should be.

Atsumu coughs. “Thanks. Do I, uh... do I get to see your suit too?”

Sakusa looks mildly puzzled, like he’s just been asked something unorthodox. But he crosses to the other side of the closet and retrieves a neatly pressed three-piece ensemble. The double-breasted waistcoat is tailored to the millimetre, and the tie—a deep, patterned red—adds just enough flair to feel dangerous.

“This is the outfit for tomorrow.”

“Oh wow,” Atsumu breathes. “Very elegant. Did you try it on?”

Sakusa eyes the suit in his hands with a tailor’s scrutiny. “I have. It’s well made—for a rush job. I’ll give Sugawara-san that much.”

There goes Atsumu’s fantasy of seeing Sakusa in it now. A shame. But he can wait until tomorrow. Probably.

As Sakusa returns the suit to its protected perch, he turns to Atsumu with a businesslike air. “Let’s review your responsibilities for tomorrow.”

Atsumu perks up. “On the banana couch?”

Sakusa exhales the kind of sigh reserved for lost causes and divine punishment. He casts a glance heavenward. “Fine.”

Atsumu does not cheer. He’s a respectable man now. A man in a belt.

Still... It's a very close call.

The dinner party tasks, roughly paraphrased, are as follows:

Welcome guests using ancient Greek rituals.

Perform oral elegance with minimal praise and maximum decorum.

Receive coats with poise and an abundance of caution. Do not wrinkle the coats. Do not fold the coats. Do not *breathe* on the coats. Hang them, reverently, in the closet.

Guide guests to the terrace. Do *not* push Tanaka Goro off the balcony, no matter how tempting. Praise Korubane Sayaka at your own risk. Do not serve Dr. Nishikawa Rei anything stronger than wine—unless you're desperate for a drunken lecture on Aristotle's hygiene practices and their philosophical implications. If Renji Tachibana becomes unbearable (likely), retreat to the nearest sanctuary. Regroup with Sakusa for troubleshooting.

Atsumu will alert the kitchen staff when to serve dinner and distribute alcohol upon request. Otherwise, he is to stand in a corner, look pretty, and await orders from Sakusa, or the guests.

"Can we schedule a breakdown session after the guests are gone? Here on the banana couch?" Atsumu asks.

"You're awfully attached to my banana couch," Sakusa replies.

Atsumu clutches one of the cushions like a security blanket. "It's comfy. And the only pop of color in this whole mausoleum. The only young soul."

"Did you just call me *old*?" Sakusa asks, the corner of his mouth twitching despite his unimpressed expression.

Atsumu nearly falls off the couch in his flailing. "No, no, no! I mean—sure, you're like, what? Forty? But you don't look forty, and that's what matters! Honestly, you don't look a day over thirty, so really, you're winning."

"I'm thirty-nine," Sakusa says mildly.

"Still," Atsumu insists, settling back into the couch. "You look a decade younger. I'm kinda jealous. Is it the skincare routine? The vitamins? Did three fairy godmothers bless you at birth?"

Sakusa blinks. Then—completely unprompted—he starts to *chortle*.

It's a strange sound. Unpracticed. It crackles in his throat like an old radio tuning into joy for the first time. But it's light, and sweet, and oddly vulnerable. Atsumu stares.

"You're ridiculous, Miya," Sakusa says through lingering laughter. "But... thank you."

Atsumu has the deranged urge to slap himself. *Did he just make Sakusa Kiyoomi laugh? A real, honest-to-god laugh?* His chest fizzes with an all-encompassing warmth.

“My ridiculousness made you laugh,” he declares proudly. “I’m counting that as a win.”

“You’re awfully delighted,” Sakusa notes, eyeing him with mild suspicion. “What exactly do you get out of earning a laugh from me?”

Atsumu blinks. “Uh... the laugh? I get the laugh.”

“You get the laugh,” Sakusa echoes.

“Yes,” Atsumu nods. “It means you were amused. Or happy. That’s a win in my book.”

Sakusa stares at him for a moment, as if assembling this puzzle with great care. “...Your goal is to amuse me?”

Heat creeps up Atsumu’s neck. Jesus. Sometimes he swears Sakusa doesn’t fully understand how people work.

“I like making people laugh, okay?” he mutters. “It feels good to make people happy. I guess you’re one of those people now.”

There’s a pause. Then Sakusa’s expression softens, his posture shifting just slightly. “Ah.”

Atsumu rubs at his nose, unable to hold Sakusa’s gaze. “Anyway. Is that all for tomorrow? I should start on today’s chores.”

“I believe so.” Sakusa rises and moves the whiteboard to the far corner of the room. “I have to head to the office soon. Please arrange to meet Tendou-san tomorrow morning and begin prep.”

Atsumu nods. Then, because he’s been living here over a month and knows the House Rules better than the building’s own architect, he ventures carefully, “What happens when you have guests over... y’know. With the rules.”

“Obviously they don’t apply,” Sakusa says, nose wrinkling. “I schedule a deep clean with a service the next morning. Then I clean again—well, *you’ll* clean again—after they leave.”

Atsumu nods, unfazed. It’s extreme, sure, but he signed up for this particular brand of neurosis.

“Okay,” he says, already standing. “I’ll get started.”

Sakusa nods. “Take care.”

“You too.”

Next morning dawns too soon, bringing with it the catering crew.

“*Mon chéri!* We meet at last!”

Tendou-san, somehow, looks exactly like he sounds.

His hair is buzzed close to the scalp, dyed a shade of red that reminds Atsumu of a fire hydrant. His grin is pure Cheshire cat. Atsumu chuckles nervously. “Bonjour, Tendou-san. Please come in.”

“*Ciao!*” chirps Bennie from behind Tendou. They’re trailed by Thomas-san, the usual delivery guy for the Sakusa Residence.

“Miya-san,” Thomas nods politely.

“Thomas-san, we’ve talked about this. Please, call me Atsumu.” Atsumu ushers them in. Each one is laden with bags brimming with supplies. He hurries to assist as they make the uphill trek to the rooftop.

They set up at the grilling station while Bennie disappears to the second-floor kitchen to begin buffet prep.

Thomas makes no fewer than eight trips lugging stainless steel chafing dishes up to the rooftop, setting up the frames at the counter while Tendou directs him like a military sergeant.

“Appetizers will go here,” Tendou points to the small island near the entrance. “We’ll spread the main courses along the long counter, dessert in the coolers. Meat will be grilled on request. Miya-san will command the bar.”

Thomas nods, silent and efficient, and begins to unpack. Tendou sweeps back downstairs to assist Bennie, with Atsumu on his heels.

“Uh... can I help somehow?” he offers, watching the kitchen unravel into a controlled chaos.

“Yes!” Tendou trills. “You’re on cleaning duty, *mon chéri!* Chop chop!”

Atsumu tries not to sweat as he’s promptly conscripted. The dishwasher swallows a full load, leaving Atsumu at the sink with a tower of pots. How many cookware items did Sakusa own? Too many, apparently.

The better part of six hours vanish in a blur of scrubbing, steaming, and taste-testing. By the end, Atsumu is sweating like a pig in a furnace.

“Tendou-san, you do this every day?”

“Every day *and* night!” Tendou sings, already whipping up dessert. Atsumu stares in despair. Dessert. Of course there’s dessert.

“Come here, *mon chéri*, whip this batter for me.”

Tendou has him sampling ingredients to judge sweetness, and Atsumu complies dutifully, humming at the rich, velvety flavours.

“Tendou-san, if you keep feeding me like this, I’ll be a human-shaped balloon by the time the guests arrive. You’ll have to roll me down the stairs.”

That earns him a gleeful laugh. “Alright, back on dish duty, then.”

Atsumu groans theatrically but complies.

Eventually, with eight o’clock looming, he has to peel himself away from the kitchen chaos and start getting ready.

First, a long shower to rinse away the day’s labour. He takes his time: shampoo, conditioner, blow-dry. A quick shave, some moisturiser—he’s a belt-wearing adult now—aftershave, cologne, a touch of gel. He feels polished. Grown-up.

The suit awaits in his room, crisply pressed. He slips into the silky shirt, then the tailored pants. The burgundy pocket square adds a pop of colour, and the shoes tie it all together. He watches his reflection transform into a refined young man with artfully tousled hair and an upright, confident air.

He grins and snaps a mirror selfie to Osamu. *How do I look?*

Osamu replies instantly:

who are you and what have you done with my brother

Delighted and riding a rush of pride, Atsumu leaves his room with a strut, humming under his breath, admiring his reflection in every surface he passes.

He turns a corner, bound for the wine cellar, and almost walks straight into Sakusa.

He stumbles back with a startled yelp, narrowly avoiding a head-on collision and his hand flies out to steady himself against the wall.

It takes a second for his brain to catch up.

His eyes lift. Focus. Recalibrate.

And then—it hits him like a brick to the face.

He wasn’t ready.

Not for *this*.

Not for Sakusa, standing there like the damn cover of a luxury magazine. Like he’d been conjured up by a deity with a grudge against anything average.

The suit is black, but not plain—there's a subtle shimmer to it, like a whisper of moonlight caught in motion. Every seam is sharp, deliberate. The cut hugs Sakusa's form in that infuriating way that says money, discretion, power. Nothing screams for attention, but everything commands it.

A splash of red—a tie, textured and rich—draws the eye like a slow burn. His pocket square is folded to lethal precision. And that silver chain? A war crime. Dangling from his collar like temptation incarnate, catching the light with quiet defiance.

It's too much. It's perfect. It's *him*.

Atsumu's mouth goes dry. His brain stalls.

He hadn't expected to feel nervous. Not like this. Not just because Sakusa looks expensive—but because, for the first time tonight, *he* feels underdressed.

“Are you okay?” Sakusa asks, calm as ever, reaching out to steady Atsumu with a hand that's absurdly gentle.

“Uh.” Atsumu's brain reboots. “M fine.”

He's staring. He knows he's staring.

Sakusa tips his head. “Is there something on my face?”

Atsumu flushes. “N-no—just—sorry, you startled me. I didn't realise you were back.”

Sakusa smooths his lapels. “Had to make sure everything was perfect.”

“Your suit *is* perfect,” Atsumu blurts, then immediately wants to evaporate. Time to fling himself down two flights of stairs and hope for instant death.

But Sakusa looks pleasantly surprised. “You think so?”

Atsumu nods fervently. “Crafted with aggressive elegance. Screams old money and taste. Bravo.”

Sakusa chuckles, shaking his head. “You're truly something else, Miya. Let's head to the terrace—I believe Tendou-san and company should be done with the setup by now.”

The door rings at 7:30, much to Atsumu's dismay. Could Sakusa's guests be the excessively punctual kind? The kind that borders on neuroticism?

He half-hopes it's a food delivery mix-up.

What he finds on the other side of the door, however, is... unexpected. For a second, Atsumu thinks someone had accidentally invited a film director or a retired spy.

The man wasn't on the Scale of Insufferability graph Sakusa provided.

Tall. Broad. Dressed in a charcoal suit, no tie. His crisp shirt's top two buttons are undone, like he'd made peace with comfort years ago. His hair is caramel brown and artfully shaggy—like a father in a movie about parenting who actually has time for his kids.

“Ah, you must be Miya Atsumu!” the man says warmly, with smile lines that say he's seen things—real things—but never lost his humor about it. He offers his hand. “I'm Komori Motoya, Kiyo-kun's favourite cousin.”

Atsumu's jaw drops at the informal, cutesy nickname, and even more so at the fact that Komori looked nothing like Sakusa.

“Who said you're my favourite cousin?” Sakusa's voice drifts from behind him, dry as bone. “And don't call me that in public.”

“We're literally in your home,” Komori says, waving him off. “And it's just Miya-san here. I'm sure you're way past the formalities.”

“Uh...” Atsumu fumbles. “Please call me Atsumu.”

“Right, Atsumu-san, I'm sure Kiyoomi's traumatised you enough, so I'm here to rescue you~”

Atsumu blinks as it clicks in his head. “Did you... invite Komori-san to babysit me through a dinner party?”

When Sakusa winces, Atsumu sighs in defeat. “I mean, I do value the help...”

“I'm just looking out for you,” Sakusa mumbles, a faint red dusting his cheeks. “But Motoya is here to run interference for me. In case I charge one of the guests with a dessert knife.”

Atsumu snorts at the mental image. “No way someone as efficient as you would go for a dessert knife. You'd steal Tendou-san's chef knife. Very efficient. Very stabby.”

Sakusa's mouth crooks up at the corner. Komori looks positively delighted. “You already know him so well!”

“Thank you for coming on short notice,” Sakusa says to Komori, poised but sincere.

“It's no biggie,” Motoya reassures as they wander into the house. “Hiro-kun's with Kaa-san this weekend, and I was just sitting around watching reruns of *MasterChef*. This is bound to be much more entertaining.”

“Thank God for that. You know how much I hate these dinners. How is Yuna-baa-san? And Hiro-kun? You should bring him around sometime.”

“Ah, well, you know how it is with her hip,” Komori says, helping himself to a glass of water like he owns the kitchen. “But she's happy to have Hiro to help. Good thing it's summer break.”

Atsumu listens curiously as they chatter with familial ease. Yuna-obaa-san, he gathers, is Sakusa's maternal aunt—Motoya's mother. And Hiro-kun, spoken of with unmistakable pride, is Komori's seven-year-old son. There's no mention of a wife.

Single father, then, Atsumu thinks, filing it away with mild admiration.

The bell chimes again at 7:50, snapping the house into movement. The first string of guests arrive: overdressed men and women who barely spare Atsumu a glance as they hand over their coats. Most are civil—*too* civil. Polished. Oily.

He clocks their rank on Sakusa's Scale of Insufferability. Low. Least offensive. Still, they reek of cigar smoke and ego.

They greet Sakusa with disconcerting familiarity.

"Nice of you to remember us! Stop by R&D more often, Sakusa-san—we've got exciting things on the table!"

"Sakusa-san, how's your health? You didn't burn the house down after that flu, did you? Hah!"

"Shimizu-san told me about the new grant—very bold. High risk, high reward, huh?"

Atsumu watches, wide-eyed. How does Sakusa keep up with so many lines of corporate small talk?

"First time doing this, huh?" Komori says, watching him with nostalgic amusement. "I remember my first Sakusa dinner. I was sixteen. I dropped a wine glass and nearly had a stroke."

Atsumu chuckles, a bit relieved. "You and I come from very different worlds, Komori-san."

"Mm. Call me Motoya," Komori says easily. "Kiyoomi told me you're juggling biochem and a full-time job. You've got my respect."

Heat rushes to Atsumu's cheeks. "Gotta make ends meet somehow. Honestly, this job's not as bad as it sounds on paper."

"Yeah? Kiyokun treating you well?"

Atsumu's mind flashes to a couple of nights ago, to Sakusa Kiyoomi's hunched form on the floor, summarising slides for Atsumu, supplying him with snacks and blankets. He thinks about the homemade soup, the meds, the fussing, and feels his chest melt a little. "Yeah. Yeah he is."

Komori pats him on the shoulder, grinning. "Glad to hear it. After that disaster with his last housekeeper, I'm relieved. That woman gave me the creeps."

"He told me," Atsumu mutters, grimacing.

“I like you better already,” Komori winks.

“Why thank you, Motoya-san. I’ve been told my clownery can be charming.”

They share a laugh—until the bell rings again.

This time, something in the air changes. The room stills ever so slightly, like a prelude in a horror film where the lighting shifts and you *know* the villain just walked on stage.

Atsumu answers the door and nearly recoils.

Kurobane Sayaka—The Vaguely Threatening Heiress—sweeps in without invitation, like she owns the oxygen.

She’s dressed in wine-red silk, gloves catching the light like claws. Her heels click with authority, her eyes assessing the space with the disdain of royalty inspecting a peasant’s pantry.

“I see your taste in lighting hasn’t evolved,” she sniffs. Atsumu blinks, trying to process the burn before she caps it off with an airy, unbothered laugh.

Then her gaze lands on him.

Sharp. Appraising. Like a high-end jeweller deciding whether he’s fake gold or just poorly cut.

“Well. Aren’t you a pleasant surprise? Eye candy *and* posture. I’d ask where Sakusa found you, but I doubt he’d give up his secrets so easily.”

Atsumu sputters, face flushing pink. “Uh—”

Komori swoops in like a practiced diplomat. “Sayaka-san, you wound me. I thought I was your favourite eye candy.”

Kurobane’s eyes linger on Atsumu just a second longer than polite—predatory, amused—before sliding lazily toward Komori. She lets herself be swept away with the sort of grace that says *I let you win this round*.

Atsumu exhales, heart thudding. What the hell *was* that?

The doorbell rings again, and Atsumu prays—silently, desperately—that it’s someone normal.

The universe laughs in his face.

Tanaka Goro lumbers in next, his bald spot catching the light like a divine punishment. He grins, all teeth and sleaze, and winks at Atsumu.

“I see our germ guy’s got himself a cute little helper. Don’t scratch the cuffs, blondie.”

Atsumu blinks. *Blondie? Are you fucking kidding me?*

“I won’t, baldie,” he mutters through clenched teeth, voice honeyed with sarcasm.

The guests keep arriving, each one shinier than the last—like they’re in competition to see who can drip the most money without actually tripping over their ego.

The stares linger. The compliments hover just on the wrong side of flattering.

One woman, Mitsuki, wears a neckline that dips like a stock market crash. Atsumu tries very hard to look at literally anything else. She catches him *not* looking—and smiles like she’s won a game he didn’t even know he was playing.

Then comes Dr. Nishikawa Rei: the Wine Guy.

“Here,” he says, handing over a Bordeaux like it’s a relic. “To enrich Sakusa-san’s collection.”

Atsumu bows politely. Not that Sakusa’s wine cellar *needed* enrichment—he was ninety-five percent sure it could survive the apocalypse.

“Thank you, Nishikawa-sensei. I’ll put this in the cellar.”

He barely makes it back from the cellar when the final bell tolls.

Enter: Renji Tachibana.

Tall. Gaudy. White suit. Too many rings. Gold glasses that glint like a villain reveal. He carries himself like someone who’s never heard the word *no*.

He looks Atsumu up and down with the slow, clinical curiosity of a buyer inspecting livestock.

“You must be Sakusa’s new housekeeper,” he says, voice low, slow, and *oily*—the kind that makes your skin want to peel itself off.

Atsumu straightens. “Yessir. I’ll take your coat.”

Renji smiles—a lazy baring of teeth. Not friendly. Not kind. Just sharp. “Thanks, pretty boy.”

Atsumu flinches, subtle but real. *Did he just—?*

He turns, jaw tight, and leads Renji toward the stairs. Every hair on his arms stands up. The man smells like leather polish and ill-gotten money.

Renji follows, silent, steps too slow. Too close.

There’s something predatory in the air, like Atsumu’s just walked into a room with no exits.

Thank god for Komori. He appears like a *deus ex human* shield halfway through the hallway.

“Renji-san,” he says, clipped and cold. “Fashionably late, as always.”

“Komori,” Renji purrs, amusement curling around the name like smoke. “You know how I love ruffling Sakusa’s pretty feathers.”

Atsumu scowls. *So this is the Inescapable Oily Benefactor.* The one Sakusa had to invite. The one you smile at with your teeth clenched. The one who expects you to smile.

They reach the terrace just as laughter spills from the clustered guests. The night air is cooler here, but Atsumu’s skin is still crawling.

Kurobane’s voice slices through the ambient chatter like the clink of a wine glass. “Miya-san!”

He barely has time to brace before she’s beside Sakusa again—too close, too familiar. Her smile is red, lacquered, and loaded.

“I was just telling Sakusa what a polite, *pretty* boy he’s found,” she croons, eyes raking over him. “How old are you?”

Atsumu straightens, forcing out a practiced smile. “Twenty-six in October, ma’am.”

“Old enough,” she hums, eyes glinting. Then she glides off with a swirl of silk and a cigarette in hand, leaving a trail of expensive perfume, smoke and tension in her wake.

Atsumu blinks. *Old enough for what?*

Sakusa’s jaw is clenched so tight the muscle ticks. “Ignore her,” he mutters, low and hoarse. “She’s inappropriate.”

A beat passes. The air feels heavier than before, the kind that settles on your shoulders and sinks in.

“I’m gonna go help Tendou-san,” Atsumu mumbles, desperate to shake it off.

“Do that,” Sakusa says. His eyes, unreadable, linger on Atsumu for just a moment too long.

Atsumu doesn’t wait. He slips away fast, heart tapping an unfamiliar rhythm against his ribs.

“Tendou-san,” he pants. “Here to help.”

Tendou turns mid-pour, eyebrows lifting as he clocks Atsumu’s expression. “Oh, *mon chéri*...” His voice gentles. “Breathe. Are you alright?”

Atsumu leans against the bar, pulse still racing. “Yeah. Just—needed air. And maybe a fire escape.”

Tendou slides a glass of water toward him. “Sadly, we don’t have one of those. But we *do* have a very nice rosé in the cooler. Or me.”

Atsumu manages a laugh—shaky, but genuine. “You’ll do.”

“You look like you need holy water,” Tendou says, with a crooked smile. Then, more softly, “He said something, didn’t he?”

Atsumu doesn’t answer right away. He doesn’t need to.

Tendou’s gaze flicks briefly toward the terrace. “Renji’s a parasite in designer shoes. The kind who thinks proximity is permission.”

Atsumu’s jaw tenses. “He was too close. Like he was—*testing* something.”

“He does that,” Tendou says. “He likes knowing who flinches.” He places the water jug down with precision. “Years ago, I flinched. Once. That was enough.”

A beat. Atsumu’s brows knit.

“I stayed away after that,” Tendou adds lightly, but his voice betrays a thread of steel. “Now I serve food and keep knives handy.”

Atsumu exhales, steadier this time. “That bad, huh?”

“You’ve seen nothing yet.”

He wasn’t kidding.

Across the rooftop, Renji and Kurobane now stand together, laughing. Their gazes keep flicking back toward Atsumu. The way they smile—like they’re sharing a private joke with teeth—makes his skin crawl.

“I feel like meat,” Atsumu mutters. “How does Sakusa-san put up with this?”

“Practice,” Tendou says. “Sakusa-san’s had years.”

Atsumu swallows. “Has it always been like this?”

“Oh, *mon chéri*... let me tell you about the time Sakusa spilled wine on her dress—*intentionally*...”

Atsumu turns, slack-jawed. “What? No way. You’re messing with me.”

Tendou just beams at him.

Atsumu narrows his eyes. “Wait. You’re *not* messing with me?”

Tendou’s grin widens in pure mischief. “Oh, I cleaned it up myself. Since then, she’s kept a wide berth whenever drinks are involved. It’s frankly a delight to watch Sakusa-san wield that memory like a battle shield.”

Atsumu presses a hand over his mouth, stifling a laugh. “So he lied. Because he definitely told me he’s never spilled a thing in his life.”

“Don’t let him know I told you this,” Tendou stage-whispers, leaning in like a co-conspirator, “but he once burned one of his own shirts because Kurobane-san left a lipstick stain on the collar. Something about bad juju, or a curse, I don’t know. He was *dead* serious.”

Atsumu pauses—really *pauses*—and looks toward the terrace.

Renji’s gaze still lingers, reptilian and unreadable. Kurobane sips her champagne, lips curled around something smug. They’re both watching. Waiting.

He turns back to Tendou, a defiant spark lighting his grin.

This? This he can handle.

He leans in. “Swear to god, our secret,” he murmurs. “Now spill more. Before those guys eat me alive. I want to go out with a bang.”

“You’d make a delightful snack, Atsumu-san,” Tendou declares, flipping a skewer with finesse, “but fear not. Tendou-san will heroically save you from the sharks.”

He gives a dramatic salute, then pivots to the grill with all the flair of a magician about to pull a dove out of a spatula. “Anyway, let me tell you about the time Sakusa-san lost a bet to Tanaka Goro...”

Atsumu groans with theatrical dread. “Oh, I’m all ears, Tendou-san. Lay it on me.”

“I’ve got *scalding* tea, *mon chéri*. Buckle up.”

“Oh, hell yeah.”

Beneath the Surface

Chapter Summary

Renji's smile turns sharper. "Let's talk after dinner. I could offer you a very lucrative side gig—provided you don't mind using your hands."

A beat.

"Renji," Sakusa says.

His voice is smooth, but the temperature drops several degrees.

"If you'd like to keep your seat at this table," he continues, tone glacially polite, "I suggest you keep your propositions to yourself."

Chapter Notes

I had so much fun writing this chapter, I hope you like it half as much as I do! ♥

Thank you for 900+ kudos, I can't express enough how grateful and humbled I am by all the love this fic has received in less than a couple months. Sending you all virtual hugs



Tendou keeps him entertained for the better part of twenty minutes while Atsumu busies himself with polishing wine glasses. He lines them behind the bar counter, using the ceramic aisle like a shield. This is familiar. Renji and Kurobane aren't the first creeps he's had to deal with. He worked a back-alley pub for two years, pouring drinks for every kind of shadowed menace.

He's pretty sure he once served a mafia boss. Twice.

So when Renji slithers up to the bar and settles into a high chair like he owns it, Atsumu pastes on his best customer service smile. "Renji-san. Here to pick your poison for the evening?"

"Amongst other things," Renji replies smoothly, voice oiled and suggestive.

Atsumu doesn't flinch. Not when he's holding an ice pick. "Sakusa-san has an excellent wine collection—"

“They say a man’s favourite drink says a lot about him,” Renji cuts in, swirling the air with unnecessary intimacy. “Wine men are aristocratic. Refined. But they hide behind a fancy label.”

Atsumu blinks. “I beg your pardon?”

“Sakusa-san,” Renji says, lounging like a snake in silk, “is an established CEO, sure. But he hides behind the Sakusa name. That’s the way of old money, isn’t it? They inherit a crown and pretend they forged it.”

Easy, Atsumu tells himself, nostrils flaring. “Opening doors with your resources *is* the mark of a good businessman.”

Renji’s smile sharpens like a paper cut. “Oho. Very astute—for a pretty boy.”

Atsumu flashes him a saccharine smile. “Ah, you flatter me. But I have a name, Renji-san. It’s Miya-san to you.”

That lands. Renji’s eyes narrow, but he chuckles like he’s just unwrapped a new toy. “Mm. I’ll have a whiskey, *pretty boy Miya-san*.”

Atsumu grinds his teeth behind the smile as he pours him two fingers of something expensive and aged enough to bite back.

Then, like a shift in the wind, Sakusa appears—sliding into the next stool with deliberate calm, a single seat left between him and Renji. Atsumu doesn’t quite sag in relief, but his smile grows more real, more grounded.

Renji doesn’t even flinch at the new company. If anything, he straightens like he’s pleased with the growing audience.

“Sakusa-san. Good evening,” Atsumu says, voice warm. “What can I serve you tonight?”

Sakusa’s posture is relaxed, but his gaze is sharp. He rests his chin on one hand, considering Atsumu like a puzzle he’s almost finished solving. “What do you recommend?”

It’s a simple question. Common in Atsumu’s line of work. But coming from *him*?

Still, Atsumu rolls with it. “May I interest you in my special cocktail?”

“Certainly,” Sakusa says, eyes never leaving him. “Though I’m hardly a cocktail guy.”

“There’s a first time for everything,” Atsumu hums, pretending Renji doesn’t exist. He grabs the shaker and ice. “Let’s start with sugar syrup. Because you can’t go wrong with a little sweetness.”

He pours with flair. “Lemon juice next. Just enough to kick.”

Sakusa’s mouth quirks upward, eyes watching his hands more than the ingredients.

Atsumu reaches for the vodka. “It’s your dinner party, right? One, two, three—four counts.”

“Easy, Miya. I’d like to remember tonight,” Sakusa murmurs with a half-laugh.

Atsumu grins as he shakes the drink, bouncing the shaker off the counter like a showman. Sakusa raises an eyebrow in subtle amusement.

He pours the drink into a wide balloon glass, layering in garnishes like a painter at work. “Two orange slices, one lime, one lemon wheel... mint leaf to make it pretty. And for the *pièce de résistance*...”

He pops a champagne cork and tops it off with a slow, steady pour, then slides the glass across the bar with a little bow. “Your drink, monsieur.”

Sakusa sips through the straw, eyes still locked on Atsumu. “Very tasty,” he murmurs, voice dipped in something warmer.

Atsumu basks for one indulgent second—then turns to Renji.

Who’s watching. *Still* watching with that same hungry, dissecting look.

Atsumu leans forward, elbows on the bar, letting his smile curl just so. “They say a man’s favourite drink says a lot about him,” he echoes sweetly. “But a man willing to try something new... now that’s someone familiar with risk and reward. Not the sort to hide behind the familiar.”

His voice is soft, but the edge is diamond-cut. “Wouldn’t you agree, Renji-san?”

Renji’s eyes glitter, all malice and intrigue. “Point taken, pretty boy Miya-san.”

Atsumu suppresses a shiver as he refills the whiskey glass. Every instinct screams *step back*.

“Sakusa-san,” he says, tone shifting to formal. “Tendou-san has finished with dinner preparations. Food will be served shortly.”

“Very well,” Sakusa says, eyebrow tilted. There’s a subtle weight behind it—like a promise that this conversation isn’t over.

Atsumu offers a quick bow. “I’ll go inform him.”

And with that, he escapes—Renji’s gaze leaving a trail of unease, Sakusa’s gaze a pressure he can’t quite name.

Atsumu makes the executive decision to help Tendou and Bennie organise the buffet, then steps aside to let the guests fill their plates, trying not to look like he’s loitering.

Some glance at him curiously; others stare outright. Atsumu wonders if there’s something on his face. He looks down—no wrinkles, no spills. Everything is in order. Then why...?

“Tendou-san... why are they staring at me like that?” Atsumu murmurs when Tendou joins him at the edge of the buffet.

Tendou raises an unimpressed brow. “Don’t tell me you’re one of those people, mon chéri.”

“What people?” Atsumu asks, already wary.

Tendou pats his shoulder. “The kind who don’t realise they’re dangerously good-looking.”

Atsumu splutters. “What?”

“Surely you’re not that oblivious,” Tendou sighs, though his smile is small and sincere. “They’re staring because you look very handsome.”

“You think I look handsome?”

“Actually,” Bennie interjects quietly, a flush rising on her cheeks, “you’re quite beautiful, Atsumu-san. It’s... honestly a little distracting.”

Atsumu turns red. “Oh.”

Tendou bursts out laughing. “You really didn’t know?”

Atsumu shakes his head. “I think there’s been a big misunderstanding.”

“I’ve overheard at least three guests call you a piece of candy,” Bennie whispers, glancing around like she’s trading state secrets. “Sakusa-san looked—*come si dice... infastidito?*—annoyed. Very annoyed.”

“Oh,” Atsumu says faintly.

“I agree,” Tendou adds. “Rather unbecoming behaviour for people of their status. This isn’t high school.”

“Guys,” Atsumu chuckles nervously. “You’re imagining things.”

But then the back of his neck prickles with the unmistakable weight of a stare. He glances back and locks eyes with Renji, who is watching him like a wolf. Atsumu suppresses a shiver. “I *hope* you’re imagining things,” he amends.

Tendou’s smile is apologetic. *Fuck.*

Kurobane approaches with a plate in hand, her perfume arriving before she does. Tendou’s gaze shifts over Atsumu’s shoulder.

“Miya-san,” she purrs. “Won’t you join us for dinner?”

Atsumu straightens instinctively, caught off-guard by her tone. “Ah—thank you, but I’m here to work. It would be impolite.”

“Such a well-mannered boy,” she croons, like he’s a pet who’s learned a new trick. Atsumu’s patience thins.

“Pretty boy Miya-san,” Renji cuts in, appearing at his other side. “I’m sure Sakusa-san wouldn’t mind. You are his guest, too, after all. There’s more than enough food.”

Atsumu forces a smile and tries not to recoil when Renji’s gaze dips to his mouth. *Ew. Ew ew ew.*

“I really shouldn’t. I’ve got to pour champagne for the guests... and... and other duties to attend to.”

Renji scans the room, eyes locking onto Sakusa’s back. His grin turns sly. *Oh no.*

“Hey, Sakusa-san!”

Sakusa turns, mid-conversation with Tanaka, and shoots back a glare sharp enough to cut glass.

“Can your pretty aide join us for dinner?” Renji calls, smug.

Atsumu mouths *oh my god* to himself, horrified, as Sakusa’s gaze darkens and he strides toward them, abandoning Tanaka without a word.

“Renji,” Sakusa says coolly. “Please take your seat. I’ll arrange a chair for *Miya*.”

He stresses the name like a reprimand—just shy of irritated. Renji’s grin sharpens, clearly enjoying himself. Sakusa’s stare, however, promises war. Kurobane watches the three of them like it’s the season finale of her favourite drama.

Atsumu resists the urge to flee, or worse, open his fat mouth to say something spectacularly rude.

Sakusa fires off instructions—Tendou to grab an extra chair, Bennie to bring another set of cutlery.

Kurobane and Renji retreat with jaunty waves to the dinner table, already drifting back into animated conversation. Atsumu sucks in a shaky breath and groans under his breath. “You weren’t kidding with the insufferability scale.”

Sakusa, too, draws a slow, measured breath, his eyes settling on Atsumu with calculated precision. “I’m sorry,” he says. “I... may have failed to anticipate this particular turn of events.

“What do you mean?” Atsumu asks, smiling uncertainly.

“I should have expected that they’d behave like a pack of discourteous dogs the moment they saw you,” Sakusa mutters darkly. “Come. You’ll sit next to me.”

Atsumu has, conservatively, thirty-seven questions he wants to ask in response to that. But he swallows them all down and follows obediently. He's now uncomfortably aware—more than ever—that his behaviour reflects on Sakusa. He needs to tread carefully.

As he draws closer to the table, Renji raises an inviting hand, and pats the seat next to him. “Won’t you join us, pretty boy Miya-san?”

Sakusa brusquely pulls a chair back. “Miya, please have a seat here.”

Bewildered, Atsumu slides into the seat Sakusa indicated. The chair is eased into place without ceremony. Renji lowers his hand, a small frown marring his face—clearly not the outcome he’d hoped for.

Good.

“Tendou-san,” Sakusa says, “fill a plate for Miya, some of everything.”

“That’s a lot of food,” Atsumu hisses under his breath. “I can go fill my own plate—”

“You will do no such thing,” Sakusa murmurs just as quietly. “Stay by my side.”

Atsumu blinks, startled. It’s not just the tone—it’s the way Sakusa says it, like it’s not a request.

What is this about?

Tendou returns with a generous serving of teriyaki, a bowl of miso soup, and a little bit of everything.

Jesus Christ.

“Thank you, Tendou-san,” Atsumu says—and means it. “I’ll help you clean up later.”

“Don’t mention it, *mon chéri*, enjoy your dinner.” Tendou places a hand on his shoulder and gives it a brief, grounding squeeze. Then he bends low, voice dropping to a conspiratorial murmur beside Atsumu’s ear. “If you need me, I’ll be at the buffet. With my chef knives.”

Atsumu chuckles, nerves crackling beneath the surface, even as something warmer—almost painful—twists in his chest. Gratitude. “You’d make a terrifying spy, Tendou-san.”

Tendou straightens with an airy laugh and floats away with a jolly wave.

Sakusa’s gaze follows him, then shifts back to Atsumu. “Eat.”

“Yessir,” Atsumu mutters with a small grin, obediently taking a bite of the teriyaki. He hums, pleased. “Man, did Tendou-san cast a magic spell on these? This might be the best teriyaki I’ve ever had.”

Sakusa’s mouth crooks at the corner. “I hired him for a reason.”

The table begins to settle into its own rhythm. Soft laughter, clinking glasses, the swell of ambient chatter. Mitsuki is giggling demurely behind her palm, leaning toward her dinner companion—Satoma Mouri, if Atsumu remembers right—to whisper something clearly scandalous.

Satoma flushes as red as a lobster.

Atsumu presses a knuckle to his mouth to stifle a laugh. Sakusa glances over. “What?”

“I think Satoma-san’s blood pressure is going to land him in the hospital,” Atsumu whispers, shielding his mouth with his hand. He can still feel eyes on him—Renji’s stare lingering too long, Kurobane’s flitting glance from across the table.

Sakusa’s gaze flicks to the pair, then returns to Atsumu. “I doubt the blood is rushing to *that* head.”

Atsumu chokes mid-laugh, coughs, and scrambles for the nearest glass—grabbing a flute of champagne and taking a long drink. He sets it down, breathless.

“Sakusa-san,” he hisses, scandalised.

Sakusa looks almost smug, but his tone softens. “Please forgive my crudeness.”

Atsumu starts laughing anyway, full-bodied and helpless. “It’s not that. It’s just—” he waves vaguely between them, “—you’re so prim and proper all the time. I wasn’t expecting it.”

Sakusa doesn’t reply. He just looks away, unreadable.

Atsumu watches him, narrowing his eyes in playful suspicion. Maybe he’s tipsy. The cocktail had been strong. That could explain it.

A drunk Sakusa?

Now *that’s* intriguing.

Atsumu stores the thought away, lips twitching around a smirk, before remembering where he is. The conversation is still flowing, champagne glasses clinking in soft harmony.

“So, Miya-san,” Kurobane begins, taking a dignified sip of champagne, “have you been in this business long? You must be quite the expert to be trusted with Sakusa-san’s famously neurotic cleaning habits.”

“Ah,” Atsumu rubs the back of his neck sheepishly. “This is actually my first housekeeping gig, I fear.”

“Miya is a biochem major,” Sakusa cuts in smoothly. “I needed an expert, someone qualified to handle sensitive chemicals.”

“I bet that’s not the only thing he can handle expertly,” Renji drawls, grinning around the rim of his glass.

Atsumu's eyes widen. The implication hits him mid-sip.

It hadn't occurred to him at first—he'd chalked it up to upper-crust snobbery, the flirting, the overfamiliar "*pretty boy Miya-san*"... but now it's unmistakable. His chest tightens.

They think he's *servicing* Sakusa.

A cold, sharp thing twists in his gut. He meets Renji's gaze squarely. "You're right," he says, too evenly. "That's not the only thing I handle. I can mix cocktails like a pro, run titration labs like a chemist, and somehow hold down a full-time job while juggling a pre-med degree."

Kurobane lets out a brittle laugh. "Ah, Miya-san—Renji must've touched a nerve. You sound like a very capable young man. I admire a jack of all trades."

Ew.

Atsumu opens his mouth to bite back—something barbed, probably regrettable—but a warm palm lands on his thigh.

He stills.

Swallowing thickly, he glances sideways at Sakusa, who's sipping his champagne like nothing's happened. The hand stays where it is. Calm. Steady. Branding heat through the fabric of Atsumu's slacks.

"The reason I hired Miya," Sakusa says mildly, "is indeed because of his diverse qualifications. And his discipline."

Atsumu's breath catches.

That's when Tanaka, oblivious to the frost gathering around the table, barrels in with a grin. "My butler has a degree in English literature. Useless, really. No job will pay you better than working for Sakusa-san."

"That's very grim, Tanaka-san," Atsumu replies, keeping his tone airy. "I'm not in med school for the money."

Renji tilts his head, resting his cheek against an upturned palm. He watches Atsumu like he's an oddity in a museum display. "But you are here for Sakusa's handsome check, I presume."

Atsumu smiles tightly. "Med school is expensive. And unfortunately for us common folk, money doesn't grow on trees."

Renji's smile turns sharper. "Let's talk after dinner. I could offer you a very lucrative side gig—provided you don't mind using your hands."

A beat.

"Renji," Sakusa says.

His voice is smooth, but the temperature drops several degrees.

“If you’d like to keep your seat at this table,” he continues, tone glacially polite, “I suggest you keep your propositions to yourself.”

Renji throws his head back and laughs, loud and performative. “Now, Sakusa-san, don’t be like that. It was just a harmless offer.”

“Oh?” Sakusa hums. “That sounded dangerously like solicitation to me. Would you like me to repeat it back to you in front of everyone?”

The laughter dies. Renji’s eyes narrow, his face a mask of shuttered civility.

“I thought so.” Sakusa stands with quiet grace, his touch sliding off Atsumu’s thigh, leaving a ghost of warmth in its place. His napkin slips from his lap and lands on the table with finality.

“You’re mistaking my tolerance for goodwill. Don’t.”

Atsumu gapes after Sakusa’s retreating figure, stunned.

The table holds its collective breath. Somewhere in the distance, silverware clinks softly against a plate.

And yet something warm and treacherous curls low in Atsumu’s belly.

That was...

Renji rises stiffly, jaw taut, and leaves without a word.

Atsumu watches him go, pulse thudding. He scans the terrace for Komori or Tendou—someone, anyone—but neither of them are in sight.

The silence at the table stretches painfully, until the clink of cutlery and low murmurs begin to fill the air once more. Three long minutes.

He exhales, stands. “Excuse me,” he murmurs, and slips away from the table, heading inside.

The second floor is nearly empty. Tendou stands by the kitchen island, ladling soup into fresh bowls.

“Tendou-san,” Atsumu says, breath catching in relief. “Did you see where Sakusa-san went?”

Tendou’s eyes narrow, his usual levity gone. “Downstairs. Followed by Renji.”

Atsumu’s stomach plummets.

Oh no.

He takes the stairs two at a time, heart pounding against his ribs. Is Renji going to pull his investment? Ice out Sakusa Industries? He can’t let that happen—not because of him.

Not after everything Sakusa's done for him. The job, the trust, the home.

Maybe he can fix this. Maybe—

He slows down when he hears voices.

Sakusa and Renji are facing off in the living room, posture taut, the air between them electric.

"You're embarrassing yourself," Renji spits. "And more importantly, me."

Sakusa's voice cuts back, cold as a scalpel. "I don't recall giving you permission to speak to my staff that way."

"Oh?" Renji laughs, humourless. "You get yourself a shiny boy toy and suddenly you care about your staff's feelings?"

The AC's low whirl fills his ears, a sharp contrast to the rush of hot blood beneath his skin.

Atsumu's mouth moves before he can think better of it. "Sakusa-san has never been anything less than courteous and compassionate with us."

Sakusa's gaze jerks toward him, startled. "Miya?"

"Sorry, Sakusa-san," Atsumu says quickly, though he only half-means it. "I didn't mean to eavesdrop."

"Pretty boy Miya-san to the rescue," Renji sneers. He turns, gaze sliding over Atsumu like a grease stain. "What benefits is he giving you, hm?"

He steps forward. Atsumu doesn't move—planting himself firmly at the base of the stairs.

"How fat is that check, really?"

"You mistake human decency for financial gain," Atsumu replies, voice low, clipped. He locks eyes with Renji, anger simmering just beneath the surface.

Renji's smile grows teeth. "So loyal. Obedient little pet, aren't you?" He steps even closer. "No wonder Sakusa's so possessive."

Atsumu barely flinches when Renji lifts a hand to tilt his chin up. His breath stutters in disgust—but he holds still, spine rigid, glare molten.

'I'm not scared of you,' the look in his eyes says.

"No one likes sharing their favourite toy, after all," Renji murmurs.

Atsumu's restraint is hanging by a thread. One second more and he might snap—etiquette be damned—but before he can speak, a hand shoots out and clamps around Renji's wrist.

It pries his fingers away with brutal precision.

Stunned, Atsumu turns—and stares.

Sakusa stands like a statue chiseled from marble. His face is terrifyingly blank, but his eyes burn—deep and dark and furious, like embers stoked in a long-dormant fire.

“You speak of loyalty like it’s something you’ve ever earned,” he says, voice smooth and dangerous.

His grip tightens.

Renji flinches. Tries to take a step back.

Sakusa doesn’t let him.

“I don’t keep pets, Renji,” he says, each word slicing through the quiet like a scalpel. “I keep people worth trusting.”

A twist of the wrist—just enough to make Renji inhale sharply through his teeth.

“That’s why,” Sakusa adds, calm and absolute, “you’re no longer one of them.”

Then, to Atsumu’s wide-eyed disbelief, Sakusa reaches up and adjusts Renji’s tie. Not roughly—no. With the same strict, capable hands he uses to line his drawers and fold his sheets. He tucks the tie snugly into the hollow of Renji’s throat—just a little too tight.

“You always did think everything had a price,” Sakusa murmurs, smoothing the lapels with fastidious grace.

His touch is featherlight. There’s a stillness in his eyes, like the edge of a knife before it drops.

“Touch him again,” he says softly, “speak to him like that again—and you’ll find out exactly how quickly money stops protecting you.”

He gives Renji’s jacket one final, deliberate tug and steps back.

“Miya-san,” Sakusa says without looking away, “please fetch Renji-san’s coat.”

Renji stands frozen. Glaring. Seething.

“Are you kicking me out?” he grits.

Sakusa exhales—measured, dispassionate. “Don’t be like that, Renji-san,” he chides. “I’ve indulged your behaviour for years.”

Then, with the finality of a closing door:

“You’re taking your leave of your own accord.”

Atsumu returns with the coat a minute later, movements stiff and mechanical.

His pulse is still in his ears, his hands faintly trembling as he holds the jacket out. Renji yanks it from his grip without a word and storms out, footsteps echoing like gunfire. The door slams shut hard enough to rattle the walls.

Then—stillness.

Atsumu stares at the door, the silence pressing in like dense fog. His body's upright, but his mind is lagging somewhere behind—still stuck on the feel of Renji's fingers against his chin. The reek of his cigar clinging to his shirt. The fire in Sakusa's voice. The way he'd tucked that tie like he was sealing a casket.

What just happened?

Did Sakusa really...?

Did he just lose his biggest investor—for *him*?

"I'm so sorry," Atsumu says suddenly, voice a rasp. "You didn't have to escalate that on my behalf. He's not the first creep I've encountered."

Sakusa doesn't even flinch. "Are you okay?"

Atsumu swallows, rubbing at his jaw. "Repulsed, but fine. Are you...?"

Sakusa exhales again, a quiet sound. "Mm."

"This is going to cause you trouble, isn't it?"

"Probably," Sakusa replies, not even attempting to soften it.

Atsumu's stomach drops. "Shit. You really should've just let him have the last word and leave."

"You're under my care," Sakusa states, adjusting his cufflinks with practiced ease. "I'm not going to tolerate some old fuck propositioning you under my roof."

The word lands hard—"fuck"—sharp and furious. It makes Atsumu shiver.

"Sakusa-san..."

"Go finish your dinner, Miya," Sakusa says, turning toward the stairs. "I'll take a moment to cool down. Please keep the guests entertained."

And without waiting for a response, he walks away, back straight, steps measured. Vanishing up the stairs like nothing just happened.

Atsumu exhales a breath he hadn't realised he was holding, palm pressed flat to his fluttering stomach.

Nothing could have prepared him for tonight.

And absolutely nothing could have prepared him for *Sakusa's* reaction.

In the Quiet Hours

Chapter Summary

Atsumu hesitates, words turning over in his mouth like loose change. Then—

“Is that a thing? An unspoken rule in the business world that you should pimp out your housekeepers?”

He regrets it instantly. Winces. The words land heavier than he meant them to.

Sakusa peeks at him through a bleary, squinted eye. “I have never, and would never, solicit sexual favours from my staff, Miya,” he says with a sneer. “Do not lump me in with those pigs.”

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the longest TMLTL chapter I’ve written yet, I hope you enjoy!

Thank you to my discord peeps for being the greatest source of motivation and entertainment, you’re the reason I keep churning these out the moment I finish them ♥

Atsumu returns to the dinner table with a bone-deep stillness in his limbs. The clink of silverware feels unnaturally sharp in his ears. Renji’s absence hangs over the room like smoke—acrid, heavy, impossible to ignore.

Tanaka is the first to try and cut through it, lifting his champagne flute with exaggerated flair. “Well,” he drawls, “that escalated fabulously.”

A few people chuckle—thin, uncertain.

Kurobane raises a brow at Atsumu from across the table but says nothing. Someone reaches for the breadbasket like nothing happened.

Atsumu picks up his fork, but it lingers in the air. His stomach is still knotted. All he can think about is the way Sakusa’s hand had tightened around Renji’s wrist, the quiet threat in his voice—polished, precise, and terrifying.

He should feel rattled. And maybe he is. But beneath it all, something else has taken root—steadier, warmer. Something like vindication. Something like... safety.

The guests begin to leave in polite intervals, murmuring goodbyes, once it becomes clear Sakusa won't be returning.

Guilt gnaws at Atsumu's stomach like a pack of wolves, even as his heart thuds hard at the memory of being defended so fiercely. It leaves him foggy. Distracted.

Komori returns—apparently from the bathroom—and quickly gets the gist of what happened via Tendou. He glances Atsumu's way twice. Atsumu briefly considers crawling under the table.

But later, when Komori finds him loitering by the dining room archway, he offers a quiet reassurance. "Breathe. This isn't your fault. Kiyoomi knows what he's doing. I'll see the staff out. You go take a minute."

Atsumu's shoulders sag. "Where is Sakusa-san? I'd like to check on him."

"In his study," Komori says, already halfway out the room. "I'm going to drive Bennie and Thomas home."

"What about Tendou-san?"

"Oh, he's got a ride," Komori replies, with a small, mischievous smile that leaves Atsumu blinking.

As it turns out, Tendou *does* have a ride.

The doorbell rings once—polite, almost dainty. Atsumu, puzzled about who would show up at this hour, opens it to reveal an unnecessarily well-built man with olive-toned skin, piercing eyes, and the kind of bone structure usually reserved for cologne ads. He's dressed like he'd just walked off a runway.

"Um. Hello?" Atsumu flounders, trying not to gawk. "Can I help you?"

"Yes," the man replies, offering a courteous nod. "I'm here to pick up my husband. Is he ready to go?"

Atsumu stares. His brain hits a wall and bounces off, stupid. "Your... your *husband*?"

"Ah! Waka-chan, you're early," comes Tendou's unmistakable voice from behind.

Atsumu whirls around, stunned and offended. "*Tendou-san!? You're married?*"

Tendou cackles with undisguised glee as he approaches, holding up his hand with theatrical flourish to display a gold ring. "I'm *literally* wearing a ring, mon chéri. It's not a secret."

He sidles up to the man's side and tilts his head expectantly. The man leans down to press a gentle kiss to his lips. "Hello," he murmurs. "Ready to go home?"

"In a moment. Let me introduce you first," Tendou says, turning with a wicked little smile. "Atsumu-san, this is my husband, Ushijima Wakatoshi. Waka-chan, this is Miya Atsumu—"

Sakusa-san's aide."

Ushijima gives a deep nod. "Nice to meet you, Miya-san. Is Kiyoomi-kun around? I'd like to say hi."

Kiyoomi-*kun*? "Unfortunately, Sakusa-san has already turned in for the night," Atsumu replies, truthfully. "But I'll pass along your greetings."

"Very well. Good night, Miya-san."

"Good night," Atsumu echoes, trying very hard not to stare as their fingers lace together and they head for the elevator.

The hopeless romantic in him lets out a wistful sigh when Ushijima smoothly takes Tendou's bag from his hand and slings it over his own shoulder. Chivalry, apparently, is alive and well—and *hot*.

Atsumu lingers in the foyer after the elevator doors close, the echo of Tendou's laughter still fading from the hall. The apartment feels quieter now—oppressively so. Not dead, exactly, but... watchful.

He wanders into the upstairs living room to stand in front of the window, watching the city blink and breathe in the distance. His reflection stares faintly back at him in the glass, eyes hollowed from the evening's emotional whiplash.

Atsumu wraps his arms around himself, absently rubbing the chill from his skin, even though the temperature is perfectly controlled.

Part of him wants to retreat—to take a shower, crawl into bed, and forget this entire night ever happened. But another part won't let him move until he knows *Sakusa's* okay.

He glances down the hallway. The door to the study is half-ajar, light spilling from the crack to cast a thin ribbon of gold across the polished floor.

Atsumu slips in, half-expecting to find it empty—but there he is: Sakusa Kiyoomi, sprawled on the banana couch like a collapsed monument. His shirt collar is open, sleeves rolled back. A glass of water sits forgotten on the coffee table beside a bottle of headache meds.

For a moment, Atsumu just watches him—bathed in the soft amber light of the desk lamp, hair mussed, brows drawn tight even in rest. He looks... human.

Sakusa exhales, eyes flicking open.

"You're still awake," he says hoarsely.

Atsumu steps inside, gently nudging the door shut behind him. "So are you."

"I think my hangover kicked in too early," Sakusa murmurs, shutting his eyes again.

Atsumu hovers for a moment, uncertain if he's intruding. But then he moves—carefully—to the end of the sofa, sitting with deliberate space between them, still not sure how close is too close.

"I'm sorry," he says quietly.

"You have nothing to apologise for," Sakusa mutters, massaging the bridge of his nose. "It was a long time coming."

Atsumu hesitates, words turning over in his mouth like loose change. Then—

"Is that a thing? An unspoken rule in the business world that you should pimp out your housekeepers?"

He regrets it instantly. Winces. The words land heavier than he meant them to.

Sakusa peeks at him through a bleary, squinted eye. "I have never, and would never, solicit sexual favours from my staff, Miya," he says with a sneer. "Do not lump me in with those pigs."

Alarmed, Atsumu waves his hands in protest. "No, no—Jesus Christ, I didn't mean *you*."

He sinks his fingers into the fabric of his slacks. It's too warm in the room, or maybe it's just shame prickling up the back of his neck.

"Sorry... I didn't mean it that way. It's just... no one's ever been that *shameless* outside of my bedroom. It's off-putting. And very disgusting coming from a man twice my age."

Sakusa grunts, a soft sound of agreement.

"But I don't mean to group you in with people like that," Atsumu adds, more earnestly now. His voice steadies. "I know I haven't been here long, but I can tell—you're the kind of man who takes everything seriously. Especially boundaries. I never feel unsafe around you."

He glances over, cautious but sincere. "I know I've got nothing to worry about."

Sakusa's frown softens, though the grimace of pain still clings to his features.

"I appreciate hearing that, Miya," he says, quiet. "I really do take boundaries seriously. If I ever make you uncomfortable, I need you to tell me. Immediately. Don't be shy. Don't worry about upsetting me, or about... repercussions. Call me out in plain terms."

Atsumu nods. His voice, when it comes, is barely above a whisper. "I mean it. I feel lucky to be here."

He doesn't add the rest—that no one's ever said something like that to him. Not like this. Not with care, not with clarity.

They sit in silence.

Sakusa's eyes flutter shut again, the lines of exhaustion pulling deeper across his face.

Atsumu leans back slowly, tipping his head against the couch cushion. The silence stretches—not awkward, not heavy. Just tired.

He shuts his eyes too, worn out from stepping around minefields and batting away unwelcome advances.

But here, in this room, in this moment, he finally lets himself breathe.

He doesn't remember falling asleep, but when he comes to, there's a blanket draped over him like a quiet embrace—and Sakusa is nowhere to be seen.

Atsumu blinks groggily, pawing at his pockets for his phone. *3:04 AM*.

Fuck. He's been out for nearly four hours.

He pushes himself upright, shrugging off his jacket as he stumbles from the study. The hallway is dim, the silence like a thick blanket. He unbuttons the collar of his shirt and draws in a breath, as though the air itself might rinse the residue of the night from his lungs. His mouth is dry enough to sand wood.

In the darkened kitchen, he feels along the counter for a mug, another button slipping open as he moves. Something shifts at his chest, the ring falling free from his shirt to catch the faint light as it comes to rest against silk. He absently grazes it with his knuckles, a reminder to call Granny soon. And Ma. Even if her ER shifts meant she might not answer.

The kettle begins to whistle, breaking him out of his musings.

Atsumu pours the water with tired precision, his free hand fumbling for his belt. It loosens, and he exhales like a man finally coming up for air.

Leaning back against the kitchen island, he sips his tea in silence, the warmth seeping into him slowly. The house is dark, but not unfriendly. The hush feels... familiar now. Less like a stranger's home and more like a space that might learn to make room for him.

Still, he can't shake the feeling that something's tainted it—that someone brought a kind of grime with them, a film over clean surfaces, a stench of entitlement lingering on the air.

Sakusa's habits must be rubbing off on him.

Fuck the cleaning crew. He's going to disinfect everything himself in the morning.

"Miya?"

Atsumu nearly drops his mug.

He spins around to find Sakusa standing at the edge of the room, dressed in soft, slate-grey pyjamas. His hair is still damp, curling faintly at the edges, and he looks freshly showered—clean in the truest sense of the word.

“Sakusa-san,” Atsumu exhales, heart hammering. “You scared me.”

Sakusa steps in slowly, each movement deliberate, like he’s trying not to startle him again. He moves past Atsumu with quiet grace, heading for the kettle.

“I’m sorry,” he says, reaching into the cabinet. “I’m not keeping a great track record today.”

Atsumu frowns. “What do you mean?”

“You looked shaken. After I kicked Renji out.” Sakusa’s voice is low, almost hesitant. He pours the water into his cup with the same care he gives to everything—precise, fluid, unhurried. Atsumu watches his hands, pale fingers curling reverently around the mug like it’s something sacred. “Did I scare you?”

“Oh.” Atsumu swallows, throat suddenly dry again. “Um. Not exactly. I wouldn’t say it was fear I was feeling.”

Sakusa glances at him—eyes sharp even in the dark. Then, almost imperceptibly, they flick down to the undone buttons of Atsumu’s shirt.

Atsumu freezes.

Right. He’s half undressed.

Too late to do anything about it now. Doing so would just draw attention to it.

He clears his throat, half-hiding behind his mug. “I guess... I guess I was flattered. Anxious. Taken aback. Feeling a whole lot of admiration, honestly.”

“Oh.”

“It was kinda really badass,” Atsumu admits, cheeks hot. “You reminded me of a K-drama protagonist.”

“You flatter me,” Sakusa says, gaze sliding away as he takes a sip of tea. But something in his expression falters—just for a moment. As if he wasn’t prepared for that.

Atsumu feels drawn to that moment of disruption, to the cracks in Sakusa’s otherwise polished restraint.

“What were you and Renji discussing at the bar?” Sakusa asks after a pause. “It seemed... pointed.”

“Ah,” Atsumu hums, thinking back to Renji’s smug little grin. “He mentioned how you can tell a lot about someone by their drink of choice.”

Sakusa raises an eyebrow. “And?”

“He said a wine guy hides behind the familiar. That it’s all old money and an inherited crown you pretend to have forged yourself.”

Sakusa huffs softly. “Charming.”

“Don’t worry,” Atsumu says, a small smirk tugging at his lips. “I set him straight.”

Sakusa looks heavenward with something between exasperation and fatigue. “He’s the most insufferable man I’ve had the misfortune of knowing.”

Atsumu lets out a soft chuckle. “He definitely broke the Scale of Insufferability. You should send him a plaque or something. Like—‘You are enough. The world does not require more of you.’”

Sakusa snorts. “He’d probably take it as a compliment.”

“Oh, absolutely. Ego the size of Jupiter,” Atsumu mutters.

They both fall quiet for a beat. The kettle clicks softly as it cools.

“All jokes aside,” Atsumu adds, quieter now, “I’m really glad you stepped in. I was about an inch away from introducing him to my left hook.”

Sakusa hums in amusement. “Maybe avoid violence. Lawsuits are tedious.”

His gaze flicks to Atsumu again—subtle, but not lost on him.

“Are you going to sleep soon?”

Atsumu hesitates. He sips his tea before answering. “Honestly? I feel pretty awake. I’m half tempted to start cleaning.”

That earns him another raised eyebrow.

“I just...” Atsumu gestures vaguely to the space around them. “It feels like they left something behind. Like they marked this place, and not in a good way. I don’t know—it almost feels like they defiled a sacred temple.”

That catches Sakusa off guard. His brows rise higher, almost amused, but he doesn’t laugh.

“You want to cleanse the apartment. At three in the morning.”

“I want to purge Renji and Kurobane from every inch of it,” Atsumu clarifies with thinly veiled loathing. “The things they said to me—like I was some kind of pet. ‘Pretty boy Miya,’ as if that’s the full extent of my worth. And those disgusting innuendos...”

He trails off with a shiver. Then adds, under his breath, “Honestly, I should’ve taken him up on that ‘lucrative offer’ just to bite his dick off.”

Sakusa chokes on his tea.

Atsumu startles, instantly at his side, patting his back. “Shit, sorry. That was—yeah, okay, maybe not the most appropriate thing to say.”

Sakusa waves him off with a slightly trembling breath, coughing through the remnants of laughter. “No, it’s fine. I think you’ve earned a little vulgarity after everything. I’m really sorry I put you in that situation.”

That stops Atsumu.

“You didn’t put me in anything,” he says, frowning. “It’s my job.”

“I dressed you up,” Sakusa says after a beat, the words reluctant, almost grudging. “I didn’t intend to turn you into a target for lecherous attention.”

Atsumu flushes, caught off guard. He remembers Tendou’s teasing. Bennie’s commentary.

“You make it sound like I’m some kind of siren,” he mutters.

A pause. Charged silence stretches between them.

Then Sakusa laughs—low and disbelieving. “Miya... don’t play coy.”

Atsumu blinks. “What do you mean?”

“Even without a designer suit,” Sakusa says, swirling the last of his tea, “they would’ve looked.”

Atsumu’s pulse stutters. There’s a peculiar tension curling in his chest, one he doesn’t quite know what to do with.

“I mean, I’m not saying I’m hideous or anything,” he says, attempting levity. “I just got a makeover, I know I clean up nice—but why’s everyone acting like I walked off a runway?”

Sakusa considers him carefully. “I think you’re being too humble.”

“Am I?”

“Yes.”

Atsumu falters, caught somewhere between amusement and uncertainty. “Uh. Thanks, I guess. It’s... kind of surreal, being complimented by you. Not so great when it’s from your charming corporate cronies.”

That gets a smirk out of Sakusa. He polishes off the rest of his drink and sets the cup down with quiet finality.

“Go to sleep, Miya,” he says. “The cleaning crew will handle everything tomorrow.”

He turns to leave, but pauses in the hallway to glance over his shoulder.

“Oh—and maybe get your eyesight checked soon.”

Atsumu sputters. “Hey!”

There are fifty-plus notifications on Atsumu’s lockscreen when he groggily surfaces around nine in the morning. Outside his door, faint shuffling can be heard—the unmistakable sound of the cleaning crew doing battle with evil spirits, cigar stench, and whatever cursed cologne Kurobane bathed in.

He unlocks his phone and finds himself unceremoniously added to a group chat with his old high school classmates. A quick scroll reveals Suna was the culprit.

They’re planning something for next Friday. Aran suggested karaoke. Kita offered a movie night. Suna proposed a pub he “frequents for the ambiance,” which is all well and good—except Atsumu only drinks in the dark like a Victorian widow.

With a sigh of surrender to the forces of nostalgia, Atsumu braces for a social weekend and heads out to meet Kuroo at the library.

Here’s to hoping he doesn’t die.

He nearly does. From cardiac arrest. Because Kuroo decides to announce his arrival by looming silently over Atsumu’s shoulder like a tax audit.

“Jesus Christ,” Atsumu yelps, nearly hurling a textbook. “Will you *stop* doing that? I featured in a horror movie last night—I’ve had my quota of trauma for the week.”

Kuroo, smug and shadowy, slides into the seat beside him. “Oh? Trouble in penthouse paradise?”

Atsumu groans and starts unpacking his reference books with the force of a man declaring war. “Sakusa-san threw a business dinner party and somehow summoned the creepiest men in Tokyo under one roof. I’m still trying to bleach their stares out of my brain.”

“Ah,” Kuroo murmurs, thoughtful. “Should I kill someone for you?”

“Are you taking contracts? Because I’ve got a list.” Atsumu pulls up Fukuda-sensei’s slides with a wince. “Let’s just get this over with. I need to cram these exam questions into my skull and hope my GPA doesn’t leave a suicide note.”

Kuroo smirks, uncapping his pen with all the menace of a seasoned academic sadist. “That’s what I’m here for. Buckle up—I’m about to drill this into your brain.”

“...Please be gentle,” Atsumu mutters, visibly bracing.

Kuroo doesn’t miss a beat. “Do you *know* me?”

Monday's exam narrowly misses kicking his ass. Not that Atsumu escapes unscathed—Tuesday's lab tries to kill him via hydrochloric acid and the vengeful spirits of chemists past. Wednesday is a lesson in restraint, as he's forced to endure fifteen agonising minutes of Q&A after his presentation, during which his classmates unleash a barrage of questions with the intellectual depth of a kiddie pool.

Haito Kagehira, lounging like an evil cat in the back row, snickers every time someone opens their mouth and tempts Atsumu to commit a felony.

By the time Saito-sensei dismisses them—officially marking the end of Atsumu's summer semester—he collapses into his seat and stares at the ceiling like it might offer salvation. For fifteen full minutes, he just sits there, blinking at the lights.

He... did it?

He survived the term. No academic disasters. No surprise bankruptcy. Trench Coat Guy didn't murder him in a parking lot. Kuroo Tetsuro performed CPR on his GPA. Sakusa Kiyoomi turned his life from a cautionary tale into a borderline K-drama.

Atsumu's eyes sting. *Holy shit.*

He fishes out his phone and types:

Guess who survived the semester.

“You?”

Atsumu jumps and spins around to find his twin standing there with an iced coffee and a tired smirk.

“Samu?” he blurts. “You scared the crap outta me.”

“Heya, scrub,” Osamu says with a lazy wave. “Figured I’d catch your ugly mug on my way out.”

Atsumu immediately hauls him into a rough hug. “Idiot, we have the same face. Are you heading home?”

“Can’t,” Osamu groans. “I looked in my closet this morning and surprise surprise—I own exactly zero shirts that *don’t* scream ‘homeless student with a grudge against fabric softener.’ Gotta hit the mall.”

Atsumu straightens, face falling. “Shit. I forgot I have nothing to wear either. I haven’t shopped since pre-pandemic. I think my last nice shirt dissolved in the wash.”

Osamu snorts and hooks their elbows together. “Well then, yer coming with me. Can’t have you showin’ up in that tragic hoodie again.”

“Shut up. You look like you’ve aged twenty years,” Atsumu says, eyeing his twin’s dark circles. “You sure you wanna go shopping now?”

“I got a new job at an izakaya,” Osamu says, lifting his coffee like it’s holy water. “The hours are murder, but this baby’s got my back.”

“If ya say so,” Atsumu mutters, letting himself be dragged out of the room.

They take the train to Shibuya, sharing earbuds while Osamu blasts the discography of some obscure rapper he’s recently gotten obsessed with. Atsumu isn’t sure if the guy’s a genius or just aggressively rhyming over construction noise, but he bobs his head along anyway.

Once they disembark, the city swallows them whole. Neon signs flicker to life against the twilight sky, and a wave of people floods past them like Tokyo collectively decided to cosplay as a stampede.

“Man,” Atsumu says, adjusting his hoodie, “when was the last time we went out just for fun?”

“Not in modern history, that’s for sure,” Osamu replies, steering them down the sidewalk with their elbows still linked. He’s leaning against Atsumu now, like a sleepy cat with questionable fashion sense.

“Yer sure you’re okay?” Atsumu asks again, peering sideways. “You wanna stop at a café or something?”

“Let’s find something to wear first,” Osamu says, bulldozing through a pack of salarymen like a man on a mission. “Then dinner.”

“Where are we even going?” Atsumu half-jogs to keep up.

“Shibuya PARCO,” Osamu tosses over his shoulder, dragging him toward the multi-story fashion fortress that looks like it was designed by an architect on espresso and vengeance. It’s basically Tokyo’s cooler, more intimidating cousin to the western mall—a place where style goes to flex.

Their first target: the lower floors. STUDIOUS is up first—polished, minimal, a little too clean-cut for Atsumu’s chaos gremlin energy, but full of sleek, dangerous-looking clothes that might impress a former classmate with perfect cheekbones and zero shame.

“Wow,” Atsumu mutters, skimming a suspiciously soft orange vest. “You really care about this hangout, huh? Wait—hold up. Is this about Suna? I remember you had a tiny high school crush.”

Osamu valiantly avoids eye contact, but the telltale pink at the tips of his ears betrays him. “We’ve been talking.”

“Talking,” Atsumu echoes, making dramatic air quotes. “*Talking* talking, or, y’know... catching up with strategic thirst traps and suggestive emojis?”

“*Talking* talking,” Osamu grumbles, snatching a black sweater off the rack with the intensity of someone trying to hide behind knitwear.

“Ohooo,” Atsumu crows, immediately throwing an arm around his neck to drag him into a brotherly noogie. “Atta boy! Of course he won ya over with free donuts. This is so funny.”

“Oi—quit it!” Osamu struggles to escape, flailing like a disgruntled goose. “You’ll get us kicked out!”

Atsumu cackles. “Okay, so we’re dressing to impress. Gotcha. Leave that rack alone, fashion disaster, *I’m* building your outfit.”

Osamu eyes him warily. “...I don’t know whether to be grateful or alarmed.”

“A healthy mix of both builds character,” Atsumu says cheerfully, already prowling through hangers like a man assembling a heist crew.

He makes Osamu try on roughly fifteen shirts, ten pairs of pants, eight sweaters, and four different shoes across three department stores.

“*Tsumu*, yer taking this way too seriously,” Osamu complains, arms full of rejected outfits and with the emotional fatigue of someone being personally styled by a golden retriever with fashion opinions.

“Shut up. Do you wanna get laid or not?”

“God, you’re so *crass*,” Osamu says, making a face like he just bit into a lemon made of disappointment. “I’m not trying to get laid.”

“Sure, sure,” Atsumu snorts, already elbow-deep in a rack of aggressively patterned shirts. “How about this one?”

“That’s *your* style,” Osamu says, grabbing the shirt to hold it up to Atsumu’s face. “You should try it.”

“Huh,” Atsumu pauses to inspect it, then drops it into his basket with a nod. “Can’t go wrong with a red top. It screams *confidence* and *maybe I know what I’m doing*.”

As they walk past a rotating stand of sunglasses shaped like various insects, Atsumu doubles back with a gleam in his eye. Osamu is mid-eye-roll when Atsumu shoves a pair of bee-themed shades onto his face, nearly gouging his eye out in the process.

“*Atsumu!*” Osamu yelps, swatting at his brother’s hands. “What the hell?”

Atsumu is already holding his phone like it’s a weapon. “Smile!”

Osamu does not smile. Osamu raises his middle finger with the solemnity of a war general. Atsumu snaps the photo anyway, cackling as he uploads it to his Instagram story with the

caption:

~ My twin is *buzzing* with style ~ 🐝 ✨

“Are you allergic to fun, Samu?” Atsumu teases, flipping the camera to selfie mode as he dons a pair of ladybug-themed sunglasses with absolutely no shame. “A selfie won’t kill ya.”

Osamu sighs and joins the frame, leaning in with the enthusiasm of a hostage. “We look like a failed circus act.”

“Now, now,” Atsumu chides solemnly. “Never underestimate your clownery.”

When Osamu makes to smack him, Atsumu ducks with a snort. “Oi! Who’s getting us kicked out *now*, huh?”

“Let’s just try these on and get outta here,” Osamu grumbles. “It’s getting late and I don’t want your boss to have an aneurysm.”

Atsumu flushes instantly. “That was *one* time.”

Atsumu returns to the residence around ten, arms full of shopping bags and yawning wide enough to catch flies. He shuffles inside, stashes the bags in a cupboard to deal with tomorrow, and melts into a hot shower that fills the bathroom with steam, curling like smoke around his thoughts.

A hot drink sounds like the perfect reward, he thinks as he leaves the bathroom. Something warm, sweet, deserved. He stirs a cup of cocoa with a small, tired smile.

He missed Osamu—not that he’d say it out loud. But it was good to see him. Even if the sight of that gaunt frame sets alarm bells ringing. He wishes he could swap places with him, just for a day. Just to give him a break.

Atsumu carries his drink to the balcony, flinching slightly as the cool night air bites at his damp hair. Still, he curls up on the outdoor couch, cocoa in hand, and dials Ma on speaker.

She picks up on the fourth ring, slightly breathless. “*Tsumu!* I almost didn’t hear the phone—hey, darlin’, I miss you.”

Atsumu’s chest softens. “Hey Ma,” he murmurs. “I missed ya too. I’ve been meanin’ to call, things just got real busy here.”

“Samu told me you got a new job,” she says, the warmth in her voice like sunlight through a kitchen window. “Yer boss nice, or is he workin’ ya to the bone?”

“He’s nice, I swear,” Atsumu chuckles. “Kinda funny too. In a weird, uptight way.”

“Glad to hear it. When are you and Samu visitin’? Granny misses ya—even when she’s not lucid.”

His heart pinches. It always does, when he thinks of Granny.

“I miss her too. All the time. Is she there? Can I talk to her?”

There’s a pause.

“She’s a little out of it today... but if you’re sure—”

“I’m sure.”

There’s the sound of shuffling, a door creaking open and closing again, and then—

“Here, Kaa-san, Tsumu wants to talk to ya.”

“Tsumu?” Granny’s voice comes, frail but unmistakably hers. Then, a beat later and clearer:

“Tsumu, is that really you?”

Atsumu smiles, heart clenching as it climbs into his throat. “Heyyy Grans, yeah, it’s me—yer favourite grandchild. How’s my favourite girl?”

“Don’t let yer Ma hear ya say that!” she chides, then—after a beat, gently bewildered—“Aren’t ya late for bed, baby? High schoolers need their eight hours!”

The blow lands low, right under his ribs. His fingers curl around the ring at his neck—hers—as he swallows around the ache. “I graduated, Grans. Years ago.” His voice drops. “I’m gonna be a doc. I’m gonna take care of ya.”

Another pause. A light, papery laugh. “Oh, you’ve always been such a smart boy. I’m sure you’ll make a fine doctor.”

He shuts his eyes. For just a moment, he lets himself drift into the illusion—that she’s okay, that they’re just chatting on a cool summer night, nothing more. “Ya really think so?”

“Of course!” Her voice beams. He can picture the glint in her warm brown eyes, the way her face folds when she grins. “My sunshine boy’s gonna kick everyone’s ass! Don’t you ever doubt yerself, baby.”

He hasn’t heard her call him that in years. It cracks something open. He wants to laugh and cry all at once.

“They kinda frown on ass-kickin’ in education,” he says, voice wet with laughter. “But I’ll try my best.”

“I know ya will. Now don’t you worry about me, alright? Just take care of yerself.”

“I’m gonna see ya soon,” he promises. “Just hang in there until then, okay darlin’?”

“You’ve always been such a worrywart,” she scolds. “Let *me* do the worryin’. You’re just a fifteen-year-old kid—you should be out playin’ with your friends, not frettin’ over some old lady like me.”

He lets out a shaky chuckle. "I guess you're right, Grans."

"Always am!" she says brightly. "Now get yer cute ass to bed and sleep."

"Yes ma'am," Atsumu whispers. "You get some rest too."

"Nighty night, my sunshine boy," she says, and then Ma's voice is back on the line.

"I told you she's a lil out of it," Ma says softly. "But I'm glad you talked to her. She looks real happy now."

Atsumu presses a palm to his chest, trying to contain the ache. "Yeah? Then I'm glad. You take care too, 'kay Ma? I'll try to visit soon, just gotta see what days off I can manage."

"Alright, hun. Let me know when you know." She sighs, already fading into exhaustion. "I've got an early shift tomorrow, better head to bed."

"Get some rest, Ma," Atsumu says gently.

"You too, darlin'."

The line clicks off.

Atsumu stays curled on the couch, staring out into the dark, the city glittering below like someone spilled stardust over concrete.

At least she knows who I am, he consoles himself. *I'm still her sunshine boy.*

He wipes at his eyes and pulls his knees up to his chest, chin resting against them, cocoa waiting faithfully beside him. Up here, the world feels distant. Quiet. Untouched by time.

But the ache is still there.

And it always will be.

When Sakusa steps out a moment later, the look on his face says it all.

"You heard all that, didn't ya?" Atsumu asks, not angry—just tired. Resigned because he already knows the answer.

"I'm sorry," Sakusa replies, voice low and earnest enough that Atsumu believes him. "I didn't mean to. But... then I did. And I felt I should say something."

He settles at the far end of the couch, mug in hand, gaze angled somewhere just shy of Atsumu's face.

"Alzheimer's?" he asks carefully, like the word itself might bruise.

“Typical late-onset,” Atsumu confirms, eyes fixed on the skyline like it holds the answers. “I can almost forget when we talk on the phone. But when I see her...”

“She doesn’t recognize you?”

“No, she does. Most times,” Atsumu says, with a hollow laugh. “But the last ten years? Hazy at best. Gone at worst. Sometimes she forgets I’m blonde. Other days, when it’s bad, she thinks I’m my dad. Starts yelling about how I left Ma to raise us alone.” He swallows. “Then Ma has to ask me to leave.”

Sakusa is quiet. The silence stretches—not awkward, not cold, just full. Full of the things he doesn’t know how to say.

“I...” Sakusa starts, falters, then finds the words. “I can’t imagine what that’s like. I’m sorry, Miya.”

Atsumu doesn’t answer. Just nods.

“Take a couple of weeks off,” Sakusa adds gently. “Go home. See your mother. Spend time with your grandma.”

Atsumu blinks, startled. “A couple of weeks?”

He turns to look at Sakusa fully now, incredulous. “I was gonna beg for three days and you’re giving me *two weeks*?”

Sakusa’s mouth twists in a sad, uncertain smile. “Our grandparents... they’re not here for long. And sometimes we forget they lived whole lives before we even existed. All we get is this sliver at the end. So—yes. Take the time. Go.”

There’s a lump forming in Atsumu’s throat, hot and stubborn.

“Sakusa-san, I... I don’t even know what to say. Thank you. Truly. I’ll scrub extra hard when I’m back. I’ll—I’ll make you fancy coffee with foam hearts, and clean the grout with a toothbrush, and—”

Sakusa’s startled laugh cuts him off. It’s quick, surprised—and genuine.

“Miya, *breathe*. You don’t have to do half of that,” he says, amusement softening his tone. “Technically, employees do get annual leave. Usually after a year, but... nothing about this job is standard, is it? Consider this your holiday. Just let me know when you’ll be away, so I can make arrangements.”

Atsumu smiles, the kind that doesn’t quite reach his eyes but tries to. “I gotta check with Samu first. He just started a new job and his hours are... crappy, to be very polite about it. I’m seeing him Friday for a class reunion. I’ll ask him then.”

Sakusa relaxes into the sofa, one leg curled beneath him, drink cradled securely in hand. He looks like a painting—still and deliberate—hung in a museum that only opens after dark.

“I never asked,” he says after a moment, voice soft. “What does your brother do?”

Atsumu sips his cocoa, still warm between his fingers. “He’s majoring in health science. Got a thing for nutrition. Says he wants to open his own restaurant someday.” He huffs a laugh. “Kinda funny, considering the guy survives on cup ramen and coffee. But...” He trails off for a beat. “I’ll make sure he gets there. Might take us two decades, but hey—never say never.”

Sakusa turns to him then, gaze quiet, unreadable. And yet—there’s something soft in it.

“I believe it,” he says.

Something tugs in Atsumu’s chest, like a frayed thread between tentative fingers. “And I’m gonna be a kickass neurologist.”

Sakusa arches a brow, one corner of his mouth twitching. “Big dreams.”

“They gotta be,” Atsumu murmurs, more to himself than anyone else. Then, lighter, “Thanks. I’ll give you a shoutout in my thesis. Something sappy. ‘To my brooding boss with a surprising sense of humour.’”

Sakusa snorts into his cup. “If I end up in your thesis, I hope it’s because you cited one of my papers. Not because I gave you a job.”

Atsumu grins. “Wait. You’ve published stuff?”

“Quite a bit,” Sakusa says, shrugging like it’s no big deal. “I lost count. There’s a folder in the library with all of it, if you’re interested.”

“Heck yeah, I’m interested,” Atsumu replies, eyes wide. “But after summer break. My brain’s still doing CPR on itself.”

“No rush,” Sakusa reassures, sipping. “Enjoy your break.”

There’s a pause, quiet and companionable. Sakusa adds, “You said you’ve got a reunion on Friday?”

“Yeah,” Atsumu confirms, lips twitching. “My brother’s being courted via pastry and decided it’s the perfect excuse to throw a class reunion. Apparently his high school crush is now Donut Man.”

“Ah.” Sakusa tilts his head. “Puppy love.”

Atsumu chuckles. “More like boomerang love. Suna moved away when they were thirteen. Now he’s back, hot, and making designer donuts.”

Sakusa smiles faintly, wistfully. “That’s... romantic. People don’t usually come back once they leave. But they found each other again. And now they’re trying to reconnect everyone else, too.” He pauses. “I hope you have fun.”

Atsumu's fingers tighten slightly around his mug. For a moment, he's back in high school. A sad piano song on loop. A hoodie that didn't belong to him caught in his peripheral. A door that never reopened.

"I..." He exhales. "Yeah. I guess you're right."

The silence that follows stretches a little too long. Atsumu shifts, fidgets, and—because he doesn't know when to stop—opens his mouth again.

"Hey. Um. I know it's not really my place but..." He swallows. "Maybe you should reach out to Iizuna. Even just to say hi. Could give you some kind of closure. Maybe there's a good reason he never came back. You never know..."

He trails off when Sakusa turns to look at him, gaze shuttered. Atsumu freezes. "Oh my god, I'm absolutely overstepping. That was so out of line. Please ignore me and pretend I never said anything—"

Sakusa's lips twitch. The expression he wears isn't quite a smile—but it's not not a smile either. "I'll think about it," he promises, far nicer than Atsumu probably deserves.

Atsumu exhales, shoulders sagging. "I swear I'm gonna learn to shut up one day."

Sakusa raises his cup again, voice dry. "Hold your breath for that one."

"Hey!" Atsumu cries, laughter bubbling up. "That was uncalled for!"

"Eh. I'm rooting for you, though," Sakusa says, the faintest chuckle slipping through. "You silly goose."

Atsumu stares at him. "Did... did you just call me a silly goose?"

Even Sakusa looks mildly surprised at himself.

For one suspended second, they stare at each other.

And then—simultaneously—they dissolve into incredulous laughter. The sound rings out, clear and unguarded, echoing gently off the quiet walls. Sakusa's head tips back. Atsumu wipes at his eyes, grinning so wide it almost hurts.

He watches Sakusa, watches him laugh—not just smile, not just smirk, but laugh—and something twists sweetly inside his chest.

He may have been called a silly goose. But he'll take it.

Because that still painting just came to life.

The Shape of Your Name

Chapter Summary

Atsumu stands dumbly on the sidewalk, mouth half-open while passersby throw curious glances his way.

“Get in. I’ll drive you,” Sakusa says, like this isn’t the plot twist that kills Atsumu three seasons too early.

“W-what?” Atsumu splutters. He looks at Osamu, who seems equally stunned, and then back at Sakusa. “Now?”

“Yes,” Sakusa says, leaning over to pop the passenger-side door open. “Come on, I’m holding up traffic.”

Chapter Notes

Hello and welcome to Chapter 19 of TMLTL.

First, thank you—truly—for 1k+ kudos. I’m humbled and deeply grateful for the love this story has received. A lot of research and editing goes into this fic, and it takes hours to format and post each chapter—but every comment, review, and kudo makes it all worth it. Your support means the world to me.

Now for something much heavier. For those not following me on Twitter: my home region, Sweida, is facing severe violence as part of a state-backed ethnic cleansing campaign against my people, the Druze. There’s a media blackout, widespread propaganda, and in the midst of it all, my family is scattered across the region, struggling to find safety under constant shelling, gunfire, and the indiscriminate killing of civilians.

The fear, anxiety, and helplessness of the past few days have drained me of sleep, focus, and joy. I’m doing my best to write when I can, but right now, my priority is staying informed and supporting my family. Thank you for your understanding and patience during this time.

Please enjoy this chapter—I poured every bit of energy I could spare into finishing it.

Special thank-you to uddie, lora, lee, kiwi, barbie, ale, and els for keeping me sane these past few days—for being there, cheering me up, distracting me when needed, and filling my messages with so much love and support. This chapter wouldn’t be here today without you.

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[Atsumu and Osamu's outfits](#)

Hey, how far away are you? Atsumu types, firing off a quick text to Osamu.

The response comes instantly. *5 mins away. Come down.*

He shoves his phone into the pocket of his oversized bomber jacket and takes one last look in the mirror. He's gone for some layered streetwear: red tee under a grey zip-up hoodie, black jogger-style cargos, and chunky sneakers. Bold, sure—but the final effect is effortless. Cool without trying too hard.

Okay. Maybe the gelled hair and recent makeover tip him from *cool* to *hot*, but... well. He's not admitting it out loud, but he hopes Kita-san notices.

It's been years since he last saw him—years that didn't erase the fact Kita had starred, frequently and quite graphically, in some of Atsumu's most X-rated dreams.

And now, here he is, riding the elevator down with bated breath, aiming for casualness like his nerves aren't currently doing the Tokyo Marathon.

A drink or two will sort that out. Probably.

He finds Osamu waiting just outside the entrance, squinting up at the skyscraper.

"This building's fuckin' massive, Tsumu," Osamu says when he spots him.

Atsumu gives his brother a once-over. Osamu's gone with an oversized burgundy sweater over a white T-shirt, relaxed black trousers, a crossbody bag, and casual Nike Dunks. It's giving laidback student. Understated. Civilian-coded.

"I thought you were tryna seduce Suna," Atsumu deadpans. "What's with the boy next door getup?"

That earns him a long-suffering sigh. "For the hundredth time, I'm *not* trying to get laid."

Atsumu's starting to believe him. "Well, if ya say so."

They amble toward the bus station, evening breeze teasing through Atsumu's hair. The stop's unusually quiet for a late Friday afternoon, but Atsumu isn't complaining.

"So..." Osamu ventures, "are we gonna talk about that dinner party?"

“Absolutely not. I’m trying to have a good time tonight.” Atsumu shuts it down immediately. “Long story short, old business creeps need to die.”

“Amen,” Osamu agrees, rubbing Atsumu’s shoulder with his knuckles. “Let me know if I need to kill anyone.”

“Kuroo already offered. I might take him up on it.”

Osamu snorts. “I fear his conman vibes might not be just for show, Tsumu. Be careful.”

“If he wanted to kill me, he would’ve already. My lab grades alone are motive enough.” He waves the thought off. “Never mind that—I called Ma the other day.”

Osamu perks up. “What’d ya say?”

“That I’m trying to get some time off ta visit. I was gonna beg Sakusa for three days, but he went ahead and offered me two weeks.” Atsumu’s still a little stunned by it. Grateful, too. “So I guess I’m going. What about you?”

Osamu stares. Then: “*Fuck off.*”

A nearby elderly woman glares at them. Osamu doesn’t notice.

“Are ya kidding me?” he continues. “Who *is* this boss of yours? A saint? I wanna meet him.”

“Uh. A saint might be pushing it,” Atsumu says, grinning helplessly. “But he’s way nicer than he lets on.” He nudges Osamu’s shoulder. “I’ll find a way to introduce ya, someday—”

“Miya?”

Atsumu jolts like someone fired a gun behind him.

A sleek black car idles at the curb, hazard lights blinking amber against the pavement. Sakusa leans across the console, window rolled down.

“S-Sakusa-san?” Atsumu stammers. “What’re ya doing here?”

Sakusa’s eyes narrow slightly. “What are *you* doing here?” he counters, gaze flicking over Atsumu’s shoulder to Osamu.

“I—uh—I told you,” Atsumu says, confused, shifting his weight like the sidewalk suddenly got too small. “I’m meeting up with old classmates—”

“I know *that*,” Sakusa cuts in. “I mean, why are you at the bus stop?”

“I… I fear I lost you,” Atsumu tries weakly, rubbing the back of his neck because honestly what’s the right answer here?

“I hired Kanako-san for a reason, Miya,” Sakusa replies, voice edged with exasperation.

Atsumu stares. “Sakusa-san,” he says slowly, hoping it’ll help him follow the logic. “I’m going out. On a *weekend*. To *see friends*. Why would I call your chauffeur?”

Sakusa pinches the bridge of his nose. How does Atsumu manage to mess things up without even trying?

“Kanao-san is there to drive you anywhere. *Anytime*. Regardless of destination or occasion.”

“Oh.”

Atsumu stands dumbly on the sidewalk, mouth half-open while passersby throw curious glances his way.

“Get in. I’ll drive you,” Sakusa says, like this isn’t the plot twist that kills Atsumu three seasons too early.

“W-what?” Atsumu splutters. He looks at Osamu, who seems equally stunned, and then back at Sakusa. “*Now?*”

“Yes,” Sakusa says, leaning over to pop the passenger-side door open. “Come on, I’m holding up traffic.”

Atsumu slides in before his survival instincts can protest.

“You too,” Sakusa says to Osamu with a polite nod. “Come on.”

Osamu, still processing the fact that *Sakusa Kiyoomi* just addressed him, moves toward the backseat like he’s being invited into the mafia. “Uh... hi, Sakusa-san. Nice to meet you. I’m Osamu.”

“Yes, I know,” Sakusa replies as he eases the car back into the road. “Nice to finally put a face to the name... even if it’s copy-pasted.”

Startled, Osamu lets out a snort and quickly covers it with a hand. “Thank you for the ride. Might be a bit out of your way, though.”

Sakusa waves a hand dismissively. “Where are you going?”

“We’re headed to The Bellwood—Tsumu, can you send him the location?”

Atsumu already has his phone out, pasting a Google Maps link into Sakusa’s iMessage thread.

“Got it,” Sakusa says, syncing it to the car’s GPS.

Twenty minutes.

Not bad, especially for their first stop of the night—with two more still to come.

A moment of heavy silence follows. Osamu likely has nothing to say, and Atsumu doesn't know *what* to say.

Sakusa's eyes flick briefly to the rearview mirror. Then:

"Miya told me you're studying health science."

Osamu startles at being addressed, his posture straightening as if Sakusa had just called on him in class. "Yessir. Fourth year, with one more to go."

Sakusa nods, brows quirking as if the answer holds some deeper meaning. "You want to open your own restaurant, right?"

Osamu's eyes widen. He throws a look—half surprised, half betrayed—at the back of Atsumu's head before answering. "That's the plan," he says, then laughs self-deprecatingly. "Provided I live to see my forties."

"Ah," Sakusa hums. "So dark humour *does* run in the family."

Osamu looks sheepish for all of two seconds before his face turns serious.

"Thank you for giving Atsumu time off to see our Ma, he was just telling me about it. I wouldn't dare ask for time off so soon after being hired. I'm just... grateful one of us gets to go home."

Atsumu whips around. "Samu? What're ya talkin' about? You didn't say anything about not goin'."

Osamu winces. "Uh... I was hoping you'd be too drunk to get mad when I told you."

"Jail," Atsumu deadpans. "You *know* I'm an emotional drunk. You'd've embarrassed me in front of everyone."

Osamu has the gall to look sheepish. "Sorry, Tsumu. I *could* maybe fake a sick day or two, but anything more's outta the question."

"Have you ever worked in a restaurant?" Sakusa asks, abruptly.

Atsumu can't quite follow where this is going, but listens as Osamu rattles off his history—working diners out of high school, selling homemade onigiri from their Ma's kitchen at a street stand, basically anything short of opening a food truck.

Sakusa hums again, noncommittal.

Osamu fidgets, then—to Atsumu's quiet amusement—tries to politely throw the question back.

"Um... What about you, Sakusa-san? What'd you do before becoming CEO?"

Sakusa flicks on his indicator and takes a right. “Like you, I went to university. Biochem undergrad. Grad school in neuroscience and psychology. Then I went to the U.S. for a degree in economics.”

“Oh wow,” Osamu says, visibly impressed. “Were you there long?”

“Not long. Two years. But I spent five years in Italy getting my PhD, then a year in Spain for a postdoc. After that, I came back to intern under my father.”

“You had to *intern* after all that?”

“Of course.” Sakusa’s smirk is subtle, almost teasing. “I didn’t become CEO overnight. I started full-time at Sakusa Industries at twenty-eight. I wasn’t promoted to CEO until thirty-three. And if it weren’t a family business, I probably wouldn’t have seen that title until I was in my forties.”

Osamu whistles lowly. “Gotta say, Sakusa-san... that’s pretty badass.”

“I’m flattered you find my extremely tedious academic suffering admirable.”

They pull up outside The Bellwood—a retro-chic bar buzzing with the energy of a Friday evening. A cluster of their old classmates already lines the sidewalk, chatting animatedly under the signage.

“Thanks so much for the ride!” Osamu bows while still half-seated, then bolts out of the car—barely hiding the way he beelines toward Suna.

“I assume that’s Donut Man,” Sakusa says, deadpan.

“The one and only.” Atsumu unbuckles his seatbelt and turns to him, smiling. “Hey. Thanks. Seriously. You didn’t have to drive us.”

“It’s alright,” Sakusa replies. “I had nothing better to do.”

“If you say so,” Atsumu grins, already pushing the door open. “I’ll be out pretty late, just FYI.”

“Noted,” Sakusa nods. “Take care.”

“You too!”

“Oi, Atsumu!” Aran calls out from the group. “Is that your boyfriend!?”

Atsumu nearly trips over the curb, face flushing crimson—because yes, Sakusa definitely heard that.

Too embarrassed to look back, he hisses at Aran, “*Dude*, that’s my *boss*.”

“Oh—whoops. Sorry *Atsumu’s boss*!”

When Atsumu risks a glance behind him, Sakusa looks... deeply amused. Possibly even a little flustered.

“Ah. No harm, no foul,” he says through the window. “I’ll see you later, Miya.”

And then, in true spy-film fashion, Sakusa pulls off in his Batmobile of a car—leaving a trail of impressed whistles and a few quiet gasps in his wake.

“That’s your *boss*?” Suna says less than three seconds later. “Your boss *drove* you here?”

The look on his face is classic Suna—mischievous, unimpressed, and way too observant for comfort. He may have grown into a pretty face, almost annoyingly beautiful really, but that trademark mischief? Still intact.

“Let’s go in before we start catching up,” Kita cuts in gently, over the calm in the storm, and Atsumu finally allows himself a proper look.

Damn it. Still as handsome as ever. Hair grown just enough to soften his face, golden hair hitting him like he’s the protagonist of a drama Atsumu would absolutely binge.

They crowd into [The Bellwood](#) in pairs, claiming a booth near the bar. Osamu practically hip-checks Atsumu out of the way to sit beside Suna, like a possessive Pomeranian in a sweater.

He nearly rolls his eyes—emphasis on *nearly*—before realising who he’s left with. Kita. Sitting thigh-to-thigh. Smelling like soft spice and subtle sandalwood and a thousand repressed memories Atsumu does not have the bandwidth to process right now.

“Hi,” he says, aiming for roguish charm but probably landing somewhere near a weird smirk. “Heard you were askin’ about your most troublesome kōhai.”

Kita’s smile is warm enough to defrost an arctic glacier. “How have you been, Atsumu-kun? You’ve grown a fair bit since I last saw you.”

God, why does that sound like something from a coming-of-age movie? Atsumu resists rubbing the back of his neck. “You too. You grew your hair out. Looks... good.”

Kita’s fingers brush his ponytail with an easy chuckle. “You think so? My obaa-san keeps asking me to cut it.”

“No way!” Atsumu blurts—too loud, judging by the glance he earns from the next booth. “Don’t let her win!”

Kita laughs again, low and warm, and something in Atsumu’s chest does a somersault.

Jazz hums soft through the speakers, golden light spilling across the table like someone draped the whole room in nostalgia with a side of wine haze. From across the table, Suna mutters something about feeling like they’ve stepped into a Miyazaki film.

He's not wrong.

Menus appear, clinking gently against the wood, accompanied by a little bowl of complimentary peanuts. Aran nabs one immediately, tosses it into the air, and catches it in his mouth like he's auditioning for a toothpaste commercial. The girl in the next booth stares. Her friend blushes. Aran winks at them like a goddamn rockstar acknowledging a fan. Atsumu fights the urge to bean him in the forehead with a peanut.

Beside him, Osamu is fiddling with the tissue holder like it's a Rubik's Cube, all restless fingers and silent crisis. Poor guy's so down bad it's practically a medical condition.

Atsumu squints at his own menu. "They've got a cocktail with grilled corn in it."

"Yaki Bloody Mary," Osamu reads, brows drawing together. "You'd hate that."

"Says who?"

"Says me. You hate grilled corn. You spit it out at the fireworks festival in elementary school."

"Yeah, but I was eight and dramatic."

"You're twenty-six and still dramatic," Suna adds dryly, not even glancing up. Aran chokes on his water.

"Hey!" Atsumu protests. "I'm still twenty-five, thank you very much."

Laughter ripples around the table—easy, familiar. The kind that feels like slipping into an old hoodie, soft and frayed, still carrying the scent of home. Nostalgia settles over Atsumu like a blanket he didn't know he'd been missing.

"So much has changed," Aran says, leaning back with a sentimental grin. "And yet you lot are still the same. Oh! You know what I found out recently? Takumi-sensei and Morisuke-sensei finally got married."

Osamu snorts, stealing peanuts with the precision of a jewel thief and the manners of a toddler. "Took them long enough. Tsumu and I caught them makin' moon eyes at each other all the time. Remember that, Tsumu? When he sent you to deliver cake?"

"Oh my god, yeah!" Atsumu bursts out laughing. "It was someone's birthday, and Morisuke-sensei saved her a slice. Real subtle, that one."

Kita smiles faintly, the kind of fond curve that says he remembers every detail. "That reminds me of my grandmother," he adds lightly. "She swears she just likes the tofu from the stall across the street, but somehow she always manages to 'accidentally' catch the vendor on his way home."

Of course Kita would notice something like that. Always watching quietly, always guiding without fanfare.

Atsumu's mind slips back to high school—the days when Kita was their anchor, the one who always looked out for him. Showing up with care packages when Atsumu was sick, keeping him out of trouble when he was late, saving him from himself more times than Atsumu could count.

“Hey, Kita-san,” Atsumu says, his tone softening without permission.

“Hm?”

“Thanks.”

“For what?”

“For makin' sure I survived high school without summoning a vengeful spirit or fallin' off a roof. Which, statistically, were both highly likely.”

Kita actually laughs—quiet and startled, like he didn't expect that. “Oh God. That time you fell off the ladder—remember that? And I was standing right under you?”

“My not-so-subtle assassination attempt,” Atsumu grins sheepishly.

“And somehow,” Kita says, shaking his head, “you blamed it on Osamu-kun even though he wasn't even there.”

“It was his fault!” Atsumu huffs. “He threw my favourite pebble onto the roof that morning.”

Osamu, eavesdropping with impeccable timing, scoffs. “You picked it up 'cause you said it reminded you of my thick head. Then you flicked it at me.”

“Only because you tried to hit me first!”

“Yer face begs for it.”

Atsumu lets out a scandalized squawk, halfway to lunging across the table, when a firm hand lands on his shoulder. Kita, calm as ever, gently presses him back into his seat. “Now now. Let's not get kicked out. I'll buy you a drink if you let this one slide.”

Atsumu practically melts, grinning wide. “You always know the way to my heart, Kita-san.”

Kita takes a slow sip of his cocktail, eyes crinkling with quiet amusement. “Only because you make it so easy to read.”

They end up at [Tokyo Confidential](#) once it becomes clear the rest of the night is destined for drinking.

The elevator ride is cramped and loud with laughter, Osamu's shoulder pressing against his, Suna humming some tune Atsumu vaguely recognizes. By the time the doors slide open on

the 9th floor of Azabu-Jūban's sleek V-City building, Atsumu's already light-headed from anticipation (and maybe the cocktails he downed earlier).

The bar greets him like a secret someone whispered in amber. Warm light pools over wooden floors, leather barstools, and backlit shelves lined with bottles that look like curiosities. A 300-year-old shrine tree has been reborn as the bar itself—smooth grain, worn edges—anchoring the sleekness with something sacred.

Drinks arrive like little performances. A baseball-themed cocktail in a leather glove, another glowing radioactive under black light, and an “Only Fans” martini that tastes like summer condensed into a single ice cube. Even the snacks are absurd—cheese puffs lacquered in takoyaki sauce and fruit sandos stacked like tiny tropical pillows.

Atsumu starts feeling that shift from buzzed to drunk—that fizzy sweet spot where everything tilts pleasantly—when Osamu slumps into nostalgia without warning.

“Remember the Great Bento Swap Debacle?” Osamu says, slouching so far he's practically horizontal.

Suna snorts, most definitely drunk-adjacent because he leans across Osamu like a particularly clingy scarf. “When Kita ratted you out five minutes in?”

“I did not,” Kita says, calm as temple bells. He plucks a cheese puff with meticulous care, his chopsticks moving like scalpel and forceps. “I simply asked why Atsumu had pickled daikon when he hates it.”

Atsumu blinks, startled. He remembers hating daikon. He didn't think anyone else did.

“Diagnosed me with lying,” Atsumu recounts, pointing a thumb at Kita like an Exhibit A. “On sight.”

Aran, sage of the group, nods solemnly. “That's the day we learned Kita was basically a moral compass with X-ray vision.”

And through it all? Kita sips his drink, unbothered. “Personally, my favorite memory is when Atsumu tried to kick a tree in half.”

Heat rockets up Atsumu's face. “Listen—listen. In my defense, I was sixteen and full of dreams.”

“And full of Monster energy drinks,” Osamu cuts in, tossing back a shot that Suna immediately steals the tail end of.

“He limped for a week,” Kita adds mildly. “I still have the photo with the ice pack.”

“Oh my god—” Atsumu groans into his hands while Aran goes for another round, laughter shaking his shoulders.

“The tree's fine, by the way,” Aran says when he returns.

“Surely y’all have stories where I’m not the butt of the joke,” Atsumu complains, though the flush creeping up his ears is half laughter, half alcohol.

“You’re easy to clown,” Aran shrugs. “Remember when Suna gave you a fake love letter?”

Suna smirks. “He looked smug for a whole week.”

“And I had to explain to the teacher,” Kita sighs, “why Atsumu was giggling at his locker during math class.”

“You could’ve just let me believe,” Atsumu whines.

“In fraud?” Kita’s tone is bone-dry, but his eyes—God, they’re warm.

Atsumu feels something go soft and stupid in his chest. He hugs his drink close and says, quiet but smiling: “Guess I’m lucky ya were there to save me from marriage scammers.”

That gets Suna choking on his drink and Osamu wheezing like a punctured accordion.

“Less talking, more drinking,” Osamu declares, thumping Atsumu on the back before hauling Suna toward the dance floor.

“Oh my god,” Atsumu murmurs, voice trembling with laughter and something dangerously close to tears. “He’s so drunk. Are you filming this, Aran?”

“You bet I am,” Aran sniggers, phone tilted just right to catch the disaster in motion: Osamu and Suna weaving through the thinning throng of people, colliding with strangers, until they find the dance floor like two idiots on a quest. “Wow. Suna can dance.”

“Osamu decidedly can’t,” Atsumu says, half horrified, half delighted, one hand clapped over his mouth as his brother flails in what can only generously be called rhythm. “Look at him. The poor bastard’s smitten.”

“Are they dating?” Kita asks mildly. His eyes flick to Atsumu, quiet, knowing.

“I… have no idea if it’s official yet,” Atsumu hedges, squinting at the mess of limbs and giggles on the dance floor. “But probably heading there?”

They’re sharing flushed, breathless smiles like they’re the only two people in the world, and Atsumu has to look away before he chokes on the saccharine. “God, they’re so fuckin’ mushy.”

“Don’t be like that, Atsumu,” Aran chides, elbow nudging into his side. “You’ll find someone too if you stop being sour about it.”

“Hey!” Atsumu whines, sinking so far into the booth he might merge with it. He’s not sour. He’s realistic. Dating requires socializing, and Atsumu’s most persistent companions are reference books and lukewarm coffee.

Sure, some people meet their partners through uni, but Atsumu is so relentlessly haunted by his GPA that just entering the building feels like stepping into a war zone. Romance doesn't survive artillery fire.

And work? Forget it. Atsumu doesn't have co-workers. His entire professional world begins and ends with Sakusa-san and that's—

Dangerous territory. Do not enter.

"I'm sure you'll meet someone," Kita says softly, pulling Atsumu out of the spiral with the warmth of his tone. He's smiling that calm, steady Kita smile that once made Atsumu trip over his own feet in high school and still—still—ties something stupid and tender in his chest. "Someone who sees you. Understands you."

Atsumu blinks, the haze of inebriation sharpening just enough to feel the punch of those words. His throat goes tight, and for one reckless heartbeat he imagines what it would feel like if that someone was sitting across from him now.

"Oh," he says, stupidly.

Kita only holds his gaze for a beat longer before reaching for his drink, unaware—or maybe mercifully pretending not to notice—the mess of yearning clawing its way up Atsumu's ribs. Atsumu knocks back his own glass like it's a life raft, because god, he wants that.

He wants someone.

Not even looking, and still wanting so badly his bones ache with it. Someone to hold him when his brain spins into static, someone who won't flinch from the ugly, exhausted parts of him. Someone who says, I've got you.

Someone who—

His chest twists. The image that surfaces is all sharp suits and latex gloves, a man with clean lines and cleaner hands who has, against all odds, started taking care of him in ways no one else ever has.

Wouldn't that be nice?

Kita must catch the shift in his expression because he nudges him gently. "Need some air?"

Atsumu nods before his brain even catches up, trailing after Kita on legs that feel like overcooked soba.

The terrace is quiet, a rare pocket of calm above the chaos. The city unfolds below—Tokyo Tower burning like an ember in the night skyline, trains threading their way between neon arteries. It's beautiful in that refined-but-rebellious Tokyo way, equal parts order and chaos.

"Better?" Kita asks, leaning against the railing with his usual ease, like he belongs anywhere he stands.

“Yeah,” Atsumu breathes out, dragging a hand through his hair. The cool air snaps some sense back into him. “Autumn’s coming. Can feel it.”

Kita hums. “Heard you’re visiting your Ma soon.”

“Yeah. Samu might not make it for long, though. Busy with work.”

“Mm.” Kita’s gaze drops to the streets below, calm and unreadable as always. “I’ll come by when you’re home. Bring Obaa-san’s dessert. You liked those, didn’t you?”

Atsumu laughs softly. “You’re too good to me, Kita-san.” His throat goes tight before he can stop it. “I’m... real glad we caught up.”

Kita glances at him then, quiet but steady, and there’s something in that look—something old and familiar, like warm sunlight through rice-paper doors. He doesn’t say much, doesn’t need to. That’s always been the thing about Kita: he sees without prying, listens without asking.

The moment stretches, taut as a string, until the wind shifts and Atsumu forces a grin before his lips can betray him.

Someone cracks a joke—something crude and easy, loud enough to snap the silence like a twig—and just like that, the spell breaks.

The night blurs after that—back to laughter, to darts (confiscated promptly after Suna, blindfolded and overconfident, nearly skewers Atsumu). But that look lingers, tucked behind Atsumu’s ribs like a note he can’t throw away.

They bar-hop to a joint with a pool table, where Atsumu gets so thoroughly humiliated by Kita that he’s half-convinced the man moonlights as an underground billiards champion. Every shot Kita makes is smooth, precise, and soul-crushingly smug in that polite, Kita-esque way that somehow makes losing worse.

“This table’s crooked,” Atsumu grumbles after his fifth failed attempt.

“It’s regulation standard,” Kita replies evenly, lining up his next shot.

“I’m regulation standard,” Atsumu mutters under his breath, earning himself an unhelpful snicker from Suna, who’s already got his phone out recording the carnage.

It devolves from there when the twins—because apparently Atsumu and Osamu share one collective brain cell—enter a drinking competition no one asked for. Six shots in, Osamu is starting to look like a cautionary tale, and Atsumu’s giving a TED Talk to his pool cue when Kita steps in with the full force of parental disapproval.

“That’s enough,” Kita says, tone gentle but firm, like a kindergarten teacher confiscating crayons from a kid who’s drawing on the walls. He pats both twins on the back and announces, “You’re both winners.”

“Yeah,” Aran scoffs from across the booth. “Winners at being dumbasses. Man, you’re wasted.”

Atsumu straightens, wobbling so hard he almost tips into the jukebox. “I dunno what yer talkin’ about. ’M fine.” He gestures vaguely in the direction of the ceiling. “Look—I’m vertical.”

From the other end of the booth, Osamu peels himself off the seat like a sticker, looking distinctly green around the gills. “Uh...” Suna says, alarm creeping into his voice. “I think I should take this one home before he decorates the sidewalk.”

“Do that, please, Suna-kun,” Kita says smoothly, then turns to Atsumu, who’s now locked in an intense staring contest with a basket of fries. “I’ll take Atsumu home, if that’s okay with you, Aran. I can catch up with you later at the hotel.”

“Yeah, sure,” Aran says, pulling out his card to cover the bill like the saint he is. By the time they disperse toward the bus stop, Atsumu’s humming some unholy mashup of Taylor Swift and a TikTok sound, and Kita’s got a firm grip on his shoulder like he’s escorting a very unruly senator out of a gala.

“‘M close to here, I c’n walk,” Atsumu insists, pointing vaguely behind him in what may or may not be the correct direction. Kita arches a brow, unimpressed.

“Are you sure you even remember how to get there?”

“Mm,” Atsumu hums solemnly, which would be more convincing if he wasn’t swaying like a wheat stalk in a summer breeze. The weather’s so nice, though. Nice enough that Atsumu wishes he could see the stars through Tokyo’s light-polluted sky. Back home, there’d be a thousand of them scattered all across.

He doesn’t notice the exact moment Kita moves closer, but suddenly there’s a steady hand under his elbow, warm and solid, anchoring him against gravity. “Come on, don’t fall asleep standing.”

“Whoops,” Atsumu giggles, letting himself be nudged along the sidewalk after slurring out the location of Sakusa’s residence.

“You live with your boss, Atsumu-kun?” Kita’s tone is mild, probably trying to keep him awake.

“Mhm... he’s got a big... *biiiiiig* house.” Atsumu stretches his arms wide to illustrate, nearly clotheslining a passerby.

“Ah. That must be nice. Does he treat you well?”

“He’s *veeeery* nice,” Atsumu nods, remembering the dinner party with a rush of tipsy warmth. “Defended my honour... from... from the evil corporate cronies. An’—an’ stopped me from becomin’ a pet.”

Kita huffs a laugh, quiet and amused. “Oh wow. What a hero.”

“*Ohhh*, I have to tell ya about his Batmobile!” Atsumu straightens so abruptly he almost catapults himself onto the pavement.

Kita catches him by the waistband with a quiet grunt. “Easy there. Slow steps. We don’t want this night ending in the ER.”

“Sorry,” Atsumu giggles sheepishly, sagging back into Kita’s steady presence like a drunk marionette. “...you’re destined to keep looking out after me, huh?”

Kita hums, softer now, a note of fondness threading his voice. “Guess so.”

“I’m definitely yer favourite troublemaking kōhai,” Atsumu says serenely, missing the small, almost nostalgic smile that flickers across Kita’s face.

“How about being my favourite rule-abiding kōhai?” Kita suggests, steering him gently as they cross the street.

“Me? Rule-abidin’? *Neverrr*,” Atsumu declares with shameless pride—right before tripping over absolutely nothing.

Kita sighs and swoops in, looping Atsumu’s arm over his shoulder and hauling most of his weight. “C’mon. We’re almost there. Atta boy.”

“Ya should move to Tokyo,” Atsumu says sagely, nodding as if he’s dispensing ancient wisdom. “So we can hang out *alllll* the time.”

“As lovely as that sounds,” Kita says, not unkindly, “I have work. And Obaa-san can’t exactly fend for herself.”

“Kita-saaaaan,” Atsumu whines, dragging his feet as they stumble into the Sakusa residence’s sleek lobby.

“Shh!” Kita hushes him, startled by the understated wealth gleaming from polished marble and glass. His eyes flick to the minimalist logo embossed on the far wall. “Are you sure this is the right place?”

Atsumu vaguely registers someone saying his name through the haze of alcohol. The voice isn’t familiar, but the tone—cautious, concerned—belongs to authority.

“Miya-san?” A security guard looms into focus. Atsumu blinks owlishly, trying to remember the man’s name and coming up with a fuzzy blank. “Are you okay?”

“He’s had a bit too much to drink,” Kita answers smoothly before Atsumu can incriminate himself further. His voice is smooth, that steady drawl Atsumu remembers from high school—the sound of reason itself, damn him. “I’m just going to drop him home and be on my way.”

The guard looks at Kita, then at Atsumu, like he’s considering whether this is a kidnapping situation.

“He’s—” Atsumu hiccups, fighting to articulate something meaningful, and what comes out is, “My favorite senpai.”

The man's expression suggests he's just bitten into a lemon. "...Right. This way...?"

"Kita," Kita supplies politely. "Kita Shinsuke."

"This way, Kita-san. The private elevator will lead you right to the residence." The guard gives Kita a once-over that screams *I'm trusting you but only because you look like you've never broken a rule in your life*. "Please return after you've safely delivered Miya-san."

"M not a cargo box," Atsumu mumbles, sagging against Kita, who just hushes him like he's a toddler mid-tantrum.

"Of course," Kita says, bowing slightly. "I apologize on behalf of my kōhai for any trouble."

The elevator ride feels eternal. Atsumu's head tips against Kita's shoulder for what he swears is half a second before Kita gently shakes him awake. "Just a little more, Atsumu-kun. Come on now. Is this how you present yourself to your boss?"

"He'll understand," Atsumu mutters, despite having zero evidence to support that bold claim.

By the time they reach the penthouse door, Atsumu is fumbling in his wallet for the key card like it's a scavenger hunt. Kita, ever the paragon of patience, bypasses the chaos and simply rings the bell.

"Oh my god, what are you doing?" Atsumu yelps, horrified. "I *have* a key!"

"And yet here we are," Kita says mildly. "I need to make sure you make it to bed in one piece."

It takes a solid minute before the door creaks open, and Sakusa stands there in sweatpants, curls ruffled, expression unreadable. Or maybe very readable, if Atsumu wasn't drunk and distracted by the sudden realization that Sakusa looks unfairly good when he's annoyed.

Sakusa's gaze slides from Atsumu—slouching, hiccuping, radiating shame—to Kita, who bows like this is the most natural situation in the world.

"Excuse me," Kita says, still holding Atsumu by the elbow like a wayward child. "I'm here to drop Atsumu-kun off. He had a little too much to drink."

"Kita-san!" Atsumu hisses, scandalized. "Don't snitch on me!"

Kita pats his side in silent apology. "Sorry, Atsumu-kun. Just looking out for you. Now be a good boy and don't cause any more trouble." Then, to Sakusa: "May I come in?"

The air sharpens, subtle but unmistakable. Sakusa's hand tightens fractionally on the doorframe. His eyes flick from Kita's steady posture to Atsumu leaning into him like gravity chose sides tonight.

Uh-oh.

Sakusa clears his throat softly, stepping forward with the calm precision of someone claiming what's his. His hand extends—not to Kita, but to Atsumu. "I'll take it from here, Kita-san."

There's no resistance when Kita transfers Atsumu over like a very confused, slightly giggly sack of rice. Sakusa's palm slides under Atsumu's elbow, steady and warm in a way that makes Atsumu melt just a little.

"Thank you for bringing him home safe," Sakusa says, voice even but clipped at the edges.

Kita, all grace and good manners, bows. "Please see that he makes it to bed in one piece. Text me in the morning, Atsumu-kun. Good night."

The door shuts with a soft click, and suddenly the quiet between them feels dense, like it's pressing on Atsumu's ears. His head swims, his body swaying in Sakusa's grip. God, he's warm. Like really warm. Atsumu leans into it without even realizing—until Sakusa adjusts his hold, firming it up so Atsumu doesn't face-plant on the floor.

"Can you walk?" Sakusa asks, voice gentle but skeptical.

"Mm," Atsumu hums, nodding like that proves anything.

"...That does not sound reassuring."

"I c'n," Atsumu insists, words slurring as he makes a valiant attempt at forward motion.

"Gonna shower 'fore bed. Promise. I'll be squeaky clean."

Sakusa follows, jaw tightening like he's doing math in his head about the physics of this disaster. "What if you slip and crack your head on the tile?"

"I'll clean that too!" Atsumu says cheerfully, immediately earning a sharp *smack* to the back of his head.

"Idiot! That's not what I meant!"

"Ow!" Atsumu whines, rubbing his head like a wounded puppy. "'M sorry! I'll shower sitting down!"

Sakusa exhales through his nose—long, low, a sound pulled straight from the depths of his patience. "...Okay. I'll stay out here until you're done. Just in case."

"Ya don't have to!" Atsumu flails, very nearly decapitating himself on the doorframe. Sakusa catches his wrist mid-air and lowers it gently, as if handling a live weapon.

"Atsumu." His name drops into the space between them like a weight, dragging the air taut. It manages to slice through the fog in Atsumu's head.

Dark eyes meet his through the dim light, steady as a blade. There's nothing casual in them—no sarcasm, no smirk. Just intent. "Shower slowly. Don't trip. And don't lock the door in case I need to scrape you off the floor."

Atsumu blinks, wide-eyed and hiccupping, the gravity of his name—shaped tender on Sakusa’s lips—settling warm and unbearable in his chest. “Y-you...” His voice is small, almost reverent. “You called me by my name.”

It might be the alcohol, the soft glow of the hallway light, or the fact that Atsumu’s entire brain feels dipped in honey, but he swears Sakusa’s ears turn pink. “Is that a problem?”

“N-no!” Atsumu stammers, nearly windmilling himself into the bathroom counter. “I like it! Y’should call me by my name more often.”

Sakusa hums low in his throat, something close to amused but with an undertow Atsumu’s too drunk to name. He helps Atsumu through the doorway like he’s guiding a reckless toddler toward danger. “Will you really be okay?”

“Yep!” Atsumu declares with an enthusiastic nod—then freezes as the room spins like a broken carnival ride. His hand shoots out, gripping the doorframe for dear life. “Oof. Okay. The room did a funny spin.”

Sakusa stiffens, watching him like a cat eyeing a precarious glass vase. “Do you... need help?”

Atsumu blinks blearily at Sakusa’s angelic face. Oh no. His brain short-circuits. “Y’wanna help me shower?”

There’s a beat of silence before Sakusa’s angelic face goes from porcelain to firetruck red. “I want to help you *not die*,” he hisses, like Atsumu just suggested they commit tax fraud together.

The offer is tempting—because Atsumu can barely see straight and the shower feels like a Herculean task—but beneath the fog of alcohol, his tiny voice of reason pipes up: *this is Sakusa. Your boss.*

Your very sexy, very attractive boss. With the pretty curls and the constellation of moles and arms that could probably crush a watermelon—

He blinks, realizing his train of thought has veered off a cliff and Sakusa is still staring at him with barely restrained panic.

“Um,” Atsumu flounders, cheeks heating in sync with his blood-alcohol level, and carefully peels himself out of Sakusa’s hold. “I think... I think I’ve got it.”

Sakusa exhales, like he’s been holding his breath for five years, and nods. “Okay... I’ll wait out here. Shout if you slip.”

“Yessir,” Atsumu says solemnly, neglecting to mention that he’d rather *die* than be found naked and concussed on imported marble tile. He musters a mock salute. “I’ll bravely defeat all the germs and return to you a hero.”

That gets a startled laugh out of Sakusa, bright and short, like he didn’t mean to let it escape. “You’re ridiculous.”

Atsumu grins, drunk and smug. “Ya love it.”

All Alone With You

Chapter Summary

“Yer... really nice, Sakusa. Nicer than ya let on. Dunno why ya hide it.”

Sakusa pauses. His hands still against the fabric.

“I’m not hiding it,” he says eventually, voice low.

Then—carefully, almost hesitantly—he telegraphs every movement as he lifts a single hand. His index finger slides through Atsumu’s damp fringe, brushing it back from his eyes.

The touch is so gentle it makes Atsumu’s breath catch in his throat.

“I’m not like this with everyone,” Sakusa murmurs.

Chapter Notes

Hi... I’m alive. Don’t ask me how I finished this chapter, I don’t know, I just got some of my muse back today despite everything.

I just want to thank my discord peeps again for being my rock, for comforting me and listening to my rants and checking in on me and making me laugh. You guys are everything ♥

If you want to join our comfort hub, here’s a [link](#). It’s very chill and we all just play games and chat (and get married every 3 seconds)

I hope you enjoy this chapter ♥

Atsumu stands beneath the artificial downpour, sluggishly blinking water out of his eyes. Steam curls up around him like an over-affectionate cloud, clinging to his skin, but it does nothing to clear the fog in his head.

Sleep keeps calling to him like a lullaby.

“Gotta get clean, Tsumu,” he mutters, voice rough, scrubbing his armpits twice for good measure. Sakusa trusts him to be clean. Atsumu won’t break that trust.

He brushes his teeth and splashes water over his face right there in the shower, too lazy to make the pilgrimage to the sink. Sakusa's instruction sheet glares at him from its laminated perch on the wall. Atsumu glares back. *I'm getting clean on my own terms, thank you very much.*

By the time he stumbles out—damp hair dripping trails across the floor, Friday's loungewear clinging to his skin (he double-checked the tag with bleary, squinted eyes)—it hits him.

Sakusa's been waiting this whole time.

"Shit." He clutches the towel around his neck like a lifeline. "I forgot you were waiting!"

Sakusa, who has somehow managed to make *leaning against a wall* look like a spread from a luxury sleepwear catalog, straightens with a quiet huff. "It's fine."

Atsumu watches, breath snagging slightly, as Sakusa bends to place a clean pair of slippers neatly in front of him. The gesture is small, careful, and so Sakusa it makes Atsumu's chest ache.

"Uhm. Thanks."

He shuffles forward, every bone aching for bed—the warm press of a mattress, the hush of darkness.

Then his foot slips on the slick droplets trailing from his hair. His stomach swoops. His hand shoots out blindly with a startled gasp, grasping at nothing—

—but he doesn't fall.

A strong, sure grip clamps over his bicep, hauling him upright with steady force. Another hand hovers near his shoulder, ready to catch him if his coordination decides to betray him again.

"Jesus—" Atsumu exhales hard, adrenaline cracking through the haze, making him slightly more awake. "Think my heart almost stopped."

Sakusa releases a shaky breath of his own. "Mine too." His voice is soft but tense. "Please—be careful. Come on, we're almost there."

He doesn't let go. His hand stays, firm and grounding, guiding Atsumu the last few steps to his bedroom.

"M sorry," Atsumu mumbles, shame curling like smoke under his ribs. "You shouldn't have to take care of me. Don't wanna cause trouble..."

"You're not," Sakusa says simply, turning the handle and stepping inside with Atsumu in tow. "I don't mind."

Atsumu all but faceplants onto the mattress, to Sakusa's sharp inhale of alarm.

“Miya Atsumu,” he hisses, hovering over him like a man watching a train wreck in slow motion. “Can you please not break your nose before dawn?”

“It won’t break,” Atsumu mutters into the sheets, clawing his way toward the pillow and kicking the blanket down so he can slide under. “Bed’s so soft... best bed ever...”

When he peeks one eye open, Sakusa is still there—still standing, watching him with a face carved out of something unreadable. His lips twitch slightly, like he’s swallowing a laugh.

“I’m glad it meets your expectations,” Sakusa says at last, reaching down to tug the duvet into place over Atsumu. His hands move with careful precision, smoothing out wrinkles. “You should’ve dried your hair properly. What if you catch a cold?”

“I’ll be fineee,” Atsumu drawls, smiling soft and crooked, drunk on exhaustion and warmth. “Yer... really nice, Sakusa. Nicer than ya let on. Dunno why ya hide it.”

Sakusa pauses. His hands still against the fabric.

“I’m not hiding it,” he says eventually, voice low.

Then—carefully, almost hesitantly—he telegraphs every movement as he lifts a single hand. His index finger slides through Atsumu’s damp fringe, brushing it back from his eyes.

The touch is so gentle it makes Atsumu’s breath catch in his throat.

“I’m not like this with everyone,” Sakusa murmurs.

“Oh,” Atsumu whispers.

The touch withdraws, leaving a ghost of warmth behind.

“Do you sleep with the lamp on or off?” Sakusa’s voice is low, careful, like he doesn’t want to startle him.

“Off,” Atsumu mumbles, tugging the duvet up to his chin, suddenly shy. His eyelids feel like lead, but he watches Sakusa’s silhouette cross the room, every movement deliberate. The light fades to a muted glow, and the darkness blooms soft around them.

“Thanks again...” His voice wavers, and maybe it’s the alcohol, maybe it’s the comfort of being seen—but the words tumble out before he can stop them. “Y’know, earlier... I thought about this.”

A pause. A rustle in the shadows. “Mm?” Sakusa glances his way, moving slowly through the dimness. “Thought about what?”

“What it’d be like ta have someone who cares.” Atsumu shuts his eyes against the weight of it, afraid to meet Sakusa’s. Afraid of being too much. “It gets real lonely being me sometimes.”

He hears it—the faint hitch in Sakusa’s breath. A falter, subtle but undeniable.

“I don’t think I realised it ‘til now.” Atsumu swallows hard. “But I feel less alone with you.”

When he finally opens his eyes, Sakusa is standing there, frozen mid-step. For the briefest heartbeat, his expression looks... split open. Like something Atsumu wasn’t supposed to see.

“Atsumu...” His name falls from Sakusa’s lips like something fragile.

Atsumu chuckles softly, self-deprecating, because the alternative is crying. “Guess Kita-san was onto something. Told me I’d find someone who sees me. You see me... don’t you, Sakusa?”

For a moment, silence. Then Sakusa moves again—slow, steady—dragging Atsumu’s desk chair to the bedside. He sits down with a quiet exhale, elbows resting on his knees, and says in that voice that never lies:

“Of course I see you.”

Something in Atsumu’s chest clenches tight, and before he can stop it, the tears come. Hot, uninvited. His breath stutters, chokes. “Thank you,” he whispers, and it breaks.

He blinks hard, clearing the blur—and finds Sakusa watching him, gaze sharp and pained, like the sight physically hurts him.

“Don’t cry.” Sakusa’s tone softens to something almost unbearably tender. “Please don’t cry, Atsumu.”

“Can’t help it.” Atsumu hiccups, his voice a wreck. “Because... I missed mattering to someone.”

“What nonsense is that?” Sakusa’s words are gentle, not sharp—like he’s trying to coax Atsumu back to himself. He leans forward, forearms braced on his thighs. “You have your brother. Your ma. Your granny. Your study buddies. Your friends from high school. Of course you matter.”

The tears burn down his cheeks. The shame burns hotter. Atsumu buries his face in the pillow, voice muffled and small. “S’rry. Shouldn’t dump this on you. Go sleep, I’ll be fine.”

“I’m okay right here.” The answer comes without hesitation, steady and unwavering.

He hears movement—a soft scrape of the chair as Sakusa rises, the muted pad of his steps toward the kitchenette. A clink of plastic, the twist of a cap. Then the chair creaks with his return.

“Here.” A water bottle appears in Atsumu’s blurry vision, along with two small pills in Sakusa’s palm. “Take these.”

Atsumu stares at them, something raw rising in his chest. “Stop,” he croaks, swiping at his wet face. “I’ll cry more if ya keep being nice.”

Even in the dim light, he catches it—a flicker of a smile tugging at Sakusa’s mouth. “You’re adorable, Miya.”

“Atsumu,” he corrects instantly, voice petulant and wet. “No take-backsies.”

“Atsumu,” Sakusa repeats, slower this time. Softer. Like he’s tasting the sound. Letting it linger.

There’s a pause, weighted but gentle as he takes his meds. Then: “Do you mind if I stay while you fall asleep?”

Atsumu exhales, the tension bleeding out of his limbs. He gives the bottle back, sinks deeper into the mattress, eyes fluttering shut. “Don mind,” he mumbles, voice slow and thick. “But... why?”

“I just want to make sure you’re okay.” The words land like a warm blanket over his frayed edges. And then—maybe it’s imagined, maybe not—fingers ghost over his damp hair in a fleeting touch that melts him from the inside out.

“Why don’t you tell me about tonight?” Sakusa prompts quietly. “What you did for fun with your friends.”

Atsumu swallows, licks his lips, and begins to recount the evening in fragments. Sloppy, half-lucid pieces. Suna and Osamu dancing. Aran covering the bill. Kita keeping an eye on him like always.

Sakusa hums occasionally, soft and attentive. He’s close enough that Atsumu can feel him, can sense the quiet strength of his presence. The air feels heavier here, but not in a bad way. Like safety. Like warmth. Like a harbor in the dark.

Sleep tugs at him, sweet and relentless. His words start to slow, slur. “M falling asleep,” he warns, eyelids sealed shut.

“Sleep,” Sakusa says, barely above a whisper. “All will be well in the morning.”

Atsumu’s lips part on instinct, on longing. “Stay a lil longer?”

“I’m right here,” Sakusa murmurs. “Not going anywhere.”

Those words—warm and sure and steady—wrap around him like arms. They carry him gently, softly, into a world of cotton skies and hushed dreams.

He drifts under. The last thing he feels is the weight of a gaze on him.

Dark, unwavering eyes.

Warm eyes.

Eyes that see him.

The next morning, Atsumu wakes up and instantly regrets it as he's catapulted into a world of pain.

“Ow,” he groans, voice scraping like gravel, and buries his face back into the pillow as if he can smother the pounding in his skull. *Ow, ow, ow. Fuck.*

The sunlight is merciless, slicing through the curtains in thin, accusing blades. Atsumu flails an arm across the bed, searching for his phone with the desperation of a man drowning. When his fingers close around it, he squints at the screen.

10:03 AM.

“Shit,” he mutters. He’s behind on everything—his morning chores, laundry, probably breathing.

Peeling himself out of the sheets feels like ripping Velcro off his skin. He shuffles to the bathroom, each step weighted, the floorboards icy under his bare feet. His mouth tastes like death and despair—like he’s licked the bottom of a pub floor. Probably what the bubonic plague tasted like, if he had to guess. Grimacing at his reflection, he splashes water on his face, and brushes his teeth trying to scrub away shame.

By the time he emerges from the bedroom, he’s tied one of his bathrobe belts around his head like a makeshift tourniquet against the headache threatening to kill him. It doesn’t help, but it makes him feel marginally less like his skull is cracking open.

Then he freezes in the doorway.

Sakusa is at the stove. Cooking.

Atsumu squints, his brain too foggy to process this level of domestic sorcery.

““morning,” he rasps, shuffling toward the counter.

Sakusa turns, eyebrows lifting slightly, and Atsumu’s stomach somersaults so violently he nearly groans. All at once, last night crashes back in fragments: Sakusa’s voice, quiet and steady— *I’m here. I’m not going anywhere.* “Good morning, Atsumu.”

Heat creeps up his neck.

“Uh. Hi. What... what are you doing?” he pushes through, as if he can hide from the memory.

“Have a seat,” Sakusa says, his voice soft but firm. “I made soup.”

Atsumu blinks. “Soup?”

“Yes.” Sakusa turns back to the stove with unflappable calm. “You’re dehydrated. It’s important to replenish the fluids you lost.” He pours a tall glass of water, slides it toward

Atsumu. “Drink.”

Atsumu downs the water like a man lost in the desert, nodding dumbly when Sakusa refills it. “Thanks,” he manages, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

When Sakusa doesn’t say a word about the ridiculous bathrobe belt tied around his head, Atsumu sags into his seat, oddly grateful for the non-commentary. “You’re... making the soup for me?”

“Mm.” Sakusa’s tone is as casual as ever, but Atsumu doesn’t miss the faint pink tint at the tips of his ears. “Vegetable broth. Sodium and potassium will help restore your electrolyte balance.”

“Ah.” Atsumu scratches the back of his neck, suddenly shy. “Thanks... you really don’t have to mother me, y’know.”

“I know.” Sakusa sets a steaming bowl in front of him, the aroma rich and comforting. “Eat this. Drink your water. Take painkillers. You’ll feel better in a couple of hours.”

Atsumu nods and obediently lifts the spoon to his lips. The first sip is like being hugged from the inside out—warm, grounding, too tender for words. Something in his chest tightens. He blinks rapidly, refusing to cry over *soup*, of all things.

The spell breaks when his phone pings on the counter. He glances at the screen.

Kita: *how are you feeling?*

Atsumu’s heart does a tiny, fluttery thing as he types back:

I’m okay-ish, Sakusa is being extra nice and made me soup.

Kita’s reply is quick and short.

Kita: *Ah. Well, take care.*

When Atsumu glances up, he catches Sakusa’s gaze flicking toward his phone screen. There’s something almost smug there, a faint curl at the corner of his lips, as if the man knows exactly what kind of impression he’s left.

“Huh?” Atsumu mutters to himself.

Sakusa wipes his hands on a kitchen towel. “I have a few important calls to make. If you need me, I’ll be in my study.”

Atsumu just nods, still half-dazed, watching Sakusa leave the kitchen with that quiet, purposeful stride.

The spoon lingers in his hand long after Sakusa’s footsteps fade, his thoughts swirling in a haze that has nothing to do with his hangover.

It takes Atsumu the better part of three hours to clean the first floor, and by the end of it, he feels like a wrung-out rag. The ground floor will have to wait; he's exhausted, his head still throbbing from the remnants of last night.

He collapses into one of the plush armchairs in the library, curling up like a cat, his muscles humming with fatigue. His eyelids droop. The pull of sleep is heavy, warm, intoxicating—

Ping.

He groans and gropes for his phone.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: *Hey... it seems I might not even be able to take a sick day or two.*

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: *Co-worker came in today lookin like death, said boss wouldn't let him off the hook.*

"For fuck's sake," Atsumu mutters, jolted straight out of his drowsy haze into righteous fury. He doesn't bother texting back. He's calling.

Osamu picks up on the first ring. "Hello?"

"Samu, tell me this is a joke," Atsumu snaps, still half-whispering because his hangover can't handle the volume of his own rage. "Sonuvabitch doesn't give sick leaves!? Is that even legal?"

Osamu groans like a man already defeated. "He requires a doctor's note in advance. Not sure a doc's gonna fake one for me just 'cause I wanna see Ma."

"Yer co-worker's sick and he's gotta work in a *restaurant*? Isn't that a health hazard?"

"I know," Osamu groans again, the sound muffled like he's rubbing his face. "I'm keeping a five-foot distance. You'd think employers woulda learned a thing or two from the pandemic, but nope. Capitalism wins again."

"Ugh," Atsumu says, despair dripping from the sound. "Ma is gonna be so sad, Samu."

"Please don't make it worse," Osamu pleads. "I already cried about it in the bathroom earlier."

Atsumu opens his mouth to say something, but a voice—smooth, calm, *way too close*—interrupts him.

"If I may," Sakusa says, from right behind him.

Atsumu yelps, nearly dropping his phone. He twists around, heart hammering, and there's Sakusa. Of course there's Sakusa. Standing there in a perfectly tailored suit, his hair neat and glossy, his watch gleaming like he's stepped out of some high-end runway show.

Sakusa's hand is extended toward him.

Atsumu blinks at the hand, then at Sakusa, then at the phone clutched in his own. *Wait. Is he asking for my phone?*

"Uh... you wanna talk to Samu?"

"Please," Sakusa says with the kind of unhurried confidence that brooks no argument.

Osamu's sharp intake of breath is loud enough to hear over the line.

"Hello," Sakusa says, taking the phone with ease. His voice is smooth, polite, but laced with something unmistakably commanding. "This is Sakusa. How are you today, Osamu-san? Hopefully not as hungover as your brother."

There's a pause. Atsumu imagines Osamu blinking like a startled deer. "Uh—hi," Osamu says, voice cracking just a little. "Sakusa-san. I'm... okay, thanks. And you?"

"Doing just fine," Sakusa says, glancing at his watch as though this is the most casual business call of his day. "Say, can I interest you in a job offer?"

Atsumu's jaw drops. His brain short-circuits. *A job offer?! What—how—*

"A job offer?" Osamu echoes, bewildered. "What kind of job? Like... Atsumu's?"

"No," Sakusa says smoothly, like the idea of hiring two Miya twins to clean his house is preposterous. "I do not require another housekeeper. I do, however, know that my cook is in need of a kitchen aid. This is why I asked about your background yesterday." Sakusa leans casually against the back of the couch, all elegant ease, like he isn't just casually rewriting Osamu's entire future. "I can make a call and connect you to the man in charge, if you're interested. He pays his workers fairly, and you can start after you return from visiting your mother."

There's a stunned pause.

"Oh," Osamu says, and the sound is so small and shaky that Atsumu wants to scream.

Sakusa glances at his watch again, the picture of efficiency. "I'm running late for a meeting. I'll have Atsumu pass along my contact information. If you're on board, give me a call. Good day, Osamu-san."

And just like that, Sakusa hands Atsumu his phone, turns on his heel, and walks out. The door clicks shut behind him, leaving a ringing silence in his wake.

Atsumu stares at his phone like it's a cursed object.

"Is... is he gone?" Osamu whispers, voice trembling.

"Yes," Atsumu croaks, his throat dry.

“Atsumu, what the *fuck*?” Osamu’s voice climbs an octave. “Yer boss is finding me a job!?”

Atsumu gulps, still trying to process. “It—it would seem so? I—he didn’t say anything to me about it.”

“Oh,” Osamu says again, and this time it’s almost suspicious.

“Are ya gonna take it?” Atsumu blurts, picking nervously at the hem of his sweatpants. “I mean, I dunno what the hours are like, or the pay, but ya can find out, right? Give him a call, see what the offer is.”

“Course I’m gonna give him a call,” Osamu snaps, but there’s a note of disbelief under the irritation. “I’m not an idiot. I fuckin’ hate my current job. Been here less than two months and I’ve been tempted to quit every damn day ‘cause my supervisor’s a nightmare and my boss is a hardass.”

“Then go give him a call,” Atsumu urges. “Sakusa can probably talk while he’s still in the car.”

There’s a deliberate pause, a kind of silence that feels loaded.

“...He called you Atsumu,” Osamu says finally.

Atsumu freezes. His face goes hot—burning, nuclear, *visible-from-space* hot. He almost drops the phone. “Uh. Yeah. ‘Parently I asked him to call me that last night when I was drunk.”

“Ah,” Osamu says, and his tone is *too knowing*. It’s the tone of a man who smells gossip a mile away. “I see.”

See what? Atsumu wants to shout, but Osamu is already muttering his goodbyes and ending the call.

Atsumu stares down at his phone, still reeling.

“What the hell is going on today?” he mutters to the empty library.

Osamu calls him that very evening, right in the middle of Atsumu’s skincare routine.

“You won’t believe the job offer I got,” he says without preamble.

“What kin’ of job ’ffer?” Atsumu mumbles around his toothbrush, the phone propped on speaker by the sink. He spits, rinses, and straightens up. “What kind of job offer?”

“Okay, so—” Osamu starts, and that’s all Atsumu needs to hear to know he’s about to get hit with something utterly batshit.

“Turns out Sakusa knows this guy, Ushijima Wakatoshi—he owns an entire chain of restaurants in Tokyo—”

Atsumu freezes mid-swipe of hyaluronic serum. “Did you just say Ushijima Wakatoshi?”
Tendou’s husband!?

“Yes, that’s his name—keep up, Tsumu!” Osamu’s voice is high with excitement, like he’s riding the biggest adrenaline wave of his life. “So, this guy—Sakusa calls him, just like that, and he invites me for an interview. I think he and Sakusa are business partners or something? He does catering for Sakusa Industries and apparently they go way, way back—like high school days.”

“Samu, get to the point! I’m at the edge of my seat here,” Atsumu whines, patting serum over his cheeks with impatient slaps.

“Right, okay. So, Ushijima-san—somehow—makes time to interview me today. I dunno what kinda sorcery your boss pulls, Tsumu, but this man literally meets me at the door.”

Atsumu gasps. “Like—escorted you to his office?”

“Yes!” Osamu hisses. “Even his employees looked shocked as hell. And by the way, this guy is, like, total fuckin’ eye candy, Tsumu. I’ve never seen someone that hot in my life—”

Atsumu nods vigorously, nearly sending serum flying. “I *met* him during Sakusa’s party. Where does he get off lookin’ like a walkin’ billboard?”

“Right?!” Osamu’s voice is almost reverent. “Anyway, Mr. Eye Candy slides me this offer across the table like he’s dealin’ cards—and it’s a ready-made contract, my name and all. Like, *poof*, just there—”

“And?!” Atsumu demands when Osamu trails off.

“Tsumu, I—*he’s offering three-hundred thousand yen a month*, with transportation coverage and *housing*.” Osamu whispers it like it’s holy, like saying it too loud might make it disappear.

Atsumu swallows, blinking fast. “Holy shit, Samu. That’s—*that’s amazing*.”

“He even pays overtime,” Osamu says, voice shaking now. “And I get *two whole days off a week*.”

Atsumu’s chest tightens, tears welling before he can stop them. “Samu, I’m so—so fucking happy for you. I—” His voice breaks, laughter and tears blurring together.

Osamu laughs too, wet and disbelieving. “I start September 20th, so if we visit Ma next Friday, we can stay a whole two weeks, Tsumu.”

Atsumu exhales a stunned laugh, the relief bubbling out of him like champagne. “Hell yeah, Samu. Fuck, this is amazing news—you’re gonna work in a *luxury hotel!*”

“In the *frickin’ Ritz-Carlton*, Tsumu.” Osamu sounds like he’s vibrating out of his skin. “Holy shit, I’m tempted to drop outta uni.”

“Oi, hakuna your tatas,” Atsumu snorts, wiping his cheeks. “You didn’t get this far with your degree just to drop out.”

“I know, I know—I’m kidding. Hey, listen, I gotta go, Suna’s comin’ over.”

“Ohooo,” Atsumu leers, instantly recovered. “*Coming over, ya say?*”

“God, get your head outta the gutter, ya pig,” Osamu groans. “We’re having a movie marathon.”

“Sure, sure—ya let me know how that *marathon* goes,” Atsumu cackles, delighting in Osamu’s sputtering outrage as the call cuts off. Ah. Nothing beats tormenting his twin.

When the laughter fades, Atsumu catches his reflection in the mirror—and it hits him like a punch. His chest feels lighter. He hadn’t realized just how much the guilt was weighing on him until the weight was gone. Osamu is going to be okay. He’s going to have a real job, with real pay, and won’t have to scrape by or quietly accept Atsumu’s charity.

And all of this—this miracle—is because of Sakusa.

Heart pounding, Atsumu pads out of his room in search of him. He finds Sakusa in the library, hunched over his usual foreign language notes, a pen tucked behind his ear. He looks so much like a university student cramming for finals that Atsumu has to blink. This is the same poised, untouchable businessman who left him reeling this morning?

Sakusa looks up as the door opens.

Atsumu closes it softly behind him, leaning back against the wood like it’s holding him together. His smile wavers, gratitude and emotion tightening his throat.

“Samu signed an offer letter,” he says, voice warm and trembling.

“Ah. Yes. Wakatoshi told me,” Sakusa nods, a faint smile curving his lips.

“Sakusa, I—” Atsumu stops, swallows hard. The words tangle and catch, too small for the storm in his chest. “I can’t thank you enough. You don’t know what you’ve done. You… you’re changing Samu’s life for the better. His old jobs really sucked. I haven’t heard him this excited in years.”

Sakusa sets his book down, his smile softening, curling just a touch higher. “I’m glad to hear that. He seemed like an earnest guy—and if he’s anything like you, I know he’ll live up to the role.”

Atsumu’s stomach flips once, twice, like the world just shifted under his feet. “Oh.”

“Did you need anything?” Sakusa asks after a pause, tilting his head.

“N-no,” Atsumu stammers, a shaky chuckle caught in his throat. “Just... wanted to thank you. Do you need anything?”

“Ah.” Sakusa chuckles, low and warm. “No. Just your good health.”

Atsumu’s face burns, his chest a wildfire of emotions he can’t name fast enough. All he can do is nod, murmuring a soft goodnight before he slips out of the library, heart pounding.

Just your good health.

Sakusa cares, Atsumu realises, gripping the railing as he nearly misses a step on the stairs. Genuinely, wholeheartedly—he *cares*.

Cares about *Atsumu*.

Echoes Through Time

Chapter Summary

Sakusa lingers a step away, framed by the soft light of the entryway. There's a quiet tension to the way he surveys Atsumu, his gaze moving over him like he's cataloging every detail before he lets him go. "That's good," Sakusa says, voice level but edged with something Atsumu can't quite name. "Kanao will be here soon to drop you and Osamu off at the station."

Atsumu's chest swells, warm and achy all at once, and he offers a crooked, grateful smile. "You really spoil me, y'know."

Chapter Notes

Welcome back to TMLTL, wherein I cook SakuAtsu on medium to low heat and leave them to simmer for a while.

I can safely say we hit the mid point of this fic now, and this chapter marks a shift in SakuAtsu's dynamics.

I really hope this fic brings you as much joy as it brings me.

Thank you for all the love and support, it means the world ♥

[The Miya Household.](#)

Join TMLTL's [discord](#) server for sneak peeks, nerding out, games and unhinged chatter (psst... the voice in your head telling you to do it is me) ♥

Atsumu stands in the genkan, shoes lined up neatly by the door, handbag packed and slung over his shoulder. He does a final check, patting each pocket like a nervous traveler: wallet, keys, phone, earphones for the long train ride to Osaka—and most importantly, his worn little fox plushie tucked safely inside. "Alright," he mutters, half to himself, "all set."

Sakusa lingers a step away, framed by the soft light of the entryway. There's a quiet tension to the way he surveys Atsumu, his gaze moving over him like he's cataloging every detail

before he lets him go. “That’s good,” Sakusa says, voice level but edged with something Atsumu can’t quite name. “Kanako will be here soon to drop you and Osamu off at the station.”

Atsumu’s chest swells, warm and achy all at once, and he offers a crooked, grateful smile. “You really spoil me, y’know.”

The corner of Sakusa’s mouth tilts upward—barely, but enough to feel like sunlight breaking through a cloud—and Atsumu is halfway to basking in it when his shrill ringtone cuts through the moment, Oat’s name flashing across the screen. “Ah, that’s my cue to go. Thanks again for this, Sakusa. I really... I appreciate it. A lot.”

Sakusa inclines his head, the hesitation in his posture speaking louder than his words. He steps forward, close enough that Atsumu catches a hint of that clean, sharp scent he always carries, and places a firm, warm palm on his shoulder. The simple squeeze feels like a promise. “Safe trip, Atsumu.”

Atsumu’s stomach knots so hard it’s almost painful, and all he can manage is a nod. “Thanks, Sakusa. See you in two weeks.”

“See you.”

Atsumu boards the car with his thoughts still spinning, the hum of the engine and the passing scenery little more than background noise to the storm in his chest. The moment he buckles his seatbelt, he’s hit by the realisation again: Sakusa *cares*.

Not in some vague, polite way. Not just because he’s Atsumu’s boss. But in all those subtle, unspoken moments—checking on him, cooking soup, saying his name like it’s something worth holding onto. Now that Atsumu’s seen it, he can’t unsee it. Every conversation, every gesture, every silence between them feels like it means something more.

It unsettles him. In a good way. Maybe too good.

He’s so caught up in these thoughts that Osamu’s nudge jolts him like a snap of fingers. “What’s with ya?” Osamu squints, just as they pull into the station parking lot.

“Nothin’,” Atsumu mutters, forcing a yawn as if to wave the feeling away. He hops out and waves goodbye to Oat. “I’m sleepy.”

Osamu’s mouth twists, unconvinced. “Aha.”

Four and a half hours. That’s how far home is. Four and a half hours until he’s surrounded by family, by the warmth and noise and familiarity he’s been starved of for over a year. His heart gives a flutter so strong it feels like a skipped beat. He misses them so much it hurts. The thought rises up and overtakes every other one—Sakusa’s careful touches, his quiet voice, even the knots in Atsumu’s stomach.

“Y’know what I really wanna do once we get home?” Atsumu says suddenly as they board the train, unable to keep the longing out of his voice.

Osamu is already untangling his earphones, scrolling through his Netflix downloads like he’s been preparing for this journey all week. “What?”

“Sit in the backyard with a mug of hot chocolate and listen to one of Granny’s stories,” Atsumu says, his smile going soft and faraway. “At least I know she’ll always have some ta tell.”

Osamu’s own smile tugs at the corners of his mouth, faint but warm, and he knocks their shoulders together. “I’m sure she does.”

Atsumu doesn’t hesitate to lean his head against Osamu’s shoulder, letting his eyelids fall. He’s too tired to fight for pride right now. “Don’ mind me using you as a pillow.”

Osamu sighs, a long-suffering sound that fails to hide the fondness underneath. “Go to sleep, scrub.”

“Love you, too,” Atsumu mutters, the words muffled by exhaustion.

But sleep doesn’t come right away. His mind drifts back, almost against his will—Sakusa’s hand on his shoulder, the quiet squeeze, the way his voice caught just slightly on *safe trip*. Atsumu frowns faintly. It’s not the first time Sakusa’s gone out of his way for him, but lately, it’s starting to feel different... heavier, almost. He doesn’t know what to do with that.

He shoves the thought aside, focusing on the steady rhythm of the train, the promise of home.

Osamu shakes him awake at some point. “We’re almost there. Also, yer drooling on me.”

Flustered, Atsumu wipes at his mouth. “Sorry.”

They disembark with their luggage, the familiar air of home wrapping around them like a well-worn blanket. The streets are the same—quiet, sunlit, lined with memories. They pass their regular konbini, their favorite ramen stand, and even Yoshida-sensei, who calls out with the same booming voice, gripping their hands warmly as if no time has passed.

Then, at last, their house comes into view. The stone pathway leading to the entrance is lined with overgrown bushes, the sakura tree arching over it like a guardian of their childhood. Atsumu’s shoulders loosen as they step forward, his chest filling with that serene, grounding sense of home.

“Ma, we’re home!” they call as they step inside, voices carrying down the hallway.

There’s a sharp gasp, a clatter, and then hurried footsteps. Their mother rounds the corner, chestnut hair tumbling from a messy bun as she dries her hands on her apron. “My babies,” she beams, eyes glistening, “yer here!”

“Tadaima,” Atsumu and Osamu chorus, grins so wide their cheeks ache.

“Okaeri,” Ma whispers before hauling them both into a crushing hug. They bend instinctively to meet her height, laughing as she peppers their faces with dozens of kisses. “Oh, how I’ve missed you.”

She pulls back to inspect them critically, eyes narrowing at Osamu. “Samu, when did ya get so skinny!? Don’t tell me yer skipping meals again!”

“Ma,” Osamu groans. “It gets so busy!”

“Busy or not,” she huffs, hands on her hips, “you’re eating properly now. I made plenty of food.”

“Ma,” Atsumu grumbles, but he’s smiling helplessly as he chases after her down the hallway. “You shouldn’t trouble yerself!”

“Nonsense!”

As they walk, Atsumu’s gaze lingers on the framed photographs lining the walls—time itself captured in snapshots. There they are as toothless toddlers, then gangly teens in volleyball jerseys, and now adults. The sight tugs at his chest, all tenderness and bittersweet ache.

“Where’s Granny?” he asks, swallowing the sudden lump in his throat.

“She’s in her room. Go say hi,” Ma says, her smile softening. “She’s having a good day.”

Atsumu’s heart swells, and without a word, he and Osamu bolt down the hallway, knocking on her door until her withered voice calls them in.

“Granny~”

Her hazel eyes go wide, shimmering with recognition, and then she’s on her feet, arms outstretched, drawing them into a trembling hug. “Oh my boys. Yer here! Yer here!”

“We’re here,” Atsumu murmurs, voice thick as he buries his face in her neck. She still smells like sunshine and warm laundry. “Told ya I’d visit soon.”

“You’re so big!” she exclaims when she pulls back, cupping his cheeks with frail hands. “What are they feeding kids these days!”

Atsumu laughs softly, running a hand through her silver hair. “Lots and lots of protein.”

“Even so,” she says with quiet conviction, “you’ll always be my babies.”

The twins squeeze onto her bed without hesitation, one on each side, leaning into her warmth like they did when they were small.

“I missed ya so much, Grans,” Atsumu says.

“So, so much,” Osamu echoes, pressing a kiss to her temple.

Granny’s eyes crinkle with joy as she kisses them both in turn. “This calls for a celebration! I’ll bake you boys yer favorite cookies.”

“Grans, no,” Atsumu protests. “Don’t trouble yourself.”

“Oh, but it’s no trouble at all!” she insists, already trying to stand.

Osamu laughs and gently guides her back down. “How about later? Just sit with us now. We’ll make cookies later, ‘kay, Grans?”

She relents with a wistful sigh. “My little boys are growing up so fast.” Her voice softens. “Come here. Let me tell ya ‘bout the first time yer grandpa tried to make cookies and nearly burned the kitchen down!”

Atsumu leans back against the headboard, resting his head against her side, smiling as her voice carries him back through the years.

He’s home now.

Home, he thinks, isn’t just walls or a roof—it’s this. The smell of cookies, the sound of laughter, the arms that have never stopped being open for him.

Home—another realisation dawns suddenly on the heel of that thought—is not a place at all. It’s also the hush of piano keys at midnight, the silent care tucked into small gestures, and the gaze that tells him, without words, that he’s safe.

He gets a text late that night, just as he and Osamu are winding down for bed.

The screen lights up, and his heart jolts like someone plucked a taut string inside his chest.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *hope everything’s okay on your end, and that you made it home safe.*

Atsumu stares. His pulse stutters and skips, like a broken music box winding itself into silence and starting all over again.

Osamu squints at him from across the room, toothbrush dangling from his mouth. “You okay?”

“Um—yeah.” Atsumu fumbles, shoving his phone into his pocket like it’s some kind of incriminating evidence. Away from Osamu’s dissecting gaze, away from the harsh bathroom light. He brushes his teeth with unnecessary force, then bolts for bed.

Atsumu waits for Osamu to settle into the bottom bunk before unlocking his phone under the covers, the screen’s glow bright against the dark. His thumbs hover.

Hey, thanks for checking up on me. I'm okay, spent the day baking with Grans. Apparently, once upon a time my grandpa almost burnt the kitchen down because he fell asleep while the cookies were baking.

He grimaces. *Oversharing much?* He hesitates, thumb trembling, before pressing send—and then shoving the phone under his pillow like a coward.

It's not like Sakusa's going to reply this late—

The vibration against his cheek makes him jump.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *What did you bake?*

Oh.

Surprise floods him, dizzying and warm. His fingers move before he can think.

Cookies. Samu and I kinda fought over what kind of cookies, then Grans decided to make both. Samu wanted hato sabure and I wanted sabo polo haha.

The reply is instant.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *personally, I'm a kawara senbei guy, but I'd pick a sabo polo over hato sabure any day. I think your brother needs to get his tastebuds checked.*

A startled laugh bursts out of Atsumu. He slaps a hand over his mouth, shoulders shaking silently. *Stop, you made me laugh out loud and Samu is trying to sleep!*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Heh.*

Atsumu freezes. Heh. He blinks at the word like it's some mythical creature. Sakusa Kiyoomi just laughed over text.

His face burns. His heart's practically doing backflips.

He types, fingers deliberately steady: *Are you okay on your end?*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Just fine, yes. Though the house feels a little too empty now.*

A knot tightens in Atsumu's chest. He swallows as he replies: *It is a very big house for one person, for sure.*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *it never felt that way before you.*

Atsumu nearly yeets his phone into orbit. What the fuck, what the fuck, what the fuck. His heart is pounding so hard it's unfair.

His thumbs fly across the keyboard: *are you saying you missed me...?*

Nope. Too much. Backspace, backspace, backspace. Has he gone *mad*?

He tries again, leaning on humor like a crutch. *Aw man, I know I take up too much space, but I didn't realise I made myself that much of a nuisance!*

There. Professional. Distant. No feelies.

And Sakusa, with the subtlety of a brick, obliterates it.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *you're not a nuisance, Atsumu. And you're allowed to take up space. I'm sorry if I ever made you feel that way.*

Oh. God. His chest aches, like he's been cracked open. His fingers move instinctively.

No no no, you never made me feel that way! You've been so kind from the get-go. Don't let my self-deprecation make you think otherwise.

Oh, *definitely* feelies.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Ah. The Miya dark humour strikes again.*

It hits Atsumu like a delayed firework: he and Sakusa are texting. Not about work. Not about household chores or great domestic floods of dishwashing doom

They're... just texting.

Like—friends?

Oh.

A grin creeps up his face, uninvited, stretching until his cheeks hurt.

My humour is not that dark... he types.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *You moved in with a box labelled Existential Despair.*

“Oh my god,” Atsumu whispers, mortified. He slaps a hand over his face, like maybe that'll smother the heat rushing to his ears.

“What's going on with ya up there?” Osamu's gruff voice cuts through the dark like a dart finding its mark.

Atsumu nearly launches himself out of bed, phone slipping and smacking him square in the nose. “Ow!”

A silence follows, heavy with suspicion. “...Should I be worried?” Osamu asks, voice low and probing.

“No,” Atsumu blurts, far too quickly. “Go ta sleep, ya nosy lil shit.”

“Woow,” Osamu drawls. “Very subtle. Fine, keep your secrets. I'll pry them outta your teeth eventually. I always do.”

“Good luck with that,” Atsumu mutters, not even remotely threatened.

When Osamu’s breathing evens out again, Atsumu dives back to defend his honor:

my existential despair box contained cosmology books. if anything, it’s a literal title.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *you’re into cosmology?*

How does he explain this without sounding unhinged? That Atsumu has been on a relentless quest to make sense of a world so dark that all he can do is reach for the distant light of stars, hoping it will guide him to a place that makes sense (and maybe aches less).

He opts for vague: *I’m into a lot of things. Don’t you ever wonder what’s on the other side of a black hole?*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *not particularly. I do wonder what happened to the things that fall into it, though.*

Atsumu’s breath catches. Oh. Oh, they’re *talking talking*.

right? And I mean, the name is very misleading because it’s not a hole punctured in the universe... it’s more like a pocket, yeah? Gravity so intense it folds space-time by weighing it down.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I do vaguely remember studying this in high school... What fascinates you about it?*

What *doesn’t* fascinate him about it? Does Sakusa know about Hawking radiation? Or that the event horizon might store information like an eternal scar, because quantum physics says information can never be lost?

Ah, hell. The dam breaks. He’s entering *nerd mode* and not even his better judgment can stop him.

Okay, hear me out, Atsumu begins to type, thumbs flying, all wild theories about alternate realities and time travel aside, there’s this speculative idea that the interior of a black hole might connect to a baby universe or another dimension entirely. A pocket universe. The singularity could “pinch off” and form its own bubble of space-time.

There. Not too nerdy. Hopefully.

He braces for Sakusa to reply with something polite and dismissive—*cool*—and promptly pop the fragile bubble of his excitement.

Instead:

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *It’s more likely that it’s a dead end. Isn’t that what general relativity favours?*

A shiver skitters up Atsumu's spine, excitement winding tight in his chest. *Sure. But aren't the other possibilities just infinitely more fascinating?*

I suppose so, Sakusa replies.

Atsumu doesn't stop there—he's already riding the wave. *For example, there's the idea of a wormhole. Mathematically, the equations of general relativity suggest a black hole might be connected to a "white hole" (basically a time-reversed black hole where matter can only come out, not go in). Together, that would form a wormhole.* His fingers are a blur, typing, typing, typing. *Though realistically, these structures are probably unstable. They'd collapse instantly if anything tried to pass through them.*

Sakusa's typing bubble flashes. Pauses. Flashes again. Atsumu stares at his screen with bated breath.

Then:

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *You fascinate me, Atsumu.*

His breath catches. Oh.

Oh.

His face flames like he's just opened the oven too early and caught a blast of heat from Grans' cookies—something that's happened far too many times in his childhood.

Atsumu's response—just two letters, *oh*—feels pitiful in comparison, but it's all he can manage.

Then Sakusa's next message hits like whiplash:

What else fascinates you? I thought you were more of a biochem guy. But you're clearly into physics too. What else? Math? History?

Atsumu exhales shakily, his pulse still tripping over itself. Okay. So his disaster nerd brain had actually *garnered fascination*. Fine.

No one's ever wanted to hear him talk about this stuff before—not really. But if Sakusa is willing to let him infodump, then Atsumu is more than happy to oblige.

Next morning dawns too soon.

“Tsumu!” His mother gasps the moment she sees his dark circles. She tries to mask her concern with an enthusiastic greeting, but her eyes linger on his face a moment too long. “Have a seat. Breakfast is almost ready.”

The culprit of said dark circles makes himself known with a soft *good morning* text flashing across the screen.

Atsumu's lips twitch into a sleepy, crooked smile. He'd gone to bed at four in the morning—he and Sakusa had spent three hours spiraling down a science rabbit hole. Then Atsumu spent another hour wondering about all the other things he'd love to discuss with Sakusa.

This must be the comic relief spinoff to his life:

What If Miya Atsumu's Boss Is Also a Nerd?

Read more to find out!

Still grinning like a fool, he quickly types back a greeting before the rest of the family wanders in.

In the kitchen, Granny hums softly under her breath, moving in rhythm beside Ma like they've danced this routine a thousand times. The scent of soy and sesame wafts through the air. The clink of dishes, the gurgle of tea in the kettle.

The familiarity of it all wraps around Atsumu like a memory, and somewhere deep inside, a quiet yearning curls in on itself.

Granny, in her faded sunflower-print apron, stands at the counter preparing food, eyes drifting to the backyard. The morning light spills across the grass, where a stray cat or two doze in the shade like they belong.

She rounds behind him a moment later and leans over his shoulder to set down a plate of onigiri. Fatty tuna—his favourite.

His chest tightens. She still remembers. Even as she loses pieces of herself, she *remembers*. It carves something hollow and tender out of him every time.

He catches her hand before she can pull away and presses a kiss to her knuckles. "Thanks, Grans."

She beams, eyes soft as she kisses the crown of his head. "Anything for my sunshine boy."

Oh, how it aches—in his bones, in his throat, behind his eyes.

My sunshine boy.

Once said with reverence when he was a toddler, murmured into soft, wispy hair. Later, spoken through a smile as he ran in from his first day of school, grass-stained and proud. It's a nickname that's chased him through time—from the moment he came into the world to the edge of it.

He smiles sadly. He'll always be her sunshine boy. But the boy who once fit that name so perfectly is now ten years older, worn down at the edges, trying to make sense of things far too big for him.

And yet, the name holds him still.

Next to him, Osamu watches quietly, gaze unreadable but heavy. He knows. Of course he knows.

Atsumu shakes himself out of it, summoning a grin that's more mischievous than mournful. He elbows his brother lightly. "Hey, Samu. Wanna take the bikes out after breakfast?"

"Oh boy," Ma sighs, setting bowls of steaming udon down on the table. "Aren't ya boys a little old for racin' bikes down hills?"

"No such thing as too old for a bike!" Granny declares.

"It's not the bike, Kaa-san," Ma huffs. "It's the skinned knees and busted elbows I'll be patchin' up after."

Osamu grabs a pair of chopsticks. "What am I supposed to do, Ma, it's always Atsumu eggin' me on."

Atsumu gasps, scandalised. "*Ha?! Yer the one always talkin' so much shit I'm surprised ya ain't got a diploma in it!*"

"Telling you your form sucks is an *observation*," Osamu replies smoothly, eyes gleaming like he's one petty comment away from achieving full evil twin status.

"Yer *face* sucks," Atsumu shoots back, petulant.

A firm palm lands on both their heads. They freeze. Oh no.

Atsumu braces for the smack, but it never comes.

Instead, Ma lets out a laugh—warm and surprised—and scruffs their hair with a fondness she doesn't bother to hide. "Ah... This is so nostalgic. You never change."

She leans down, wraps her arms around both their necks, and grins like she's got the whole world under her roof again. "Lil shits from the day you were born. As constant as time."

"Ma," Atsumu groans, but he doesn't pull away. "Samu's the bigger little shit," he mutters.

"Ha! You're the biggest bigger little shit," Osamu fires back.

"That doesn't even *make sense!*"

"Boys," Granny warns gently, turning from the counter. "Settle down. There won't be any bike riding before breakfast."

"Sorry," they mumble in tandem, dragging their bowls close.

The warmth of the porcelain stings Atsumu's palms, but he savours it. The broth, the sunlight, the voices of his family layered in the morning air.

He drinks it in until it almost kills him.

So that one day, when he inevitably loses this—

He won't have any regrets.

What the Brain Forgets, the Heart Remembers

Chapter Summary

He presses the ring between them. “Look—I kept it. I remember your love. Grandpa’s stories. Your recipes. Your jokes. I remember it all. It’s still alive. It’s all here.”

She cups his hands around the ring, her smile faint but luminous. “You keep it, then. Love like your grandpa did. Fiercely.”

Then, quieter: “But promise me you won’t let it eat you up. Whatever I forget. Whatever I say.”

He nods, trembling. “I promise.”

Chapter Notes

Before I say anything, please go look at this [adorable fanart](#) Tobi drew 🥹💕💕💕💕💕💕

I bring you some angst this chapter, pls don’t hate me 🙏

I also bring you SakuAtsu feelies so I hope that makes up for it.

[Bekku Rice Terraces](#)

“Here,” Atsumu says as the old Toyota Corolla rattles to a stop. The terraced rice fields stretch out before them, bathed in the soft blush of twilight. Pink skies melt into purple, the sun dipping low behind the hills.

They’ve made it just in time.

“I’ll get the spread from the back seat.”

With practiced ease, they unload the checkered picnic blanket and their modest stash of snacks, wandering up the slope to find the perfect stargazing spot.

The moment Atsumu finishes laying everything out, Osamu flops down with a contented sigh. “God, I needed this.”

Atsumu follows with more restraint, settling back on his palms as he tips his head to the sky. “Yeah,” he murmurs, drawing in a breath of cool evening air that slips through his lungs like silk. He exhales slowly, grounding himself in the quiet.

Out here, away from deadlines and noise and neon lights, time unspools. Nature folds around them like a mother’s embrace, and Atsumu sinks into it gratefully. The sky deepens to indigo above them, stretching vast and eternal, and the full moon glows like an ancient eye watching over her children.

For the first time in weeks, he doesn’t feel like a cog in a machine or a ghost in someone else’s life. He just... exists. A living, breathing person lying under the stars with his twin beside him and the whole sky unfolding above.

He closes his eyes and listens: the rustling trees swaying in the breeze, the chirr of cicadas, Osamu’s relaxed breathing syncing with his own.

When he opens them again, he’s met with the dazzling sight of the Milky Way mirrored in the clear pools of the rice fields—a quiet marvel. Stars spill across the sky in silvery clusters, their light dancing across water and leaf. The galactic core glows warm: pinks, golds, violets smudged like pastel across the night.

It feels like the universe is exhaling. Or maybe he is.

Without thinking, Atsumu pulls out his phone and snaps a photo. It doesn’t come close to doing the view justice, but he sends it anyway.

To Sakusa.

They’ve been texting on and off for days now—casual updates, little snapshots of their lives shared like breadcrumbs on a trail. Conversations that stretch into the early hours, light but strangely grounding.

It still catches Atsumu off guard every time Sakusa replies. Prompt. Open. Like he’s waiting.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *is that a real place?*

Atsumu smiles, touched by the question.

Yeah. It’s real.

Bekku Rice Terraces in Yabu City, Hyogo.

Been coming here since Samu got his license.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *it’s beautiful. reminds me of Achi Village in Nagano. Do you like stargazing?*

Yeah, Atsumu replies simply. Because there’s no better word for it.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Nagano has some of the best stargazing spots in Japan. Kamikochi. Mount Yatsugatake. There's Lake Mashu in Hokkaido too. One of the clearest lakes in the world. Reflects the sky pretty nicely.*

Atsumu's smile deepens as the wall of text rolls in—long, detailed, filled with facts and poetic clarity. A language that's becoming familiar. Walls of text about chemistry. About physics. About cleaning solvents. And now this: constellations and lakes and light.

You can show me some day, he types back, breezy, the way he'd talk to Osamu or Kita.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *maybe when you come back.*

Atsumu stares at the message a beat too long.

I dunno, he sends finally, *tempted to stay here forever.*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *do you really mean that...?*

Nah, Atsumu replies, grinning. *Can't leave you to fend for yourself. What if the dishwasher stages another coup?*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *how noble of you. Going to war with kitchen appliances for me.*

Who said chivalry is dead 😏

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *still convinced you signed a secret pact with my appliances and cleaning products.*

Just cause the blender never craps out on me doesn't mean a pact was involved. Maybe I just got a magic touch.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *hm.*

Atsumu silently laughs, imagining Sakusa's skeptical little squint. Probably tilting his head too, like a suspicious cat. His phone buzzes again.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *shouldn't you be stargazing?*

Atsumu glances up at the sky, stars like crushed ice scattered across velvet. The moon lingers, ghost-pale and watchful, like a forgotten god peering down through the veil of stars.

Everything feels hushed. Far away.

He lets it wash over him before typing back:

Did you know the moon is forever falling toward the earth, but moving forward just fast enough to keep missing it?

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I didn't know that, no. I know gravity holds the moon in orbit.*

It's the same thought experiment as the falling apple, Atsumu types. Newton figured if gravity pulls apples down, maybe it pulls distant things too. So he imagined the moon as a kind of falling object—but instead of crashing down, it's falling around the Earth. Forever caught in a perfect, endless loop.

Sakusa doesn't reply right away.

Atsumu shifts, letting his head fall back against the woven picnic mat. Above him, the stars continue to blink like quiet spectators.

He wonders why he keeps telling Sakusa all the stray thoughts that live in his head. Things he doesn't really say to anyone else. Is it because Sakusa doesn't judge? Or maybe it's that he always, somehow, listens?

A smaller voice—quieter, slipperier—whispers something truer: *Maybe you just like sharing things with him.*

Then—

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Do you ever wonder if people fall into each other's orbit for a reason?*

Atsumu's breath catches. His fingers still above the keyboard as a thought rises from deep within—the same one that brushed past him earlier in the quiet.

He missed this. This moment. This calm. This strange, suspended peace.

And none of it—*none of it*—would've been possible without Sakusa.

Without Sakusa, he'd still be sprinting between part-time jobs and classes, living on protein bars and vending machine coffee. Falling asleep on top of unfinished assignments. Waking up hollow. Crying on Saturdays when everything cracked wide open from the weight.

But now...

Now he works from home. Somehow, home had become a high-rise with a safe hush and soft lights, where kindness lived behind cold marble and quiet gestures.

Now he's driven around in sleek black cars instead of running until his legs give out. Now he eats actual food. Hot food. Meals someone made for him.

But it's not just the material shifts. That's the shallow layer.

Sakusa... Sakusa also sat cross-legged on a library floor to help him study. Waited outside the bathroom to make sure Atsumu didn't slip in the shower when he was too drunk to stand. Listened to him ramble until he passed out. Hired Osamu when things were tight.

His chest stutters like it forgot how to breathe. His eyes blur unexpectedly, the burn sharp and real.

So much of his life has changed. And all of it—*all of it*—because of Sakusa.

His fingers move again, this time slower. Careful.

I... I don't know, he types, honest to the bone. *But I'm thankful for the forces that be that I fell into yours.*

Something shifts after that.

The messages grow more frequent, like the distance between them is aching to be bridged. The night becomes a quiet, watchful companion, sitting beside Atsumu's dimly lit screen, listening in on Sakusa's thoughtful observations.

Osamu breathes steadily in sleep nearby while Atsumu, eyelids heavy, stares at a thread of texts that keeps lengthening—now peppered with pictures: of meals, of his childhood home, of his favourite corner streets, of stray orange cats lounging on warm pavement.

In these hushed hours, Atsumu thinks—quietly, without fanfare—that Sakusa is slowly unspooling him.

Layer by layer, he's being drawn open, and Sakusa is peering inside like he's found something worth uncovering. Atsumu swallows hard.

The professional boundary between them is softening, blurring, becoming harder to name. And he doesn't know what to do with that.

All he knows is that he doesn't want to leave this strange, secret space they've carved out between softly lit screens, between one message and the next.

In the mornings that follow, Ma greets him with a knowing look—the kind only mothers possess. Like she knows Sakusa is the reason Atsumu is staying up at night.

Osamu watches him, too, with quiet judgment that Atsumu chooses to ignore. Because what would he even say if asked? *I think Sakusa and I might be friends now?*

It sounds banal. Inadequate.

As if *friendship* could explain a connection that thrives on theories about black holes, the soul, and the chemical structures of wonder.

Every night, like clockwork, Sakusa asks:

Got any scientific facts for me this evening?

And every night, Atsumu smiles.

Because yes. Always.

“Kita-san's coming over,” Osamu pipes up, tugging Atsumu out of his reverie. “Said he'll bring some of his Obaa-san's sweets.”

“Oh,” Atsumu says, pleasantly surprised. “Being home’s really spoiling us, huh?”

“Mhm.”

“Tsumu, Samu!” Ma calls from the kitchen, her voice raised over the gushing tap. “Go help Grans in the backyard! She wants to pluck peaches before Kita-kun arrives!”

“Hai!” they chorus, clambering up from where they’d been splayed across the tatami, lazily sorting a deck of old playing cards.

They find Granny in the backyard, her woven basket hooked over one arm, her soft pastel-pink cardigan fluttering in the breeze. She’s on tiptoe, reaching for a sun-warmed peach low on a branch, her silhouette framed by the lazy afternoon light.

“Hi, Grans,” Atsumu murmurs as he leans down to kiss her temple, gently easing the fruit from her fingers.

She startles with a tiny gasp and lightly swats his chest. “Tsumu! You gave me a fright.”

“Sorry, darlin’,” he chuckles, rubbing her shoulders with warm affection. “Why don’t ya sit this one out and let Samu and me take over?”

“But—”

“No buts!” Osamu chimes in cheerfully, already swooping in to steer her toward the old wooden swing beneath the eaves. “Pretty ladies get tea and shade duty.”

Granny swats at him with a pleased huff, her cheeks tinged with pink. “Oh, stop flattering this old grandma. Look at these wrinkly hands.”

Osamu catches them delicately in his own and presses a kiss to her knuckles. “Pretty wrinkly hands. I’ll make some tea. You sit tight.”

Granny exhales in mock exasperation, but her eyes shine with unmistakable joy. Atsumu watches her settle into the swing with a fond smile tugging at his mouth. His chest feels light—buoyant—as he turns back to the peach tree and begins plucking it clean. The basket slowly fills with sun-ripened fruit, the scent of peaches wrapping around him like a memory.

“Y’know...” Granny pipes up, voice drifting like the breeze. “Yer grandpa used to plant a peach tree every few years.”

Atsumu glances back, his fingers stilled on a stem.

“But when you and Samu were born,” she continues, “he planted two. Right over there. Said he was namin’ ’em Boke and Tsukkomi.”

Atsumu lets out a startled laugh. “Like the comedy duo? One makes the jokes and the other tells ’em to shut up?”

Granny nods sagely. “Said, ‘These two are gonna be arguin’ from cradle to grave, might as well name the trees after ’em.’”

Atsumu dissolves into chuckles, imagining his late grandfather with a twinkle in his eye and a shovel in hand. “Grandpa sounds like a real legend, Grans.”

“He was,” she says softly. “Passed when you were just a wee thing, but oh—he loved you both somethin’ fierce.”

Atsumu’s expression softens. He dusts off his hands and crosses back to her side, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and resting his head gently against hers.

“I’m sure he did,” he says quietly.

Osamu reappears a moment later, balancing a tray of tea and biscuits. He stops short, dramatically aghast at the sight of Granny cooing over Atsumu.

“Oi, why does Tsumu always get the good hugs?”

“Because he’s sweeter than you,” Atsumu says, tongue out as Granny laughs.

“Lies and slander!” Osamu barks, though the grin tugging at his mouth betrays him.

“Fetch the red photo album from my room, would you, Samu dear?” Granny says, still smiling. “I was just tellin’ Tsumu about the peach trees yer grandpa named after the two of you.”

Osamu lights up at the mention of a new story, his curiosity sparkling. He’s off in a flash and returns moments later, breathless and beaming. “Tsumu, you’re not ready. We look ridiculous in this one.”

Granny chuckles and flips open the album, her fingers reverent as they turn the well-loved pages. “You two were absolute terrors,” she says fondly. “Drew on the walls, fought over every toy, ate yer Ma’s lipstick...”

She stops at the first photo—a faded picture of Grandpa holding baby Atsumu and Osamu under two young peach trees.

“This,” she says with a soft smile, “is Boke and Tsukkomi.”

Below the photo, a handwritten note curls across the yellowing paper:

They ain’t meant to last forever. But they’ll grow fast, bloom hard, and make sure this place is never quiet. Just like these two.

“Gah, Grans, I’m gonna cry,” Atsumu mutters, scrubbing a hand over his face.

Granny nudges him affectionately, and with a knowing smile, turns the page—

Atsumu bursts out laughing, immediately joined by Granny and Osamu.

“Look at ya!” she wheezes, wiping away tears. “Wore yer Ma’s bra on yer head. Thought it was a hat!”

“In my defence, I look two,” Atsumu snorts, grinning as he shakes his head.

He barely has time to catch his breath before the back door swings open. Kita and Ma amble into the yard, carrying a tray of sweets and a fresh pot of tea.

“Kita-san!” Atsumu calls out, still giggling. “You came just in time. Grans is exposing us.”

Kita chuckles, greeting them all with a polite bow. “Good afternoon,” he says, and makes his way to the swing, sliding in beside Atsumu and peering over his shoulder at the album.

He smells faintly of green tea and mint, the familiar scent hitting Atsumu with a wave of quiet fondness.

“Fancy seein’ ya again,” Atsumu murmurs with a nudge.

“Told you I’d visit,” Kita replies with an easy smile. He tilts his head at the photo. “That you?”

“You can tell?”

“I mean...” Kita smirks. “Once a terror, always a terror.”

Atsumu gasps, scandalised. “Kita-san!”

Kita only laughs, giving Atsumu’s back a light pat full of warmth.

“They were *both* terrors,” Granny declares helpfully. “Ate the drywall once.”

Osamu groans into his hands. “Not this again...”

“It’s true!” Granny cackles. “Yer grandpa looked away for five minutes—five! Came back to find ya two pickin’ at the walls like they were candy. Yer poor Ma nearly passed out!”

Atsumu shrugs, smiling crookedly. “Well, I mean... we turned out fine.”

“I worry about you two,” Ma sighs as she pulls a chair up beside them. She pours Kita a cup of green tea with practiced ease, her movements gentle. “If Kita-kun lived closer to Tokyo, I might finally sleep through the night.”

Kita bows his head slightly, accepting the cup with both hands. “I’ll check in on them more often, Haruka-oba-san,” he promises, his smile soft and sincere.

“Kita-san just visited us last week,” Osamu says cheerfully. “We saw Aran-kun and Sunarin too. It was a great time.”

Ma perks up. “I’m glad you boys are enjoying yourselves,” she says with a smile, lifting her tea to her lips for a dainty sip. “Must be nice to be young and full of life.”

“Ma, yer not that old!” Osamu cackles, reaching over to tug playfully at her cheek. “Don’t think we forgot ya had us when ya were still in uni!”

She swats his hand away, laughing, her cheeks flushing pink. “Those were different times,” she insists, hiding behind her cup. “Back then, it was expected for a lady to marry young. Even if I went to nursing school, I wasn’t off the hook.”

“Well,” Atsumu says, reaching for a biscuit with a grin, “the good news is you’re only, what, two decades older than us? So we’ve got plenty of time together.”

Ma’s eyes soften. “That’s all I ever want,” she says quietly. “To spend as much time as I can with my two precious boys.”

Atsumu groans and presses his palms to his face. “Gah, Ma, I’ll cry. Enough with the sap already!”

Unrepentant, Ma snatches Osamu’s phone and snaps a picture. “You’re both so cute~”

Kita chuckles under his breath beside him. “Never change, Haruka-oba-san.”

Ma beams, basking in the laughter that circles the group like sunlight. Atsumu huffs and leans into Granny’s side again, resting his chin briefly on her shoulder as he peers back down at the photo album.

The images blur slightly in his vision, worn and soaked in memory.

A sip of tea fills his mouth with heat.

And somehow, that same heat spreads everywhere else too.

A slow, comforting swell of warmth—quiet and all-encompassing.

Like safety.

Like home.

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Atsumu stands in a sun-soaked field, hazy with memory. His feet are small and bare against the warm earth, and his hands are still soft—untouched by time, not yet aching with loss.

Granny kneels before him, her pink dress spread out in the dirt as she wipes his nose with a floral handkerchief.

“Blow again, Tsumu—yes, just like that. My good sunshine boy.”

He beams, toothless and bright, the sun in his eyes and the wind in Granny's long hair. He throws his arms wide, reaching for her.

She laughs and gathers him to her chest, warm and familiar. Her hand rests gently against the back of his head—and there, on her finger, the wedding ring gleams in the light.

“Oh, my sunshine boy...” she whispers into his hair. “I wish I could keep you locked away in my heart forever and ever.”

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Atsumu doesn't remember falling asleep that evening, only that he wakes to quiet voices in the kitchen and the distant hum of the TV in the living room. The ring against his chest—tucked beneath his shirt—feels like it's burning.

Something feels... off. Like the air has shifted while he was unconscious.

He rises slowly, the tatami mat cool beneath his feet, and pads out of the tea room, guided by a strip of light beneath the closed door.

The kitchen is aflutter with motion: Ma and Osamu are rinsing dishes. The living room glows with late-night quiet, Kita seated cross-legged, leafing through a book. But it's the hush beyond the hallway that draws him, tugs at something deep in his bones.

Granny's door is shut. Silence pools on the other side.

Atsumu knocks gently. “Grans?” he says, hesitant.

No reply.

He twists the knob and lets himself in.

At first, he can't make sense of what he's seeing. The room is dim—moonlight spills across the floor like spilled milk—and Granny stands by the window in her nightgown, tears carving silent tracks down her cheeks. Her drawers are pulled open, belongings strewn across the floor like someone went looking for something and forgot what they needed halfway through.

The room smells of jasmine and old tea, and a kind of sadness that feels like it's been folded into the wallpaper.

Her eyes find him.

“Tsumu?” she says, and her voice is soft—papery—but clear. Not clouded, not lost.

His breath catches. His heart stutters in his chest.

“Yeah,” he says quietly, careful not to startle the moment. “It’s me. I’m here.”

Her gaze drifts to his chest. To the thin silver chain around his neck.

“Is that... mine?”

His fingers rise instinctively to the ring. It’s warm from sleep, a little worn from years of constant wear. “Yeah,” he whispers. “It’s yours.”

She looks at it for a long while. Then lifts her eyes to his. “I’m sick, aren’t I?”

There’s no tremor in the words. No confusion. Just quiet clarity. A flicker of grief in full awareness.

He steps forward, slowly. Not too close. Enough to anchor the moment. Enough to be near.

“Yeah,” he says again, and his voice breaks.

She nods, a slow, weary thing. Her eyes roam the room—at the photos, the trinkets, the comb she’s had since she was twenty. Her favorite knit blanket is clutched around her shoulders, clinging like it’s the only thing keeping her grounded.

“I forget things,” she murmurs, eyes distant. “But I don’t want to forget you.”

His throat tightens. Words pile up and collapse in his mouth. “You won’t,” he manages. “I promised you. I’d carry you with me every day. Even if your mind wandered off, you wouldn’t be alone.”

Her hand reaches out, a fluttering motion, and he takes it gently. Her grip is soft but unsteady, a tremor dancing between their fingers. She tries to smile through her tears, her chin quivering despite herself.

“You’re still Granny,” Atsumu says, voice thick. “Still the one who bakes us cookies. Still the one who calls me her sunshine boy even when I’m being a little shit.”

She huffs a wet laugh, collapsing slowly into his chest, and he wraps his arms around her like he’s holding something precious and fragile and impossibly heavy.

“You still like your tea too sweet. You still fuss when I don’t wear socks. You still scold me for staying up too late, even when I’m twenty-five and grown.”

He kisses the crown of her head. “You’re still here.”

“We’ve had this conversation before,” she says softly, voice muffled against his shirt. “Haven’t we?”

“Yeah,” he says. “A few times now.”

She pulls back, eyes damp. “I’m sorry, Tsumu.”

“Don’t be,” he whispers, wiping at her cheeks. “We can have it a thousand times. I’ll remember for both of us.”

He presses the ring between them. “Look—I kept it. I remember your love. Grandpa’s stories. Your recipes. Your jokes. I remember it all. It’s still alive. It’s all here.”

She cups his hands around the ring, her smile faint but luminous. “You keep it, then. Love like your grandpa did. Fiercely.”

Then, quieter: “But promise me you won’t let it eat you up. Whatever I forget. Whatever I say.”

He nods, trembling. “I promise.”

She inhales, and for a moment it seems like she might say something more. But then she looks around the room with a dazed blink.

“Oh dear,” she whispers, as if waking from a fog. “I made a mess, didn’t I?”

She begins to bend down, arms trembling.

Atsumu catches her wrist gently. “Let me.”

He kneels. Begins to gather the scattered photo albums. His fingers shake, but he doesn’t stop. He holds the pieces of her life with reverence, as if by putting them back he can somehow hold her in place too.

Granny watches, quiet again. Somewhere in her eyes, the light begins to fade.

But Atsumu stays kneeling, his back straight, his hands steady, his heart open—ready to be her anchor until she forgets again.

When Atsumu tentatively steps into the living room after settling Granny into bed, the quiet rustle of the shoji door draws Kita’s gaze. His brow furrows at once.

“Atsumu-kun? Are you alright?”

“I…” Atsumu starts, then falters.

Kita pats the spot beside him on the tatami mat in silent invitation. Without a word, Atsumu crosses the room and lowers himself beside him, cross-legged but hunched inwards, his shoulders curved protectively around a heart still trembling.

He stares at the polished grain of the low table, eyes unfocused. His voice comes out brittle:

“She remembered. For a moment.”

“Ah,” Kita says, so softly it’s nearly a breath. He reaches for the teapot and carefully pours Atsumu a fresh cup, the sound of liquid filling porcelain the only noise between them.

Atsumu takes it with fingers that feel numb, almost too far away to belong to him. The cup is hot—almost too hot—but he welcomes the bite of it, lets it sting him back to life.

“The human mind is so cruel, Kita-san.”

They fall into a long, quiet stretch. The room is dim, lit only by the soft blue wash of the TV screen, and the scent of roasted tea lingers in the air like something holy.

Kita sips his tea without urgency. Atsumu stares into his like it might hold the answer to something ancient and unspeakable.

Then—a gentle palm lands atop his head.

Atsumu startles slightly, turning to look. Kita meets his gaze with that same unwavering calm, eyes kind.

“It’s also beautiful,” he says softly. “Even when it’s breaking, it loves. It hopes. It dreams. I hope you learn to forgive Obaa-san’s mind... for being sick.”

Atsumu’s eyes brim again. He swipes at the tears before they can fall. “Yeah,” he murmurs.

Kita’s hand shifts, blunt nails scratching lightly at his scalp—comforting, steady, the way you’d soothe a child too old to be rocked but still in need of something constant.

“Would you like me to sit with you for a while,” Kita asks, “or would you rather go to sleep?”

“Are you staying the night?” Atsumu’s voice is barely above a whisper.

“Yes,” Kita nods. “Haruka-oba-san insisted.”

“Okay,” Atsumu exhales. “Let’s sit here for a while.”

He lies back slowly on the tatami mat, arms folded beneath his head, and lets the stillness wash over him. The TV flickers, quiet and pale against the far wall. The house hums around them—wood creaking, the wind nudging at the windows, distant murmurs from the kitchen.

Kita watches him for a beat, then sets his book gently aside. “I’m sorry, Atsumu-kun,” he says. “I can’t imagine how much it hurts.”

Atsumu gives a small nod, eyes fixed to the ceiling. “Yeah,” he whispers. “Hurts like a stab wound...” He wipes at his eyes again—gritty from sleep, sore from unshed tears.

There’s a pause.

“What’re ya reading?”

Kita lifts the corner of his mouth in the faintest smile. “It’s a book about the history of rice farming.”

Atsumu huffs out a weak laugh. “Very *Kita-san* of you.”

Kita chuckles, the sound low and warm.

“Read out loud?” Atsumu asks, voice lighter now, almost shy.

Kita nods. His smile curves, so earnest it chokes Atsumu. “Of course,” he says, retrieving the book and leafing back to his page.

He reads aloud, calm and deliberate, his voice wrapping around the space like a blanket.

“Rice cultivation in Japan dates back roughly 3,000 years. It marked a significant shift from a hunter-gatherer society to one based on agriculture...”

Atsumu listens, lashes lowered. The rhythm of Kita’s voice soothes something raw inside him. Each word a balm. Each sentence a small bridge back to steadiness.

He lets his eyes flutter shut. Lets the cadence of rice and rivers and harvests carry him somewhere gentler.

Somewhere where Granny’s mind isn’t made of thorns.

Somewhere he can hold her without bleeding.

absence makes the heart grow fonder

Chapter Summary

“...But me, Sakusa? I’m just a guy with all this love they gave me... and no one to pass it on to.”

His teeth click shut. Exhaustion settles deep in his bones.

He expects Sakusa to say goodbye, to offer a quiet apology, or just to let the silence stretch. Instead, Sakusa says softly, “Okay. So pass it on to me. Tell me about your grandparents. I’ll carry it with you.”

Chapter Notes

Just so you know, I threw my phone across the room at least 3 times while writing this, they make me so unhinged god help us all

Without further ado, enjoy this SakuAtsu offering!

The house is as still as a held breath when Atsumu wakes for the second time, with no memory of having fallen asleep.

He’s still in the living room, curled on the tatami mat and swaddled in one of Ma’s handknit blankets. It smells like the family’s laundry detergent—floral, faintly citrusy, and deeply familiar—and he buries his face in the sleep-warmed folds, inhaling like it might anchor him to the present.

He gropes blindly for his phone beside him, coming up empty—until memory clicks into place. He left it in his room.

Atsumu startles. He hasn’t checked his phone all day. He slept in, passed out on the floor, and somehow fell asleep again. It’s been *hours*.

His breath echoes loud in his ears as he pads through the hallway, bare feet brushing against the floorboards.

Osamu is dead asleep in their old room, mouth half-open. Kita’s curled on a futon on the floor, the blanket tucked with military precision around his shoulders.

He feels around the furniture blindly, almost stubbing his toe until he finds his phone resting on his old study table, screen dim, battery at 60%. A missed call stares back at him—Sakusa. Atsumu's breath hitches as he unlocks the screen and scrolls through his notifications.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I'm visiting Motoya today, he sends his greetings.*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Actually I said he should have brought you along to meet Hiro-kun! — Motoya*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I told him you're visiting family. He's being nosy and wants to interrogate you. If he steals my phone again ignore him.*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I hope you're well. Take care.*

That was from late morning while Atsumu was still wrapped in bed, indulging in a rare lie-in until eleven, before Osamu came screeching about chores and launched a pillow at his head.

The rest of the messages are from a few hours ago.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Earth to Atsumu, are you alive or did you drop your phone in the toilet?*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *...you better be dead and not ignoring me, Miya Atsumu 🙄*

Atsumu nearly drops his phone.

An emoji. A whole-ass emoji. From Sakusa Kiyoomi.

What the fuck.

The final message hits gentler, warm enough to leave a mark.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *...fine I take that back, please don't be dead but kindly don't ignore me either*

Atsumu smiles down at his screen, heart cracking open just a little.

The guilt seeps in, too. He hadn't meant to ignore him. Just... life happened. Emotions, exhaustion, memories. All of it.

He starts to type a reply.

Stops halfway through.

"Fuck it," he mutters, abandoning the draft as he leaves the room in favour of the call button.

It's past three in the morning. But knowing Sakusa, he might still be up.

Probably.

Hopefully.

The call connects on the second ring, and Atsumu sags with relief.

“Atsumu?” Sakusa’s voice is low, steady like an anchor.

“Hey.” Atsumu clears his throat softly, surprised by how rough and fragile his own voice sounds. “Sorry I missed your call.”

A faint shuffle. The creak of a chair. The quiet rustle of fabric.

“That’s fine. Are you okay...?”

Is he? Atsumu wonders. Surrounded by family, warm and safe, yet feeling like a cracked ice cube melting into a glass that’s too warm—held gently but slipping away.

His silence stretches. Sakusa’s voice breaks through again. “What’s going on?”

“I...” Atsumu swallows hard, uncertainty thick in his throat. “I’m okay. Mostly. Just... had a pretty emotionally taxing night.”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“I dunno,” Atsumu murmurs, stepping outside into the quiet backyard. He curls up on the swing, resting his head against its frame. The neighborhood is still and sleepy; above him, the stars stretch vast and bright.

“Granny had a lucid moment. I guess... I’m a little shaken.”

There’s a pause on the other end—a silence heavy with understanding.

“I’m sorry, Atsumu.”

“I’m not,” Atsumu says after a breath. “I’m just grateful. Grateful for another moment with her—even if it hurts.”

Sakusa sighs softly. “I’m still sorry it has to be this way.”

“Yeah.” Atsumu’s fingers find the ring around his neck, tracing the cool metal through the darkness. The engraving is hidden in shadows, but his thumb moves over its delicate indentations.

“It’s kind of ironic.”

“What is?”

“When my grandpa proposed to Granny, he had the ring engraved,” Atsumu says, voice low, almost a whisper. “*For all the stories we’ll keep.*”

Sakusa doesn’t say anything right away. Atsumu’s mouth opens to share another thought.

“When Granny first got sick, she was so terrified of forgetting Grandpa that she started a journal—writing down her favorite memories of them together.”

The silence stretches between them, heavy and taut—like the night itself is holding its breath, waiting.

“Every story she told us had something to do with Grandpa,” Atsumu says softly, sliding his index finger into the ring. It’s too tight to pass the second knuckle.

He pauses, voice thick. “I could tell she was trying to keep him alive in her memory... even when she started forgetting why she was trying.”

“She must have loved him very much,” Sakusa murmurs, reverence folding his words.

Atsumu lets out a small, wet laugh—half smile, half sigh. “They were childhood friends, neighbors. Grandpa would sneak out in the middle of the night just to sit by her windowsill. They’d talk until dawn.”

Sakusa lets out a quiet, awed breath.

“She hasn’t forgotten those stories. Not yet,” Atsumu whispers, letting the ring slip down beneath his collar. “The old ones, at least. But there are stories now only I carry. I hold them close, so they’ll have a place to stay when Granny forgets.”

“That’s a heavy burden to bear, Atsumu.” Sakusa’s voice tightens, a quiet pain behind it.

“I don’t want them to be forgotten.” Atsumu’s breath catches. A tear slips down the bridge of his nose, landing softly on the back of his hand. “They taught me what love really means.”

He buries his face in his knees, struggling to steady his breath. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” Sakusa’s voice is gentle but firm. “I asked.”

“For calling you at three in the morning.” Atsumu’s voice is small.

“I called you first.” Sakusa’s tone carries a faint smile. “If anything, thank you for calling me back.”

Atsumu chuckles softly, the sound wet with lingering tears, and brushes at his face. “What’re you thanking me for? This must be pretty depressing to listen to.”

Sakusa sighs again, quieter this time. Atsumu barely has a moment to wonder what’s going through his mind before Sakusa speaks. “I want to know.”

“You want to know?” Atsumu’s voice catches, disbelief threading through the words.

“Yes. About you.” Sakusa’s tone is steady, deliberate. A shiver trickles down Atsumu’s spine. “What makes you laugh, what makes you cry, and why you are the way you are.”

Atsumu swallows hard, throat tight, heart fluttering in an uneven rhythm. “I—why?”

Sakusa falls silent, the space between them growing heavy.

“Why do you care?” Atsumu presses, voice rough. “What’s it matter why I’m the way I am? It’s not unique. I’m just some guy dealt a shitty hand. My grandparents’ love was so fierce, it made everyone believe in fairytales. That’s why I exist. Ma wasn’t so lucky. My father left before I could even remember his face. But I never felt like I was missing a parent. Grandpa was one hell of a man—I wish he was still here, just so I could ask how he did it. But me, Sakusa? I’m just a guy with all this love they gave me... and no one to pass it on to.”

His teeth click shut. Exhaustion settles deep in his bones.

He expects Sakusa to say goodbye, to offer a quiet apology, or just to let the silence stretch. Instead, Sakusa says softly, “Okay. So pass it on to me. Tell me about your grandparents. I’ll carry it with you.”

Atsumu’s breath hitches.

“I don’t know much about love. I wasn’t born from it. My parents didn’t have it. But your grandparents? That sounds like a love story worth holding onto. So tell me.”

“Sakusa, I...” Atsumu’s lips tremble, his eyes brim over.

“You’re not just some guy,” Sakusa says, voice low but steady, gaining quiet conviction. “You’re your grandparents’ child. Proof their love still lives. Proof stories don’t die when they’re held by the right hands.”

Atsumu buries his face in his shoulder, trying to steady his breath.

“I’m offering my hands,” Sakusa adds, voice soft, almost a whisper now. “Will you trust me to carry them? It would be an honour.”

“Yes,” Atsumu chokes out, voice thick. “Yes. Yes. Of course. How could you even ask—yes.”

Sakusa chuckles faintly, genuine. “Yes,” he repeats, a quiet invitation. “So tell me—how much trouble did your grandpa get into sitting at a girl’s windowsill like that?”

Helpless, Atsumu falls into giggles—wet, relieved laughter spilling free. “Oh God, they were the talk of the town. There was a whole scandal.”

“I can imagine,” Sakusa joins in, chuckling softly. “In that day and age? Definitely scandal-worthy.”

“Great grandpa would chase Grandpa away with a shovel. ‘Get a ring and come through the front door first, then we’ll talk, ya bastard!’” Atsumu mimics as best he can, grinning when Sakusa chokes on a laugh. “Grandpa didn’t come from money, so it took him years to come back with that ring.”

“Well, it all worked out in the end, and that’s all that matters,” Sakusa’s voice is warm, threaded with laughter. Atsumu wants to hear that again and again.

“They almost caused a real scandal though,” Atsumu confides. “Grans said she considered lying ‘bout being pregnant so her Pa would let them get married, but Grandpa refused.”

“Oh wow,” Sakusa says, genuinely caught off guard.

“What can I say? Grandpa was a real gentleman,” Atsumu snickers, the tears now distant memories. “He insisted on waiting until marriage—all to honour her virtue. It’s kinda sweet when you think about it, especially since, according to her at least, she was pretty willing.” Atsumu feigns gagging. “Grans was a menace.”

There it is again—Sakusa’s unpracticed laugh, a little raspy, trembling at the edges. But sweet. So sweet it makes Atsumu’s teeth ache.

“I fear if my grandpa ever told me something like that, I’d die of embarrassment,” Sakusa wheezes, amusement clear in his voice. “When did she tell you this? How old were you?”

Atsumu scratches the side of his nose, smiling bashfully. “Ten.”

Sakusa lets out a scandalised noise. “Ten! That’s a baby.”

“I dunno about you, but we had The Talk at, like, eight—”

“Stop,” Sakusa interrupts, pained. “Your poor innocent ears.”

Atsumu has to stifle his laughter, reminding himself it’s four in the morning. “I dunno, if you ask Ma, she’d say we weren’t innocent a day in our lives.”

“Do you know when I had The Talk?” Sakusa deadpans, unimpressed. “Never.”

“What? Seriously?”

“The Sakusas don’t tell you unless you’re getting married,” Sakusa replies, tone flat. Atsumu can practically hear the eye-roll. “Old-fashioned, yes. But I never got married, hence... no talk.”

Atsumu is, quite frankly, offended on his behalf. “That’s just rude.”

“Eh.” Sakusa exhales, deliberately breezy. “Probably for the best. Pretty sure I’d have flung myself into the sun if my father tried to give me The Talk. He’s not exactly a warm or... emotionally intelligent man.”

“A ‘you study, you work, you die’ kinda guy?”

Sakusa hums in thought. “More like, ‘you study and work until you die, and if you complain, you’re weak. Also, you’d better leave behind an heir.’”

Atsumu squints up at the sky. “You don’t have an heir.”

“Yes, an ongoing point of contention with Father Dearest,” Sakusa replies sweetly, his tone edged with sugar-coated venom. “Luckily for him, he’s got two other children who have no

qualms about procreating.”

“You have qualms about procreating?”

“...Atsumu. I’m gay. We’ve had this conversation.”

Atsumu flushes. “Ah. Right. Sorry. My bad.”

There’s a beat of silence. Then Sakusa lets out a laugh—short, sharp, and utterly delighted. It spills over into something wheezy, and Atsumu finds himself grinning so wide his cheeks ache.

“I can just *imagine* your face right now,” Sakusa manages between snorts.

“Hey!” Atsumu splutters, joining in. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Never mind that,” Sakusa manages, still recovering. “We went off on a tangent. Tell me more.”

“Oh, man,” Atsumu groans, but he’s already smiling. “Well, today I found out Grandpa planted two peach trees when Samu and I were born... and named them *Boke* and *Tsukkomi*...”

Atsumu doesn’t sleep until the sky begins to blush with the promise of morning, the stars paling as Sakusa gently coaxes him to bed.

His heart feels lighter when he finally curls beneath the sheets, the weight of the night softened at the edges. When sleep finds him, it’s slow and syrupy, slipping over him like warm honey.

That night, he dreams of Sakusa for the first time.

The dream is gauzy and disjointed, stitched together with soft light and half-formed thought.

Sakusa stands beneath the wide canopy of a peach tree, its branches swaying lazily in a breeze Atsumu can’t feel. Dappled sunlight spills through the leaves, catching on Sakusa’s hair like threads of gold. He’s looking up, murmuring something too distant to make out—but Atsumu hears his name, said like a secret.

It echoes through the dreamspace with aching gentleness.

He steps forward, hesitant, drawn in by the gravity of that voice. Sakusa doesn’t flinch. He simply shifts his weight, creating just enough space in his shadow for Atsumu to join him.

So he does.

They stand there together in the quiet hush of something not quite real and not quite false, the dream thick with peaches and summer and something like peace. Atsumu looks at Sakusa—

just looks—and the dream lets him.

Then the light changes, and the world dissolves.

Sleep thins at the seams.

And Atsumu wakes.

Atsumu rises slowly, the last wisps of his dream curling away like mist in the sunlight. The room is quiet, too quiet. He lies still for a moment, letting the memory of dappled light and Sakusa's smile flicker behind his eyes.

Then a loud thump jolts him fully awake.

He groans, dragging himself upright with all the grace of a landslide. The illusion of morning peace shatters as he hears rustling, muttering, and what sounds like a closet war being waged across the room.

Osamu is fretting around like a man possessed, elbow-deep in shelves and storage boxes.

“What're you doing?” Atsumu rasps, rubbing crust from his eyes with the heel of his hand.

“I'm looking for something,” Osamu mutters, half-smothered by a hanging jacket.

Atsumu leaves his bed and shuffles into his slippers with the dramatic weariness of someone twice his age. “What something?”

Osamu pauses, noticeably stiff. The back of his neck flushes a familiar pink. “... A letter Sunarin left behind when we were kids.”

Atsumu blinks. The sleep vanishes from his face in an instant, replaced with gleeful menace. “Suna left ya a love letter when he was thirteen? That's adorable~”

“Shut up,” Osamu grumbles, shoulders curling in defense.

Grinning, Atsumu shuffles toward the bathroom. “Why don't ya ask Ma? She's got the memory of a squirrel on caffeine. Probably archived it in a vault somewhere.”

Osamu bolts out of the room without another word.

Their Ma, it turns out, had done some spring cleaning and moved a few old boxes to the storage room.

His brother lets out a long, miserable sigh, his face folding into a frown.

Atsumu echoes the sound with a grunt. “C'mon, I'll help you look. Stop looking like a kicked puppy,” he grumbles, though his voice softens at the edges.

“Shut up, Tsumu,” Osamu mumbles, but doesn’t push him away.

They don’t say it, but there’s a quiet understanding that settles between them, familiar and wordless. The kind that only siblings can share.

Together, they pad down the hall, the weight of nostalgia trailing behind them like a second shadow.

The storage room feels like a secret pocket of the house, a place caught in suspended time—musty, dim, and thick with the quiet weight of forgotten things. Atsumu flicks on the light, and the pale glow spills unevenly across stacks of boxes, shelves heavy with dust, and shadowy corners that seem to hold their breath.

He steps in slowly, the air cool against his skin. He doubts the letter is buried in any of these large cardboard fortresses, but the room itself feels sacred somehow, like a shrine to memory.

In the far corner, next to the only window—smudged and streaked—stands a cabinet packed tight with Grandpa’s old books and trinkets. Maybe Ma had tucked the letter there, safely out of the way.

“Hi, Pops,” Atsumu murmurs, fingertips tracing the worn grain of the wood. Sometimes, he thinks, his grandpa’s spirit lingers here, in these quiet corners, living on in the things he left behind. “You wouldn’t happen to have Samu’s letter, would you?”

His fingers glide over the cracked spines of books—novels, poetry collections, dictionaries, encyclopedias. His lips curl at the sight of titles in foreign scripts, strange and beautiful, pulling his thoughts to Sakusa’s library.

Grandpa was a well-read man. Over five hundred books are crammed into this little space—stacked, shelved, folded into drawers, and packed tight in boxes. Atsumu vaguely remembers sitting in Grandpa’s lap, the old man’s voice rising and falling as he read poetry aloud from a cloth-bound anthology.

He pauses beside a leather-bound notebook, plain and unassuming, its spine unmarked and dusty. Not a novel—something more intimate. A diary?

A journal.

With care, Atsumu pulls it free, reverently brushing his fingers over the worn leather as if awakening a sleeping memory.

He cracks the journal open—and immediately has to scramble, hands fumbling to catch the slips of paper that flutter loose like startled birds. Yellowed notes drift to the floor, tea leaves pressed flat between pages like long-forgotten prayers, small scraps tucked into a plastic film pocket at the back.

Carefully, Atsumu gathers them. He smooths each corner with tentative fingers before returning them to their places, one by one.

There's a photograph too—faded into soft sepia tones—of a young boy in formal kimono, standing solemnly between two adults. Atsumu stares at it, heart tugged by the familiarity in the eyes. Grandpa, he thinks. As a child. The man who always smelled of sage and ink, who taught him how to whistle through his fingers.

He places the photo back with care, the corners gently curling like they're trying to fold into the past.

Curiosity leads him deeper, though hesitation makes his fingers clumsy. He flips through the pages with the cautious reverence of someone stepping through memory too sacred to name. He shouldn't read it—not really. This belonged to Grandpa. It was his.

And yet—

Atsumu stills.

His name, scrawled in familiar handwriting, catches his eye like a thread tugged tight.

*Though I ache to see you one day, strong—a man,
To let the spring of your youth grace the autumn of my years,
Still, I wish for you to remain a child,
So that life does not spend you too soon,
For life, my dear, is never long enough.*

Atsumu's breath catches. His fingertips hover over the words, tracing the faded ink with an awe that trembles.

“Oh, Pops...” he whispers, throat tight. The sorrow is gentle but deep, the kind that lingers.

Grandpa never got to see him grow—not in a way that truly matters.

He's a man now. Strong, yes. But only because life does not weep for the gentle; it breaks them, slowly and without a sound. Life has no mercy for those who cannot stand. Atsumu learned that the hard way.

He may not believe in an afterlife, not really. God, spirituality, the pearly gates—all a little beyond his reach. But he knows, with quiet certainty, that part of his grandfather still lives on: in the curl of his fingers, in the rhythm of his heart, in the marrow of his bones.

Maybe the steel in his spine is really just Pops, still holding him up. Still telling him, in that soft unshakable way, to be strong.

Always, to be strong.

Let nothing inside you wither—

for when it dies,

it might take you with it.

Speak.

Life is but a single moment,

unrepeatable.

Speak,

for your words may stir into being

the very thing your heart once longed for.

Be strong—

for life does not destroy the weak with noise,

but with quiet, merciless weight.

And be kind

to those you pass on your climb to the summit,

for you will meet them again

on your way back down.

No one remains at the peak forever.

“What are you doing?” Osamu’s voice cuts gently through the hush, drawing Atsumu from his reverie. He peers over Atsumu’s shoulder, eyes curious. “What’s that?”

“Grandpa’s journal, I think,” Atsumu says, quiet as breath.

“Ah.” Osamu’s voice mirrors the hush. Then, almost shyly, “I found the letter.”

“Yeah?” Atsumu smiles, warmth blooming in his chest. He reaches out and scruffs his knuckles through Osamu’s hair. “C’mon then, lover boy.”

They head out together, Atsumu leading the way with Grandpa’s journal cradled in one hand.

Sorry, Pops, he thinks, lips tugging into a bittersweet smile. I'm a selfish, nosy bastard—and this piece of you is coming home with me.

"I found Grandpa's journal," Atsumu says when they call that evening—when *he* calls, not with a greeting, but with another wandering thought, because their conversations have started to feel like a single, uninterrupted breath. One long thread of time, day bleeding into night and night into day, looping endlessly without clear beginning or end.

There is no yesterday. There is no tomorrow. Just the gentle hush of now, suspended in a quiet pocket of time that belongs only to them.

"Yeah?" Sakusa says, curious. He answers on the first ring—without surprise, without preamble, just a quiet, listening presence. Like a hand reaching out in the dark.

"Pops had a way with words," Atsumu tells him. "I've been trying to read it slowly to savour it, but the urge to binge it is *so* strong."

"I know the feeling. My grandfather left behind a few journals too," Sakusa says, and there's a shuffle on the other end—a door opening, closing, the rustle of fabric as he settles into some private corner.

A beat.

"It's comforting," Sakusa adds, quieter. "To read his thoughts. To hear some of mine already echoed there."

Atsumu smiles, small and fond. He shifts on the swing, shoulder brushing chain. "Words are another language of inheritance," Atsumu says, voice gentle. "In the end, we're really just a collection of the people we love."

Sakusa hums in agreement, a low, thoughtful sound. "What did your pops say?"

"This soul and mine met somewhere before form," Atsumu quotes reverently.

He gives the line space to breathe, to settle between them. "He always believed in the spiritual and mystical. I'm more of a science guy."

"Hmm... I do kind of understand why people believe in magic," Sakusa muses. His voice is low now, like he's leaning closer. "Even the most scientific mind has to admit—we don't know why some people reach into us like that. Why some voices soften our armour. Why, against all odds, we just know."

Atsumu smiles, eyes crinkling at the corners. "That's so romantic. There is an explanation. Kind of."

"Oh?"

“Yes. Because even science has its poetry.” Atsumu leans back on the creaky backyard swing, letting the night air settle into his lungs, the hush of the hour cloaking his words. “Have you heard of quantum entanglement?”

“Heard, yes. Know? Not so much.”

“Quantum entanglement,” Atsumu begins, voice soft with wonder, “is the phenomenon where two particles, once connected, remain instantaneously linked across any distance. Change one, and the other reacts—no matter how far apart they are.”

He chuckles lightly. “Einstein called it *spooky action at a distance*. But mystics... they might call it what happens when two souls touch before time.”

It lingers between them for a beat too long. “Every atom in your body was forged in the heart of a star that died long before Earth was even born,” Atsumu murmurs.

He doesn’t know what he expects Sakusa to say. Something quiet, maybe. Curious. But not—

“So in speculative terms,” Sakusa says slowly, “if consciousness isn’t confined to the brain... and if two beings share a deep energetic resonance... could it be that they’re actually just bodies forged from the same star?”

Atsumu’s heart skips—no, *staggers*. Catches, tumbles, races.

“Well,” he says, a little breathless, “here’s a thought. You know when you think of someone and they message you? Or you dream of someone, and later they say they dreamed of you too?”

He swallows.

“What if that’s not coincidence... but the echo of entanglement?”

There’s a pause.

Then, a smile in Sakusa’s voice: soft, warm, private. *Felt*, not just heard. “That’s a profound thought.”

Atsumu can picture it so vividly—his mouth tilting in that quiet, barely-there way. That look like he’s never sure if he’s allowed to smile.

He kind of wishes he could see it.

“Have you ever dreamed of me?” Sakusa asks.

Atsumu’s heart trips. Ricochets inside him like a marble in a glass jar.

His face goes hot. Not just pink—*scalding*.

He doesn’t know why it surprises him.

Maybe because he's been caught red-handed.

"I... um." Atsumu laughs, awkward and flustered. "It's funny you ask that. I *did* dream about you yesterday, actually. First time, though."

"Oh."

The silence that follows is thick with static—charged.

Too full. Too fragile.

Terrifying in the best and worst ways.

"What?" Atsumu breathes, unable to bear it.

"I dreamt about you too," Sakusa says, eventually—quietly, reverently, like a confession passed through folded hands—and Atsumu forgets how to breathe.

"...Oh."

They sit in that charged silence for a while—*not empty*, but thick with all the things left unsaid. Atsumu's thoughts race to match his heart, until he starts to wonder if he might just float away.

"Do you think..." he begins, falters. Heat creeps up his neck. "This sounds so corny, but... do you think we're actually—" he swallows "—forged from the same star?"

Sakusa exhales, long and quiet, like he's surrendering to something sacred.

"It's a lovely thought," he says at last. "Would certainly explain a lot."

"Like what?"

"Well..." And now Sakusa sounds distinctly sheepish. "It'd explain why you never felt like a stranger to me."

Atsumu swallows hard. "Well," he echoes, his voice unsteady with feeling, "it would also explain why I found my way to you despite living in a completely different universe. And yet... somehow... I don't know. It *is* a nice thought."

"It is," Sakusa murmurs, voice muffled as if he's lying down now, speaking into the soft hush of fabric. "Thanks."

"For what?"

There's a pause. A heartbeat.

"I don't know," Sakusa says quietly. "For being you."

Atsumu's face burns. "Stop," he mutters, burying the words behind his hand. "My face is gonna melt off."

Sakusa chuckles—and it's delighted, gentle, amused. "Am I making you blush?"

The heat on Atsumu's cheeks deepens, traitorous. "No," he lies, petulant.

The laugh that follows is warm—*honey-sweet* and growing dangerously familiar.

"I'm sending you to bed now," Sakusa says after a moment, soft but firm. "It's late. I don't want my bad habits rubbing off on you."

"Too late," Atsumu says, smiling despite himself. "I've always been nocturnal. You just went ahead and gave company to my 3 A.M. thoughts. I almost feel bad for you, having to listen to all that."

"What are you talking about?" Sakusa huffs. "I'm the one picking *your* brain. It's not every day someone tells you you're made of stars."

Atsumu grins. "You are, though. The calcium in your bones, the iron in your blood, the oxygen you breathe—every atom was forged in the heart of a dying star, scattered across the cosmos when it exploded billions of years ago."

"You fascinate me, Atsumu," Sakusa murmurs, a quiet echo of a text once shared.

Atsumu shivers, leaning into the phone like it might hold him. "You're not just *in* the universe. You *are* the universe, made conscious—briefly looking back at itself before returning to the stars."

The night holds its breath. For a while, Atsumu too, forgets how to breathe under the weight of this realisation. But, eventually, he says, "I'll let you go now. Good night, Sakusa."

"Kiyoomi," Sakusa says—so soft, Atsumu almost misses it.

"Hm?"

"You can call me Kiyoomi," he repeats, clearer now. "If you want."

Atsumu's heart kicks like a startled bird, crashing into his ribs. He swallows, mouth suddenly dry. Tests it gently. "Kiyoomi."

His tongue stings like he's touched a live wire.

"Yes," Kiyoomi says, and Atsumu can hear the smile blooming on his face.

"Good night, Kiyoomi," Atsumu whispers, certain his face is about to melt off—utterly lost in the tide of feeling rising up his throat.

"Good night, Atsumu," Kiyoomi replies, then adds, soft and devastating:

"Sleep well, stardust."

Falling Star

Chapter Summary

He falters, coming to a stop a few feet away.

Their eyes catch and lock, like two magnets beginning to recognize each other's pull.
Depthless charcoal drowning in liquid amber.

“Atsumu,” Sakusa says, smile softening just so, and all at once Atsumu falls back into his body.

A shy smile finds its way onto his face. “Kiyoomi.” Atsumu stumbles a little over his name, unpracticed, precious, far too delicate to be mishandled. “Hey.”

Chapter Notes

Gnawing at the bars of my enclosure listen, I'm so abnormal about them but first things first.

[illegible]

I also drew [this](#), inspired by a future chapter hehe

Thank you for all the love this story gets! We're officially at 90k+ words. It's so surreal, this is my longest fic to date and I'm having so so much fun writing it.

Join the TMLTL discord for exclusive sneak peeks and fun times: [click here](#)

Table 9 Tokyo restaurant + Kiyoomi's fit

And finally, THANK YOU FOR 1.4K KUDOS! 🥹❤️

Atsumu stares at his phone for a full minute.

Then, against better judgement, he bites down on his fist and lets out a muffled scream.

Stardust?

His heartbeat thunders in his ears like an oncoming storm Atsumu is not even remotely prepared for.

Somehow, no one wakes up to witness his spiral.

The whole conversation suddenly feels unreal. Did he imagine it? Did... *Kiyoomi*... really say that?

Kiyoomi.

Atsumu flushes, rolling the name over his tongue like it's a new language he's still learning how to speak.

Sakusa's name has a different weight now—something precious, something to be approached carefully.

Atsumu really called him by his first name. Sakusa *asked* Atsumu to call him by his first name.

There's a dazed ache in his chest. *What am I supposed to do with all this tenderness?*

He doesn't sleep that night, not really. Just lies there with the weight of Sakusa's voice pressed to the inside of his ribs, soft and echoing. *Stardust*. He mouths it to the dark like a secret incantation, and something inside him fizzles in response like pop rocks and longing.

Breakfast the next morning is a quiet affair.

Atsumu, sporting epic eyebags, pokes half-heartedly at his rice. Across the table, Osamu scrolls through his phone, smiling at his screen.

Atsumu leans slightly to peek, clocking a stream of messages with Suna.

He tips his head. "So... are ya two together yet?"

Osamu startles, glancing up with wide eyes before turning back to his phone.

A beat of silence passes. Then—

"We don't talk about it."

"You don't *talk* about it?" Atsumu echoes.

"Mm."

That infuriating little smile hasn't left his face.

“You just know,” Osamu says, eyes fixed on a new selfie from Suna. “When someone’s your person.”

“Oh.”

Osamu snaps a shameless selfie and sends it back without hesitation.

Atsumu swallows. *Right.*

He looks down at his bowl, suddenly too aware of his screen lighting up beside it.

Time to deflect. “Didja pack yet? We gotta leave soon.”

“Mm.” Osamu hums. “Gotta say—I’m excited to start work.”

“Yeah?” Atsumu’s lips quirk up, thoughts drifting back to Sakusa.

They all seem to circle back to Sakusa lately. He brushes them aside and returns to scarfing down breakfast.

There’s still laundry to do. Still packing. Still—

His screen lights up.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Hey, you’re coming back today right?*

His heart jumpstarts. Soon, he’ll be back at the Sakusa residence. Back to the scent of tea, antiseptic, and the quiet orbit of Sakusa himself.

His hands tremble slightly as he types: *yes*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I’ll be waiting then. Safe travels.*

“Atsumu, why do ya look like that?”

He jerks upright, nearly dropping his phone. “What? Look like what?”

Osamu eyes him suspiciously. “I dunno. Flushed.”

“No I’m not,” Atsumu yelps, hastily shoving his phone into his pocket. “C’mon, help me with the laundry! We don’t have time to sit around.”

Osamu lets it go—mostly.

“Alright...”

But the sideways glance he gives Atsumu feels like an x-ray.

Like he’s looking straight through him.

What exactly can Osamu see?

Back in Tokyo, the station is loud, hot, and smells like convenience store ramen and too many lives happening all at once.

Atsumu shoulders his way through the crowd, half-distracted by the buzz in his chest.

His phone vibrates.

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *I'm outside.*

Atsumu nearly walks straight into a vending machine.

“What?” he blurts aloud, stumbling to a stop. He types back: *What.*

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *What?*

What do you mean you're outside?

Sakusa Kiyoomi: *Outside the station. You arrive at five, right? Or did I get the timing wrong?*

Air rushes into Atsumu's lungs—and gets stuck there.

Outside.

Sakusa is here. Right now. Just beyond the gates.

The confusion, the shock, the hesitation—all of it melts away, replaced by something far more damning.

His legs move, pulled forward by an invisible force.

One faltering step. Another, steadier. A third—faster.

By the fifth step, he's weaving through the crowd like a man on a mission, suitcase rattling in protest behind him.

Then he bursts through the sliding doors into the early autumn air.

He scans the street—pedestrians, buses, rows of parked cars—until his gaze lands on a familiar Mercedes-Benz.

Sakusa stands there next to it like the skyline was just a backdrop designed to frame him. A navy sweater hangs loose on his frame, sleeves bunched casually at his wrists—like he'd rolled them up once, then forgot, because he was too busy looking effortlessly good. There is a softness to the knit, something tactile, the kind of fabric that invites fingertips even if Atsumu has no business thinking about that right now.

He's wearing jeans, clean and unfussy, rolled at the ankle just enough to suggest taste without vanity. On his wrist: a matte black smartwatch that pulses like it has somewhere more

important to be. On the other: a simple chain bracelet. Silver. Elegant. Sakusa's fingers brush it absentmindedly, like it's an old habit.

As if sensing Atsumu's stare, Sakusa looks up.

The wind catches his hair, tousling it just enough to ruin the symmetry. He doesn't fix it.

He just smiles—the kind that reaches his eyes.

The kind Atsumu knows from late nights spent at the library.

The kind he holds like a secret.

All the air leaves his lungs at once. He falters, coming to a stop a few feet away.

Their eyes catch and lock, like two magnets beginning to recognize each other's pull. Depthless charcoal drowning in liquid amber.

"Atsumu," Sakusa says, smile softening just so, and all at once Atsumu falls back into his body.

A shy smile finds its way onto his face. "Kiyoomi." Atsumu stumbles a little over his name, unpracticed, precious, far too delicate to be mishandled. "Hey."

"Hello." Sakusa straightens from his casual lean against his car. "Welcome back."

"I didn't know you were picking me up personally," Atsumu says, his hand twitching to reach out before he jams it into his pocket.

"Kanao said you'd be here by five," Sakusa shrugs, though the casualness feels a little forced. "I was on my way home anyway."

With a click, the trunk opens.

Sakusa steps closer—just close enough to catch a hint of spicy cologne as Sakusa gently pries the suitcase from his grip. Atsumu's breath hitches

Their fingers brush.

Just a whisper of contact, but it shoots up Atsumu's arm and skitters down his spine.

He shivers.

Sakusa loads the bag into the trunk, shuts it, then moves to the passenger side and opens the door.

Atsumu stares.

"Come on," Sakusa says, holding the door open. "Where's your brother?"

Atsumu finds his voice as his feet carry him forward. “Suna— his boyfriend’s picking him up.” He slips into the seat, catching another thread of that clean, spicy scent. “Thanks.”

“Hm.” Sakusa closes the door after him.

Atsumu tries not to fidget, busying himself with the seatbelt, his phone, anything to settle the flush blooming under his skin.

When Sakusa joins him behind the wheel, Atsumu has mostly tamed his pulse.

“Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” Atsumu nods, rubbing his palms against his jeans. “Thanks for picking me up. You really didn’t have to.”

Sakusa twists the wheel with one hand, smoothly easing out of the parking lot. He throws Atsumu a quietly amused look.

“I know. But I wanted to.”

Traitorous heat rushes to Atsumu’s cheeks. He ducks his head, hoping to hide it.

“Are you hungry?” Sakusa asks, adjusting the radio to something low and unobtrusive.

“Um. A little,” Atsumu admits. “I haven’t had lunch.”

“Alright.” Sakusa checks the mirrors, changes lanes. “I know a nice place.”

“Table 9, Tokyo,” Sakusa had said when Atsumu finally asked upon arrival, just as they slipped into the elevator alongside two businessmen.

“Don’t hotel restaurants need a reservation?” Atsumu asked under his breath.

“Usually,” Sakusa agreed—and didn’t elaborate. Maybe there’s always an open table for someone like him.

Atsumu walks into the restaurant and immediately feels underdressed, unprepared, and slightly like he’s stepped into the wrong dimension.

The ceiling stretches so high it practically has its own atmosphere. Golden rods hang from above like frozen lightning—art, maybe. Or architecture. Or just some rich person’s idea of whimsy. Atsumu doesn’t know, but he stares anyway.

The windows span the entire wall—floor to ceiling glass that frames the city like a museum exhibit. Outside, the skyline is awash in gold, the kind of sunset that doesn’t seem real. Everything inside glows because of it, like the whole place was built just to catch this hour.

There are plants everywhere. Big ones. Trees in suits, practically. They stand between lounge chairs and low tables like they belong here more than he does. The chairs look too pretty to sit on. The tables shine like obsidian.

No one's rushing. No one's loud. It's the kind of place that makes you lower your voice without realising.

"Um," Atsumu murmurs, trailing after Sakusa, "isn't this a bit fancy for a quick lunch?"

Sakusa glances back with that same amused twinkle in his eyes. "Who said it's going to be a quick lunch?"

"Sakusa-sama!" A refined young man beams as he approaches with a tray of refreshments. "Welcome back. Usual table?"

"Yes, please, Kiba-san," Sakusa replies, smiling politely.

So Atsumu *was* right.

They follow the man to a corner table bracketed by windows and drenched in sunlight. Atsumu exhales in quiet awe at the sight of the sunset dipping beneath the Tokyo skyline, sitting slowly, careful not to scrape the chair legs on the floor.

When he glances back at Sakusa, he finds himself caught in the full weight of his gaze—dark, unreadable, and quietly intense.

Atsumu straightens, throat tight. "...What?"

"Nothing," Sakusa murmurs, shaking his head. Then he smiles. "Golden hour really suits you."

Heat rushes to Atsumu's face—hot and fast and impossible to hide.

He ducks his head, flustered. "Th-thank you."

He busies himself with the menu, though the words blur together and his focus keeps slipping—again and again—drawn back to Sakusa's face.

Golden hour suits *him*, too. Pale skin flushed with gold, sunlight brushing over high cheekbones and dusting his lashes in soft amber. Atsumu has always known Sakusa was beautiful—not just conventionally attractive, but *striking*, in that quiet, arresting way that sneaks up on you. There's a gentle delicateness to his nose, an elegant taper to his jaw. The twin moles over his brow break the symmetry of an otherwise perfect face—and somehow, make it even more beautiful.

"Is there something on my face?"

Atsumu flinches, caught. He licks his lips—only to notice the way Sakusa's eyes drop briefly to his mouth. That shiver returns.

“No,” he manages. “It’s just... golden hour suits you, too.”

Sakusa’s eyes widen, just slightly.

And then—beneath Atsumu’s gaze, warm and unabashed—a faint pink flush blooms across his cheeks. *Oh.*

“Thank you,” Sakusa murmurs, a real smile pulling at his lips. “Have you decided what you want to order?”

The question startles Atsumu back to the menu. He blurts out the first thing his eyes land on, then immediately cringes at the price. *Ah, screw it, he thinks. I can treat myself. It’s my last vacation day.*

Sakusa signals the waiter, placing their orders with the casual ease of someone used to this level of elegance—plus water and a few side dishes, because of course he does.

“Right away,” the waiter replies with a small bow before disappearing.

Atsumu doesn’t miss the way the man’s gaze lingers on Sakusa. He can’t exactly blame him. But he *also* can’t stop the warm, smug little curl that unfurls low in his stomach. *I’m the one at his table.*

“How was your trip back?” Sakusa asks, resting his chin against his fist. His eyes are steady, focused—like Atsumu is the only thing in the room worth his attention.

“Not bad,” Atsumu says, glancing out the window to keep from combusting under that gaze. “Slept most of the way, since I didn’t get much sleep last night.”

“Oh?” Sakusa lifts an eyebrow. “And why’s that?”

Heat rises in Atsumu’s neck. *What’s he supposed to say? I was up all night thinking about you?* Absolutely not. “Just... had a lot on my mind.”

“Hm.” Sakusa lets it go—graciously, mercifully. “I hope you had a good time with your family. I know how much they mean to you.”

That makes Atsumu smile. “I did. Thanks for giving me the time to visit. Ma actually sent you some homemade biscuits.”

“She did?” Sakusa blinks, genuinely surprised. “That’s so sweet of her.”

“They’re in my bag. I’ll make you tea and biscuits for your evening snack.”

As if on cue, the waiter returns with their drinks. He casts a curious glance at Atsumu before departing again, leaving him slightly puzzled.

Their food arrives in stages—appetisers first: crispy pork gyoza, edamame, chilled soba in cucumber cups, creamy potato salad, tebasaki chicken wings... Atsumu’s mouth waters at the sight of it all.

“Man, this looks so good.”

“Dig in,” Sakusa says, clearly pleased. He signals the waiter once more and adds an order of chilled premium sake.

Oh, Atsumu *plans* to. Enthusiastically.

He doesn’t realise Sakusa’s been watching him until he looks up at the arrival of the sake—and sees that small smile still playing on his lips.

“Thank you,” Sakusa says absently, reaching for the bottle to pour Atsumu a drink into a delicate, deep violet Toyo-Sasaki glass.

Atsumu takes a sip under his gaze, the heat of it unfurling in his chest. “This is really good sake.”

Sakusa pours himself a glass. “It’s my favourite.” He lifts it. “Kanpai.”

Atsumu mirrors him with a smile. “Kanpai.” Another sip. Slower this time.

Outside, the sky has melted into twilight. Inside, the restaurant’s warm lighting flickers to life, casting their corner in gold and amber, softening the edges of everything. It’s only when Atsumu slows down enough to take it in that he feels a twist in his stomach—sharp, fluttery, traitorous.

The setting. The light. Sakusa’s compliments.

It *feels* like a date.

His face flushes, hot with embarrassment, and he swats the thought away like an annoying fly. *Where did that come from?*

He sneaks a glance at Sakusa again—discreet, or so he hopes—and finds himself once more caught in the warmth of his gaze. Atsumu swallows, flustered, and offers a tentative smile.

Sakusa returns it.

The sake settles warmly in his belly. The food bursts with flavour. The low jazz hums around them like a silk wrap. Atsumu lets himself melt into it—the rare, indulgent luxury of this dinner.

By the time Sakusa asks for the bill, Atsumu is buzzed and full, comfortably drowsy.

The waiter returns with the pin machine, and Atsumu instinctively reaches for the bill to check his share—only for Sakusa to pluck it away and swipe his card before Atsumu can get a look.

“What’re you doing?” Atsumu blinks. “Let me pay my half.”

Sakusa is already standing. “Don’t insult me, Atsumu,” he says, voice light but pointed.

Atsumu goes red, standing too. “Come on. We went pretty overboard...”

“It’s no issue to me,” Sakusa says, already guiding him toward the door, one hand hovering just a centimetre above the small of Atsumu’s back. Not touching—but close enough that Atsumu can *feel* it.

He’s half tempted to lean into it. Just to see if Sakusa would pull away.

God. What is wrong with him?

He’s too rattled by the thought to even notice the elevator ride or when they’ve reached the car—until Sakusa opens the door for him again. Atsumu slips inside without a word, that same thought creeping back in, uninvited and smug.

What in the K-drama is happening right now?

Sakusa slides into the driver’s seat. The car hums to life. His fingers curl around the gearstick, twisting the wheel as they pull out of the lot.

Out of the corner of his eye, Atsumu watches his hands. Long, pale fingers. Neatly manicured. A faint scar across the back of his knuckles. They’re *beautiful* hands. Steady. Intentional.

If this was a date, Atsumu thinks, he might have reached over—just a brush against the back of Sakusa’s hand, maybe even threaded their fingers together, felt the warmth of another’s touch.

His heart trips over itself, stops, and restarts like a startled rabbit.

What the fuck is he thinking?

This is his *boss*.

Atsumu bites his lip. *Sleep well, stardust.*

Is that something a boss says to an employee? Is that something a man says to a *friend*?

He can’t imagine it. Not unless it meant something.

So does that mean Sakusa...?

He shakes the thought off again and turns to the window. That’s a problem for another day.

Right now, Atsumu just wants to bask in the glow of warm sake, good food, and a golden evening.

The Sakusa residence looks exactly as he left it. Quiet. Immaculate. A sealed-off pocket of calm, separating them from the chaos of the world outside. Atsumu pauses in the genkan,

letting the familiarity sink in like warmth through his bones.

“Tadaima,” he murmurs without thinking.

Sakusa’s hand lands lightly on his shoulder, a gentle squeeze before he steps past. “Okaeri.”

Atsumu watches him slip into indoor slippers and head upstairs, disappearing around the bend—leaving him alone, finally, with his thoughts.

Whatever that was, he thinks, I’ll deal with it later.

Right now? A shower sounds like heaven.

He grabs his overnight bag and heads to the guest bathroom, feet soft against the polished floors, the familiar route already etched into muscle memory. He tosses his clothes into the laundry basket—he’ll wash them tomorrow.

Then, finally, he slips into the glass cubicle with a blissed-out sigh as hot water pours over him. God, he missed this. Back home, their water tank sputters and groans before it even *thinks* about heating up. And the pressure doesn’t hold a candle to this.

Living in the Sakusa residence is *really* spoiling him.

He starts humming as he massages shampoo into his hair, the rich lather clinging to his fingers. The shower gel smells like something out of a fancy spa—subtle citrus and soft florals—and the steam curls around him like a warm fog, rinsing away travel fatigue until he feels clean down to the soul.

Even the towel feels obscenely plush as he wraps it around his waist and steps out to brush his teeth. He pats hyaluronic serum into his skin with practiced fingers, smooths moisturiser over his cheeks, jaw, and forehead.

There. Fresh, clean, and ready to enter Sakusa’s shrine.

He’s patting his skin dry when he takes a moment to really *look* at himself in the mirror. The difference is stark. He’s filled out again—collarbones no longer so sharp, a soft swell returning to his stomach where once only lean, flat muscle remained.

Atsumu grins. Not bad. All he needs now is to finally take Sakusa up on that home gym offer. Maybe even get bold enough to post a shirtless Instagram story again. It’s been a while.

Lost in that tiny daydream, he slips into loungewear and pads out of the bathroom, disinfecting his phone and gently wiping down his grandfather’s journal to take with him. It’s too early to sleep, but Atsumu fully intends to faceplant into his bed and turn into a very content log.

“Ahhh,” he sighs when his face is finally buried in the soft-scented duvet and cool sheets. “I missed you.”

Forget dates—*this* bed is his one true love. Plush. Cool. Absolutely devoted to his comfort. Like being carried on a cloud straight into heaven.

He flops onto his back, pulls up his phone, and starts scrolling mindlessly, basking in the glow of clean skin, warm muscles, and a full belly.

When Atsumu begins to doze off that night—curled under the duvet, an article open on his phone, the soft lamp casting yellow warmth over his sheets—music finds its way to him, like it always does.

It comes softly, without ceremony. Just a few notes, drifting through the hallway like fog under a door. Quiet piano chords, jazzy in structure but delicate in delivery. There's a patience to the sound. Like someone thinking out loud with their fingers.

Each note lingers—hovering in the air just a breath too long—making it feel like someone's remembering something they aren't ready to let go of.

A lullaby, maybe. Or a secret whispered too close to the heart.

Atsumu lies there, unmoving. The melody trickles in through the walls, muffled and intimate, something not meant to be overheard. The space between the notes continues to hang in the air. Not emptiness—intention. Silence used like punctuation.

It doesn't sound like something Sakusa's playing for himself.

It sounds like a message.

Atsumu is left to stare at the ceiling, his chest slowly rising and falling. He should sleep. He wants to sleep. But the music keeps threading itself under his ribs, wrapping soft fingers around his lungs.

Sakusa keeps slipping under his ribs, too.

Eventually, he gives in—throws the duvet off with a groan, slipping into his slippers and stretching with a yawn so wide it cracks his jaw. He shuffles toward the kitchen, rubbing sleep from his eyes, and begins to make tea. Plates his mother's biscuits with methodical hands.

Didn't he promise Sakusa an evening snack?

The melody repeats, just once, as he waits for the kettle to whistle.

By the time Atsumu makes it upstairs, the final chord is still humming in the strings.

Sakusa doesn't turn immediately when he approaches—just lets his fingers rest on the keys, gaze distant. The shadows in the room have lengthened, soft and undisturbed.

Atsumu steps quietly to his side. "Hey."

Sakusa glances up, then down at the tray in Atsumu's hands. His smile is subtle, tired. "Hey. You didn't have to do that."

"I know," Atsumu shrugs, setting it on the low table. "But I wanted to. Plus, I promised."

Sakusa lets out a quiet exhale. "Thanks."

There's a pause. The kind that could end or turn into something else, depending on who speaks first.

Atsumu tips his chin toward the piano. "New tune?"

Sakusa shifts, standing to reach for a mug of tea. He blows on it before speaking. "Sort of. I'm still figuring it out."

Atsumu's brows lift. "You're composing it?"

"Hm."

Atsumu's face lights up, genuinely impressed. "It's beautiful. What's it called?"

Sakusa hesitates. Not dramatically, but like he's weighing whether to answer honestly.

Then he looks up and says, with a small, careful smile, "In Your Arms."

Atsumu stills. His stomach flutters—then folds in on itself in a strange little dance he doesn't know what to do with.

"Oh," he says, like he's just remembered how to speak.

Sakusa's smile softens. He sips his tea, voice quieter now. "It gets a bit... dull around here. I didn't notice how much, until you left."

Atsumu's ears go hot. "I sort of guessed," he mumbles. "Since you started texting more."

There it is again. That barely-there grin. The one that feels like a shared secret.

"I hope I'm not being annoying," Sakusa says.

Atsumu waves a hand. "Nah. I like our conversations."

Sakusa nods, looking almost relieved. "Me too. They're... introspective."

"Well," Atsumu smirks, "you did ask to pick my brain."

"I like it," Sakusa replies, eyes on his mug. "The way you think. It's... quietly brilliant."

Atsumu ducks his head, throat tightening with heat. "You're making me sound like a prodigy."

“You’re not,” Sakusa says simply. “You’re just... different. In a way that’s rare. I’ve never met anyone like you.”

Silence.

Atsumu’s face is officially on fire. “Please stop,” he mutters, half-laughing. “If you keep saying stuff like that, it’s gonna go straight to my head and I’ll start thinking I’m something special.”

A beat.

Then Sakusa laughs. It’s low, real, unguarded.

“Atsumu,” he says, a little amused, a little fond. “You *are* special.”

Ah, fuck.

Atsumu groans into his hands. “Jesus.”

“Oh?” Sakusa says, tone teasing. “Am I making you blush?”

“Shut up,” Atsumu mutters. “Drink your tea. I’m going to bed.”

Sakusa watches him stand, still smiling, still glowing in a way that makes Atsumu’s chest ache.

“Goodnight, then,” he says—then, after a pause, like a secret spoken into the dark: “Sleep well, stardust.”

Atsumu bolts before his legs give out. Doesn’t look back.

Nope. Definitely not sleeping tonight either.

Pulled Into Orbit

Chapter Summary

Yo, Kuroo's text says, just as Atsumu peels himself out of his comfortable bed to brave the day and its monstrous mountain of chores. *Heard it's your birthday soon* 🙄🙄

Chapter Notes

Formatting this chapter was absolute HELL. But it's worth it. Just so you know, my heart raced so fast writing this I almost has an anxiety attack 🙌

Please go look at this beautiful [art](#) Ydine did 🥰

[Atsumu's outfit + Kiyoomi's watch](#)

Yo, Kuroo's text says, just as Atsumu peels himself out of his comfortable bed to brave the day and its monstrous mountain of chores. *Heard it's your birthday soon* 🙄🙄

Atsumu stares at the message, bleary-eyed. His birthday's still two weeks away.

Uhh, it's on the 5th... Heard from who??

Roosterhead: *Your brother duh*

Since when are you friends with Samu??

Roosterhead: *Since I started tutoring you, dumbass. Who do you think begged me to take mercy on your academically cursed soul?*

Atsumu gasps. Osamu did WHAT.

So you are kinda sorta MAYBE a decent human being at heart...???? Atsumu sends, grinning like a raccoon with a snack stash.

Roosterhead: *Is this any way to talk to the guy planning your birthday party?* 🙄

UR DOING WHAT 🙄

Roosterhead: *Osamu said you two don't have any plans. I'm just a guy, standing in front of a calendar, looking for an excuse to throw a rager 🧑🏻🎉*

Ur kidding.

Roosterhead: *Am I though?*

... Okay. Suppose you are throwing a party. Where, exactly? Because your apartment barely fits your ego.

Roosterhead: *Glad you asked. You know how Kunimi's parents have that wholeass mansion? They're off gallivanting around Europe for a month. Guess who has the keys?*

Are YOU offering his house, or is HE offering his house?

Roosterhead: *Same thing. 😏*

UH NO. We are NOT colonising the guy's house.

Roosterhead: *He offered, scout's honour 😏 So you in or not?*

I mean... if he offered... I don't mind. But you gotta ask Samu first. I ain't celebrating without him.

Roosterhead: *He said it's cool as long as he can bring his boyfriend/situationship/date/whatever the hell he's got going with that Suna guy.*

LMAO okay, count me in. Can I invite people too?

Roosterhead: *It's your birthday, dude. Knock yourself out.*



Atsumu does nearly knock himself out that evening.

All because, on his way to Sakusa's gym, he failed to factor in one crucial detail:

It's Sakusa's gym.

As in.

A gym.

That Sakusa. Uses.

Obviously.

Why else would he need a personal gym? For decoration??

Atsumu waltzes in, gym outfit on, earphones ready, prepared to conquer the day with the unearned confidence of a man who's clearly never seen his boss mid-pull-up.

He stops dead.

Sakusa is there.

Doing pull-ups.

Tank top. Gloves. Biceps that belong in a museum.

Atsumu freezes like a wide-eyed deer caught in aesthetic headlights, brain buffering.

First thought: *His biceps are illegal.*

Second thought: *Dark tank top? Sakusa owns sleeveless clothing??*

Third thought: *If he walked around like that every day, Atsumu would trip over air and fall out a window from sheer emotional distress.*

Sakusa tips his head back mid-rep, finally noticing Atsumu. He lets go of the bar and lands with a light *thud*, pulling one earbud out.

“Hey.”

“H-hi,” Atsumu croaks, voice cracking like a cursed record. “Didn’t realise you were here. I can come back later—”

“Don’t be silly, there’s space for two,” Sakusa says, already adjusting his gloves and turning back to the bar. “Use whatever you like. I’m almost done.”

Atsumu scurries to the treadmill like a frightened lab mouse, ears pink, dignity barely intact.

He slaps on his earphones and opens his playlist with trembling fingers. *Do not look at Sakusa. Do not look at Sakusa. Do not—*

Mirror.

Mirrors everywhere.

He glances.

Instant regret.

Sakusa’s shirt has ridden up. There’s a visible flash of pale skin, Calvin Klein waistband, and a teasing glimpse of lean abs.

Atsumu whips his head away so fast he nearly gives himself whiplash.

Jesusfuckingchrist—

He slams the + button on the treadmill.

Warm-up? Forget it.

He needs cardio.

Fast, hard cardio.

Cardio that drowns out the intrusive thought: *Maybe I should walk into a wall just a little bit.*

He starts running, eyes on the window, pretending it's an inspirational forest and not an attempt at survival. But the mirror continues to exist. A side glance shows Sakusa now doing curl-ups on the same bar.

8.0 speed it is.

Go big or fall on your face, Atsumu thinks, which is a very real possibility at this point.

He manages a sweaty, wheezing 20 minutes before he slows down. Not bad. Not his personal best. But hey—he didn't spontaneously combust, so it's a win.

He reaches for his water, downs half the bottle, and wipes his brow with the hem of his shirt

—

Oh, wait. He forgot his towel. Crap.

"You really can run."

Sakusa's voice slices through his thoughts. Atsumu whirls around, startled, to find Sakusa watching him with an unreadable expression. "Ever done a marathon?"

Atsumu grabs his yoga mat and tries to pretend he's not flustered. "Once. I had this client—a recovering addict—who needed something to work toward. So we trained for months, then ran 42 kilometers together. Took us about three and a half hours."

He settles into a butterfly fold stretch, trying to focus on breathing and not on Sakusa's slightly dishevelled post-workout bangs.

"That's pretty cool," Sakusa says, undoing his gloves and wiping his face with his hand towel like he's not auditioning for a forbidden fruit commercial.

Atsumu stares aggressively at the floor.

This is a test, he thinks. *Of restraint. Of core strength. Of how many homoerotic intrusive thoughts the human brain can process per minute.*

"Have you ever run a marathon?" he blurts.

"Once," Sakusa says, echoing him. "Charity run."

Okay, Atsumu thinks. *Lick the floor. Maybe that'll distract me.*

“Anyway, I’ll leave you to it,” Sakusa says, mercifully. “Good luck with the rest of your workout.”

“Thanks,” Atsumu mumbles, lowering into a forward fold so deeply he could pass for a yoga poster.

Maybe if I bow low enough, I’ll merge with the earth and be free.

(Maybe then Sakusa will step on me.)

The gym has become both a haven and a hell.

Atsumu’s always found solace in working out to manage the constant stress of being a broke med student.

Entertaining homicidal thoughts after a review session with Fukuda-sensei? Gym.

Mentally and emotionally strung out but can’t sleep? Gym.

Fighting with Osamu? Gym.

If his schedule allowed it, Atsumu was at the gym. Not for the muscles—though that’s a hell of a bonus—but because it shuts his brain up.

He does yoga to drop into that meditative headspace where breath and body take priority over spiraling thoughts.

But that equilibrium flies out the damn window whenever Sakusa’s there.

There’s no meditating.

There’s only falling too deep into his stretches trying not to stare, and nearly pulling a muscle.

There’s sprinting until his lungs give out.

Push-ups until his arms tremble.

In less than two weeks, Atsumu’s thighs are shredded again, calves tight, biceps no longer resembling sad deflated balloons. Amazing what the human body can do when it’s trying to outrun gay panic.

The worst part? Sakusa has no idea he’s walking temptation incarnate.

The sleeveless shirt makes regular appearances. Each time, Atsumu has to remind himself not to ogle his boss—his *boss*—who happens to be built like a Greek statue, lovingly carved from marble and rendered with offensive precision.

There's a smattering of moles across Sakusa's back that disappear beneath his shirt, and for reasons Atsumu cannot explain, they absolutely wreck him.

Then there's the scar. A faint, raised line on the inner side of his left bicep.

It becomes an itch in the back of Atsumu's brain.

On an emotionally fraught Wednesday, the curiosity wins.

"What happened?" he blurts.

"Mm?" Sakusa doesn't pause his bicep curls, just glances his way.

Atsumu nods toward the scar. "Your arm."

"Oh. That." Sakusa says it like he's being asked about a weather forecast. "Got knifed."

Atsumu nearly drops the dumbbell on his foot. "What the *fuck*?"

Sakusa raises an eyebrow at the profanity. "Two guys tried to rob a corner konbini. I just happened to be there."

"And they *stabbed* you!?"

Sakusa hums, looking almost amused. "More like I charged them."

Atsumu gapes. "Are you *insane*?"

"They were trying to take a hostage. I saw a chance to knock one of them down." He shrugs, casual. "Didn't expect the second guy to come at me with a knife. Dodged, mostly. Got nicked."

Atsumu swallows. His mouth's suddenly dry. "Did he get away?"

"Mm. No. I palm-struck his chin so hard it knocked out half his teeth."

Something warm and entirely traitorous curls in Atsumu's gut. He pretends it's secondhand adrenaline.

"I mean—I kinda remember you mentioned kickboxing..." Atsumu trails off, gaze flicking anywhere but Sakusa. "You get in fights a lot?"

"Not particularly," Sakusa says. "You?"

Atsumu should've expected the question. He curses under his breath. "Sometimes."

"Sometimes?"

"When someone's being too pushy. Or rude," he mutters. "Mostly to Samu."

"Oh?" Sakusa asks, mild. "That happen often?"

“When we go clubbing,” Atsumu admits, finally meeting his gaze. “Dunno if you’ve ever been to one, but being a gay guy in public? Comes with setbacks.”

Sakusa’s expression shifts. Not quite sympathy. Something more complicated.

“Look, Samu’s got anger issues. He doesn’t take shit lying down. If he’s getting jumped, I’m getting involved. Ain’t pretty, but it only takes a few punches to let someone know they picked the wrong guy.”

Sakusa’s quiet for a beat. Then: “There are decent clubs, you know. Sounds like the ones you go to are a dump. What if you get seriously hurt? Or the cops get involved?”

Atsumu flashes a grin and lifts the hem of his shirt just enough to show a faint scar above his waistband. “Almost got knifed once too.”

Sakusa blinks. “...That’s... alarming. But I guess it could’ve been worse.”

“For sure,” Atsumu says, letting his shirt drop. “Didn’t take martial arts or anything, but growing up with a twin means you learn how to wrestle. Anyway, those dumb homophobic dude bros always think gay means soft. Easy to catch ’em off guard.”

He doesn’t explicitly mention the times it didn’t go so well. The bruises he had to hide. The aching joints. The shame.

“I’ve had the shit kicked out of me a few times,” he mutters, trying to sound breezy. “But alas.”

Sakusa looks constipated. “I worry about you, Atsumu.”

Atsumu’s grin softens, goes lopsided. His chest goes warm and fluttery. “Still kickin’, aren’t I? If you can survive med school, you can survive anything.”

Sakusa sighs like Atsumu is a tax on his lifespan. “Do your workout and pity my greying head.”

“Yessir.”

Osamu calls him at some point to ramble about his new job.

“Tsumu, ya won’t believe this place,” he says in hushed awe. “I keep walking into glass walls because they’re too clean.”

Atsumu snorts, grabbing his mug of tea on the way to the balcony he’s now mentally dubbed the ‘Hot Gossip HQ’, because apparently that’s where all the drama lives now. “Don’t break yer nose before our birthday party, Samu. What are ya, a fly?”

“Shut up,” Osamu grumbles, though there’s no real bite. “You have no idea what it’s like here. I’d be a dead man walking without Tendou-san.”

“Ohh,” Atsumu perks up, settling into the balcony couch and hugging a pillow to his chest. “Ya work with Tendou-san? Love that guy.”

“You know him? He’s a culinary god. And his mousse cake? Orgasmic levels of delight. I think I’ve put on two kilos since I started.”

Atsumu switches to speaker, placing the phone on the armrest to sip his tea with both hands. “He totally saved my ass during Ki—uh, Sakusa’s business party.”

There’s a pause. A barely-there flicker of static silence before Osamu moves on.

“Anyway,” he says casually, “I invited him and Ushijima-san to the party.”

Atsumu blinks. “Seriously? You just started working there like, what, twelve days ago? That fast?”

“Dude, I owe this guy my life,” Osamu says with the fervour of a man reborn. “And I mean, the more the merrier, right? Kuroo said to invite whoever I want. I asked Akaashi-san from class too, but he hasn’t given me a definitive answer yet.”

Atsumu hums, thoughtful. “Well, Kuroo and Shirabu are already in since they’re organising the whole thing. D’you think Aran and Kita-san would come if we asked?”

“No clue,” Osamu mumbles, distant, as if mentally sorting the guest list. “Kuroo said he’ll introduce us to people. Apparently everyone’s cool. Honestly, I don’t really care. If there’s food and drink, I’m in.”

“Course you are,” Atsumu sniggers. “Hey, maybe I’ll invite Bokuto-san. I owe him for the suit he lent me for my interview.”

“Guest list aside,” Osamu groans, the sound genuine and from the soul. “I have *nothing* to wear. I wish we’d bought more clothes when we went shopping. Half my pants don’t even fit anymore... man, I really gotta start working out.”

Right. Clothes. Party.

Atsumu groans in kind. “Shit, Samu, what am I gonna wear? I can’t show up in the same outfit from the high school reunion. Not with Suna and co showing up.”

“Exactly,” Osamu says, followed by a rustle that sounds like him digging through his closet. “I’ve got a flannel jacket. Boots. Maybe one decent shirt. Pants are a lost cause though. Ugh.”

Atsumu pinches the bridge of his nose. “I mean, I could go shopping—I got paid yesterday—but I’m too lazy.”

“Tell me about it,” Osamu sighs. A bell rings faintly on his end, followed by more shuffling. “Hey uh, I gotta go. I’ll text you later, okay?”

“Alright,” Atsumu says brightly, then adds with a smirk, “Say hi to Suna for me.”

“Fuck off, Tsumu,” Osamu fires back, and Atsumu can vividly picture the blush burning on his brother’s face as the call ends.

Truly, tormenting his brother is one of life’s greatest joys.

The balcony door slides open a moment later and Sakusa steps out, hair damp, a steaming mug in hand. “Hey,” he says lightly. “Sorry—I may have overheard some of that.”

Atsumu flushes. “Oops.”

“‘Oops’ indeed,” Sakusa says, lips twitching into a smile. “It’s refreshing, though. Seeing someone that close with their sibling.”

Atsumu shrugs, setting his mug down. “He’s my other half. It’d be weird if we *weren’t* close.”

Sakusa hums in agreement and takes the other corner of the couch. He wraps the throw blanket around his shoulders and tucks one knee to his chest.

He looks so... *warm*, Atsumu thinks. Soft around the edges. He looks young like this. It makes Atsumu’s heart melt a little.

“What?” Sakusa tilts his head, catching his gaze.

Atsumu flushes, but doesn’t look away. “Nothin’. Just... you *really* don’t look your age. Not even a little bit.”

Sakusa arches a brow, amused. “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

“Definitely not a bad thing,” Atsumu says with a chuckle, gesturing toward the faint greys near Sakusa’s temples. “This is the only thing that gives you away.”

Sakusa touches the strands lightly. “I’ve considered dyeing them before.”

Atsumu’s heart jolts. “Don’t.”

Sakusa blinks. “Why not?”

“Uh...” Atsumu clears his throat. “I just mean—you don’t need to. It looks good. You look good. You don’t have to change anything.”

Sakusa’s smile is slow and genuine, a little mischievous at the corners. “Oh? Are you saying I’m good-looking?”

Atsumu side-eyes him with theatrical weariness, even as his ears burn. “You don’t need me to tell you that, Kiyoomi. I’m sure you’ve heard it plenty before.”

And there it is—Sakusa’s pleased smile, coupled with a hint of pink in his cheeks, that makes Atsumu want to scream into a pillow.

“Maybe I want to hear it from you,” Sakusa says.

Atsumu’s heart flat-out trips, tumbles, and hits the floor with a crash. *Rude.*

He forces nonchalance and brings the mug to his lips, trying to hide behind it. “Well... you are. Good looking, I mean. Obviously. It’s practically criminal.”

Sakusa takes a small sip of tea. “I don’t really care what other people think,” he says softly. “I do care what *you* think, though.”

Atsumu chokes a little on his tea.

He wants to ask why. Why does it matter? Why does Sakusa’s gaze feel like sunlight filtering through a canopy?

But he doesn’t think he’s ready for the answer.

So instead, he stares out into the evening sky and drinks his tea like it might save him.

Would it be too dramatic to lean over the balcony and scream?

Probably.

He settles for gripping his mug tighter and screaming internally.

Atsumu throws himself into the gym that night with the desperation of a drowning man clawing for air.

It doesn’t matter that he already worked out that afternoon—what he needs now is a stretch deep enough to wring out the nameless tension curling tight along his spine.

His phone buzzes sometime past midnight; Osamu finally texts him as promised.

Acquired pants.

You should swing by my new lodge, check it out.

Atsumu huffs a laugh, swiping sweat from his brow as the next text comes in.

It’s nothing as fancy as yer place, but it’s pretty damn neat.

Then another—this time in all caps, accompanied by a picture of a porcelain tub:

ALSO THERE’S A BATHTUB!!

Atsumu grins despite himself, thumbs flying over the keyboard. *Ah. I’m so ridiculously happy for you, u have no idea.*

The reply is quick, smug:

It's bigger than it looks. Comfortably fits two people.

Atsumu's eyebrows shoot up. *Speaking from experience?* 😊

Osamu ignores him with the grace of a monk. *You coming tomorrow or not?*

I'll be there 😬

Maybe then he can interrogate Osamu in person. If his brother thinks he can hide anything from Atsumu, he's got another thing coming.

That's the thought still simmering in his chest when he steps into Osamu's new apartment the next day—only to stop short.

The first thing he notices is the quiet. Not the cold, empty kind, but a quiet that feels settled—soft, like the whole room is halfway into a dream. Warm light pools on honey-colored floors. Everything looks...intentional, like Osamu didn't just move in, like he belongs here. It smells faintly of jasmine tea and something toasted, like a memory cooling on a plate.

To the right, a small dining table wears an off-white cloth. One chair's tucked in, the other turned slightly askew, as if someone had just stood and left mid-thought. He almost doesn't want to disturb it.

The far wall is all essentials: a compact kitchenette, neat as a catalogue page, mugs hanging like ornaments. An open rack of clothes nearby. It's very Osamu. Functional, but with a quiet charm.

Straight ahead, a perfectly made bed rests under a wide window, the city hidden beneath sheer curtains.

But the cream sofa is what pulls Atsumu's eyes last—soft, lived-in, with a throw blanket and cushions. There's a hoodie draped over the armrest, and Atsumu knows immediately it's not Osamu's.

On his second pass, details start leaping out: a wine-colored t-shirt on the rack, a navy scarf he's never seen before, a second pair of slippers tucked neatly under the coffee table. Candles perched beside them.

Well, well.

"This is a really nice place, Samu," Atsumu says, arching a brow. "Glad they got you out of that dump."

Osamu smiles—pursed, real—and pulls two iced teas from the fridge. Tosses one across the room.

"It's more than I expected. Figured I'd get a shoebox dorm with a shared bathroom or something. But this? I love this."

Atsumu claps him on the back before collapsing on the couch. His fingers brush the sleeve of what is definitely *not* Osamu's hoodie. "When were you planning to tell me Suna's staying with you?"

Osamu flushes. "He's not staying with me. He just... spends the night sometimes."

"Aha." Atsumu makes sure the disbelief drips from every syllable. "Totally."

Osamu rolls his eyes and lowers himself onto the bed—a safe distance away. "Seriously, he has his own place."

"If you say so," Atsumu shrugs. "So how does this work? Are you a thing or not? If you're not dating and it's not a relationship, then what the hell is it?"

Osamu sighs, sprawling back on the bed. Sunlight spills across him like a confession, catching a strip of bruised skin where his shirt's ridden up.

"Look..." Osamu's mouth twists around something complicated. "It's not that we're not together. We just... never explicitly stated it? And now it feels weird to mention."

Trust his brother to be an idiot.

"But what does he call you?"

"My name?"

"No, like—how does he introduce you to people, dumbass."

"He's never really introduced me to anyone," Osamu shrugs, and Atsumu resists the urge to pull his hair out.

"Don't make me give the guy the shovel talk," he warns, taking what he hopes looks like a threatening sip of tea—if such a thing even exists. "I'm not gonna sit around and watch some guy fuck with you."

"Tsumu," Osamu says, exasperated. "No one's fucking with anyone. Have you never just... enjoyed spending time with someone so you keep doing it?"

Unbidden, Atsumu thinks of late-night library sessions. Balcony talks under stars. The sound of Sakusa's voice threading through quiet hours.

"I mean, yeah, but that doesn't mean we're together!"

"Obviously not." Osamu sits up, curling forward. "But there's a distinct difference between chatting with a friend and talking to a guy you *like*."

Atsumu squints. "Okay. Help me understand this. What do you talk about that's more than friends but somehow not a relationship?"

Osamu's cheeks pinken. He looks away.

“What do you mean what? Have you never flirted with anyone?”

“Uh,” Atsumu says, deeply offended. “Yes, I have. But if I’m flirting, I make damn sure they know my intentions. Either I’m bantering, angling for a date, or trying to get laid. So which is it with Suna?”

Osamu groans into his hands. “Why are you interrogating me about this?”

“Because I worry about you,” Atsumu snaps. “I know you. You’ll turn yourself inside out pining. I don’t want you getting hurt because you can’t figure out if you’re on the same page. I’m not saying he’s a bad guy. But Jesus Christ, just ask him to be your boyfriend, what the fuck.”

“I like what we have now,” Osamu mutters, petulant.

“Which is??”

“I don’t know.” His voice softens. “Late-night conversations. The deep kind you don’t share with everyone. Laying in bed talking about nothing and everything. Cooking together. Having someone look after you when you feel like shit.” Osamu’s face is red enough to light a match. He looks like he’d rather dissect a frog. “Seriously, Tsumu, things are fine the way they are.”

Atsumu narrows his eyes, not entirely convinced. “Are you afraid to burst this ‘domestic’ bubble? Because that’s all the more reason to talk about it. I can’t believe I’m giving you dating advice.”

“Then stop giving me dating advice!” Osamu yells, collapsing back like a felled tree. “We’ll talk about it when we talk about it! Why don’t you get a partner so you can stop butting into my love life?”

“Wooooow.” Atsumu drags the word out, unimpressed. “Good comeback. Very smart. Did you Google that?”

Osamu flicks him off without looking up. “Fuck you, Tsumu.”

“I’d tell you the same except you seem pretty fucked already, sooo.”

They simmer in silence—Osamu contemplative, Atsumu worn thin by too many sleepless nights.

Deep talks. Late-night conversations. Someone taking care of you when you feel like shit.

Funny how close that sounds to what’s happening with Sakusa.

Not that he and Sakusa are anything. Never mind the balcony talks about fate or the library sessions that stretch past midnight. Or the vitamins. Or the chamomile, and the soup and the careful tucking-in, and.

And and and—

Fuck.

Fuck fuck fuck.

Who is he to judge Osamu when he can't even name whatever this is?

Not a boss and his employee. And definitely not regular friends.

This is bad. This is really bad.

Opening this can of worms might summon the reaper.

And Atsumu already has enough things haunting him.

He returns to Sakusa's residence with his thoughts aswirl.

Atsumu went looking for answers and came back with questions he's not ready to ask. Serves him right for poking a sleeping bear.

Ugh. Fuck Osamu and his stupid logic.

Now he's being stupid and illogical. It's contagious. He's infected.

He kicks his shoes off, glaring at nothing in particular. His boss. His boss. His unfairly beautiful, bafflingly kind, inexcusably thoughtful boss—but boss nonetheless. Atsumu is here for work. No matter how much cohabitation has blurred that line.

He lives here for Sakusa. Not with Sakusa.

The thought flusters him so much he almost considers bashing his head against the nearest sufficiently solid surface and hoping for a concussion.

"Honestly, Tsumu, what the fuck?" He mutters under his breath as he heads for the bathroom, yanking off his clothes with more force than necessary and chucking them into the laundry basket.

I don't really care what other people think. I do care what you think, though.

The memory of Sakusa's voice sends an involuntary shiver racing down his spine.

"Oh my God," Atsumu says aloud, twisting the faucet and shoving his head under the cold spray.

Maybe, if he's lucky, he can drown these thoughts out.

The water hammers over his skin, sharp and relentless, but it does little to scrub away the heat simmering in his chest. Still, minute by minute, breath by breath, the chaos dulls—sanded down to something he can almost hold without burning.

When he finally steps out an indefinite time later, he does so with tentatively gathered composure—fresh, clean, and ready to dive face-first into next semester’s readings.

Fukuda-sensei, he knows, will find any excuse to torment him. But at least this time he can be prepared. Or, failing that, use Kuroo as a human shield. The latter sounds like a winning strategy. The former? Pure wishful thinking.

He’s halfway to grabbing his laptop when he notices a blue shopping bag sitting neatly on his desk.

Atsumu stops dead. Stares.

“What,” he says aloud, to no one in particular, as though the bag might explode.

Why is this here?

He edges closer like it’s some strange specimen and lifts the tag. His name stares back at him.

Okay. So it didn’t just materialize out of thin air. It’s for him.

Not that that clears up any of his confusion.

He peeks inside—and blinks, stunned. A pile of neatly folded clothes rests at the bottom.

Cautiously, he tugs the first piece free, and the weight surprises him. A jacket—black, with a dark denim panel across the shoulders. Heavier than expected, lined with something soft that his fingers sink into like water. Smooth, almost satiny. The outside smells faintly of new leather and detergent, that crisp, clean scent that makes him think of Sakusa’s closet. A stitched patch near the chest catches his eye—sharp lettering, understated but expensive.

Underneath is a zip-up hoodie, black as the rest but softer, more forgiving when he runs his hand down the sleeve. That broken-in kind of cotton, warm and easy, like it’s been waiting for someone to live in it. The drawstrings brush his wrist, tipped in silver. Even those feel deliberate.

The pants come next—a loose fit, fluid and heavy in his hands.

And at the very bottom—sneakers. Grey, layered mesh and leather with thick soles, solid but not clunky. When he lifts one, it’s lighter than it looks, all engineered curves and grooves. It smells faintly of rubber and something metallic, like a new car. They feel fast, even just sitting in his palms.

He doesn’t need to think hard about who’s behind this. There’s only one person it could be.

Setting the bag down with careful hands, Atsumu heads upstairs in search of Sakusa.

It doesn’t take long to find him.

As expected, he’s in the library, bent over his nightly readings. His hair is damp, freshly washed, loungewear soft and draped over him in all the right ways.

“Hey,” he says carefully, stepping inside and shutting the door behind him. “There’s a gift bag in my room.”

Sakusa looks up, glasses flashing before he slides them off with deliberate ease. “Yes.”

Atsumu tries not to fidget. “You bought me clothes...?”

“I overheard you yesterday—on the phone with your brother.” Sakusa shrugs, all calm composure, like he isn’t currently reducing Atsumu’s brain into molten chaos.

“Kiyoomi.” Atsumu’s voice pitches somewhere between exasperation and disbelief. “You seriously went out and bought me an outfit?”

“Yes,” Sakusa says simply. “I picked something less form-fitting in case your measurements changed since your last fitting. I hope you like it.”

What is Atsumu supposed to do at this point—*die*? “It’s... it’s too much... it looks expensive.”

“Consider it an early birthday gift.” Another shrug, maddeningly casual. “Your party’s the day after tomorrow, right?”

Atsumu can only nod, mute and useless.

“Try it on,” Sakusa continues, “and let me know if the fit’s okay. I still have the receipt in case you want to exchange anything. Especially the shoes—those took some guesswork.”

Atsumu wants to scream. Or cry. Or both. Possibly combust. “You’re so insane,” he mutters, raw with something he doesn’t want to name. “Like—genuinely insane. I don’t even know what to say. I wasn’t expecting a birthday gift at all.”

Sakusa arches a brow. “You thought I wouldn’t get you one?”

“I mean...” Atsumu shifts his weight, suddenly too aware of his own hands. “Technically we’re boss and employee, y’know. Despite... everything.”

That unreadable look flickers across Sakusa’s ridiculously perfect face. “Atsumu,” he says slowly, deliberately. “You’re not just an employee.”

Then what am I? Atsumu aches to ask. *What am I to you? A friend? A roommate? A break in the monotony? A distraction?* None of it—*none* of it—feels like enough.

He stares at the floor, throat tight. “I’ll... go try them on. Thank you. Really. It means a lot.”

Sakusa’s smile softens. Enough to feel like a blow.

Atsumu retreats to his room feeling like someone just clocked him with a particularly vindictive brick. Then shoved him down the stairs for good measure.

The outfit is exactly where he left it. Heavy. Stylish. Expensive. Atsumu doesn't even dare look up the brand—he already knows what the answer would do to him. Designer pants. Sleek jacket. Shoes that look like they could walk through entire cities without touching the ground.

He undresses in a daze, fingertips grazing the fabric of each piece as he slips it on. Everything feels cool, smooth, whisper-soft. The whole thing—blacked out, clean, dangerous in its sharp edges—feels like stepping into someone else's skin. Someone sharper. Someone untouchable.

He turns to the mirror and stops breathing.

It's good. *Fuck*. It's *really* good. The kind of outfit that would stop him dead if he saw it on display. The kind that makes you move differently, like gravity shifted just to hold you in its palm.

Is that what Sakusa thought when he picked it out?

The question burns like fire in his chest. Sakusa went out and handpicked this for him. Touched every piece. Considered every detail. Each choice—deliberate. Each thread—selected with Atsumu in mind.

His stomach feels like someone lit a match and dropped it in gasoline.

He swallows hard, fingers skimming the lapels of the jacket. And then—God help him—he pictures Sakusa's hands there instead. Long, pale, elegant fingers ghosting over the fabric... then sliding lower. Pulling it off the rack. Pulling it off—

The thought slams into him like a body check.

His heart kicks into overdrive, a hard, relentless rhythm that rattles his ribs. His brain takes off with it, careening out of control, a rollercoaster ripping through its own tracks.

He shouldn't. He *really* shouldn't. But the thought is there, clinging like burrs. His own hand flattens over his chest, and in a cruel flicker of imagination, it isn't his anymore. It's Sakusa's. Cool, precise. Curious in the worst, best way.

It takes him a full minute to claw his way out of it—out of the vice grip of a fantasy that bloomed like a wildfire and refused to burn out.

He leaves his room flushed and unsteady, confusion and heat tangled in webs under his skin. His body feels like it's been rewired, short-circuited by thoughts he's terrified to name.

Sakusa is where he left him, lounging like marble brought to life, twirling a pen between long fingers. The motion hooks Atsumu's gaze and pulls, unspooling something molten inside him. His chest feels too tight. His throat, bone-dry.

Then Sakusa looks up.

That's all it takes.

The shiver comes like a silent predator crawling up his spine, merciless and impatient, as those dark eyes drag over him—slow, syrup-thick, leaving a trail Atsumu swears *burns*. It presses on his skin like weight, like heat, until he has to bite his lip just to keep from shuddering outright.

Because the way Sakusa is looking at him...

“Hm,” Sakusa murmurs, rising in one fluid movement.

Atsumu can’t move. Can hardly breathe.

He stands there caught in the gravity of a predator’s gaze, breath shallow, pulse loud. Anticipating. *Aching*.

“It’s missing something.” Sakusa tips his head, voice dipping into a low rasp as he steps close—close enough that Atsumu catches a breath of his scent, clean and sharp, threaded with something that makes his pulse leap even higher. “Come with me.”

Atsumu follows without thought, like Sakusa’s voice wrapped around his spine and pulled. Out of the library, across the living room, down the long corridor. Each step winds him tighter, his thoughts falling away one by one until there’s nothing left but the pounding in his chest and the man walking ahead of him.

By the time they reach Sakusa’s room, Atsumu is lightheaded. He doesn’t dare look at the bed—God, not with his head already drowning where it shouldn’t.

Instead, he trails Sakusa into the walk-in closet and stops dead at the edge, statue-still, while Sakusa moves with practiced ease. Like he isn’t ripping Atsumu’s world apart thread by thread.

A drawer slides open. Sakusa hums to himself, skimming through velvet and steel, then plucks out a glint of silver.

“Come here,” he says softly—softly enough that Atsumu feels it more than hears it, like a hand brushing his jaw.

He steps forward on legs that don’t feel like his.

It’s a watch. Not just a watch—a Rolex. Of course it is.

“May I?” Sakusa asks, voice as gentle as the gleam of polished metal between his fingers.

Words desert him. Atsumu just lifts his wrist, like his body knows what it wants before his mind can catch up.

Sakusa’s fingers close around him—warm, steady, claiming without force. The faint scrape of a callus ghosts over his skin as if it has all the time in the world. He works the band slowly, deliberately, like this moment deserves precision. Each brush of his knuckles sends a tremor skating down Atsumu’s spine.

The clasp clicks shut, sharp in the hush of the room—obscene in its finality. The watch settles against his wrist with a cool, elegant weight, pressing over the frantic beat of his pulse like it wants to memorise the rhythm.

He stares.

Once, years ago, he and Osamu walked into a Rolex store for a laugh, gawking at prices while the clerk tried not to laugh back. Two million yen for the one they liked.

“There,” Sakusa murmurs, his touch skimming over Atsumu’s pulse before slipping away, slow enough to burn. “That fixes it.”

Atsumu drags his eyes up with effort, throat working. “Kiyoomi...” His voice sounds wrecked to his own ears. “Are you... are you *lending* me this?”

“Yes,” Sakusa replies with quiet finality. “It ties the outfit together.”

“How much is this watch?” Atsumu asks, terrified.

“Does it matter?” The lightness in Sakusa’s tone is a blade disguised as silk.

Atsumu’s chest knots. “I can’t walk out of here with two million yen on my wrist. That’s—That’s not—I’m not—” He chokes on the words. “I’m just me.”

The curve of Sakusa’s mouth is small, almost secret, like Atsumu just told him something charming. “Yes. You’re you.”

“I’m not worth two million yen,” Atsumu blurts out, the words splitting out of him like glass under pressure.

“You’re right.”

The words land, and then Sakusa moves—composed, unhurried—as he turns back to the drawer, plucks out a square black box, and closes the space between them. He unclasps the watch with deft hands, the brush of his fingers slow, lingering. Metal slides off in a soft sigh, whispering over skin, and the ghost of that touch sinks all the way to Atsumu’s bones.

“You’re not worth two million yen.” Sakusa’s voice is quiet ruin, dark eyes locking onto Atsumu’s with unbearable gravity. The corner of his mouth lifts just barely—enough to undo him completely—as he delivers the final blow:

“After all... you can’t measure the worth of something made of stars.”

The Point of No Return

Chapter Summary

His head drops forward to his bent knees. He drags a breath in, shuddering, trembling all the way down to his bones.

You can't measure the worth of something made of stars.

“Oh,” Atsumu chokes out, one palm pressing over the agonizing thrum of his heart. *Oh oh oh.*

“Fuck,” he whispers, shaking like a live wire. *“Fuck.”*

Chapter Notes

I know I just posted chapter 25 yesterday but I'm riding the momentum because this is technically part 2 of that chapter.

My wrist is inflamed and hurts but I just had to put this out 😊

Thank you so much for reading! This fic is already 100k+ words which is insane omg, but you guys keep me going ♥

Please enjoy ♥

Atsumu's breath stutters out of him.

He's drowning—sinking, sinking, sinking—pulled under by the gravity in Sakusa's dark eyes. His throat works soundlessly, words splintering before they form, as Sakusa closes the watch box with deliberate care.

“Take it,” Sakusa says softly. Then he steps closer, turning Atsumu's hand palm-up like it's something precious, placing the box there. The weight is shocking—cool metal contained in velvet—and then Sakusa's fingers spread over the back of his hand, searing heat through his skin, burning a brand Atsumu will never scrub away. He nudges Atsumu's fingers until they curl around the box. “Keep it if you want.”

“I—” Atsumu licks his lips, swallows against a throat so dry it feels scorched. He doesn’t know what his face looks like. He thinks his chest might be cracked open, all the mess inside spilling where Sakusa can see. “This is... but I...”

Sakusa’s expression softens. His voice is a quiet tether. “Breathe,” he says, gentle, like a command only Atsumu would obey. “It’s just a watch.”

Atsumu finds his voice, rough and scraped raw. “It’s not just a watch.”

He’s acutely aware Sakusa is still holding his hand, their fingers bridged by a single black box like a barricade—because if that barrier vanished, if their palms touched, Atsumu is certain the world would catch fire.

He stares down at them, at the pale pink stretched across Sakusa’s knuckles. His tongue darts out again, chasing words that refuse to come. “Why are you doing this?” he whispers, and before he can stop himself—like gravity has him in a chokehold—his free hand lifts, covers Sakusa’s. “Hey, Kiyoomi... really. Why are you doing this?”

“Because I want to.” Sakusa’s voice hums low, intimate, crawling under Atsumu’s skin, curling deep in his bloodstream. “Because I’m selfish.”

“Selfish?” Atsumu stammers, eyes wide, everything spinning.

“Yes.” Sakusa smiles faintly, self-deprecating, as if it costs him something. “I’m selfish. I do this because it makes me happy.”

Atsumu’s head is spinning so violently he almost laughs. “I think I need to lie down.”

Sakusa chuckles, warm and unguarded. “Go get some rest, Atsumu.”

And then the touch slips away—slow, like silk sliding from his skin—leaving Atsumu bereft with a small black box that feels heavier than a branding iron. He clutches it like a lifeline, because maybe it is.

“Thank you,” he manages, voice paper-thin. “Good night.”

Then he turns on his heel and flees.

His knees wobble on the stairs, one hand death-gripping the railing, lungs stuttering as if they’ve forgotten how to work. By the time he shoves the bedroom door shut, his legs buckle entirely, and he slides down hard against the wood, heart pounding like a fist against his ribs.

He stares at the box in his hands, wide-eyed, chest heaving. The ghost of Sakusa’s touch is still there, scorching him, refusing to fade.

Thoughts won’t line up. They scatter like birds.

You’re not just an employee.

His head drops forward to his bent knees. He drags a breath in, shuddering, trembling all the way down to his bones.

You can't measure the worth of something made of stars.

“Oh,” Atsumu chokes out, one palm pressing over the agonizing thrum of his heart. *Oh oh oh.*

“Fuck,” he whispers, shaking like a live wire. *“Fuck.”*

With fingers that barely work, he fumbles for his phone—an anchor, something solid—and pulls up Osamu’s contact.

The line clicks. “Hello?” Osamu’s voice crackles, familiar and grounding, and when Atsumu doesn’t answer right away, tension threads through it. “Tsumu...?”

“Samu,” Atsumu rasps. His throat is shredded. “Can I come over?”

“What’s going on?” Osamu sounds instantly alert.

“I...” Atsumu swallows hard. “I just need you.”

“You’re gonna give me a heart attack one of these days,” Osamu mutters, already moving. “Do I need to come and get you?”

“No,” Atsumu says. “I’ll take a taxi.”

There’s a pause—heavy, loaded. “Okay. I’ll leave the door unlocked.”

“Thanks, Samu,” Atsumu whispers, then ends the call.

It takes him a full minute to haul himself upright.

He sets the Rolex down carefully on the desk, like it’s dangerous—and maybe it is. He’ll deal with it later.

The outfit comes off in trembling pieces, discarded over the chair as he stumbles into loungewear, shoves his phone in his pocket, and leaves without looking back.

The October air slams into him, sharp as a blade as he makes his way out of the Sakusa building.

Atsumu shivers. He forgot to bring a jacket.

But his feet move anyway. Yes. Movement—he needs movement, needs somewhere to pour the adrenaline screaming in his veins.

He picks up the pace, taxi forgotten.

And then he’s running.

Cold air scorches his throat. His lungs ache from the chill, but it doesn't smother the fire inside—if anything, it stokes it higher, wilder. His heart races like it's trying to tear free, and Atsumu sprints faster, desperate to outrun it, desperate to outrun himself.

By the time Osamu's building looms ahead, his legs feel carved from lead. The elevator ride is agonising. The corridor is endless.

He braces a hand against the door when he reaches it, gulping air like a man starved. Sweat slicks his spine, dampens his hair, and still—still—the ghost of Sakusa's touch lingers.

Finally, he exhales and pushes inside.

Osamu freezes mid-pace, staring at him like he's seen a ghost. Then:

“What the fuck happened to you?”

And isn't that the million-dollar question.

Osamu sits him down and thrusts a glass of water into his hand. “Drink.”

He disappears into the closet and returns with a clean shirt and a towel.

“Jesus, you're a mess,” Osamu mutters, tossing the towel over Atsumu's head and rubbing him down with brisk, brotherly annoyance. “Change outta that shirt before you catch a cold.”

By the time Atsumu has changed, Osamu's already in the kitchenette, kettle hissing low. He returns with a mug of chamomile that Atsumu barely registers—because the steam curls up and becomes Sakusa's fingers again, brushing over his skin, tugging him back into the black hole of his gaze.

“Drink,” Osamu says again, frowning now.

Atsumu takes a shaky sip.

“What the hell happened?”

Where does he even begin? “I... I don't know.”

Osamu's frown deepens. “What do you mean, you don't know?”

“My heart won't calm down,” Atsumu whispers, pressing a palm against his chest like he could physically contain the thundering inside. “It's beating out of my ribs. I've never felt like this before.”

“This' like how?” Osamu asks, voice gentling. His hand settles on Atsumu's back, grounding. “Is this work-related?”

Atsumu jolts. Words tremble out of him. “I’m more than just an employee. Shit, Osamu. I’m more than just an employee.”

“Okay...” Osamu says slowly, like he’s talking to a bomb with an uncertain timer. “Are we talking an *affair* here? Or what?”

“Worse,” Atsumu chokes out, setting the mug down, face buried in his hands. “We’re not anything. And somehow we’re *everything*. And the way he looks at me. The things he says. The way he *cares*. I just—” His voice cracks. “I don’t know what this is. I don’t know what it *means*. I’m scared of how I feel.”

“Oookay,” Osamu draws the word out, rubbing a calming circle into Atsumu’s nape. “Breathe.”

“I just...” Atsumu gulps a breath. “He overheard us on the phone. And then he *brought me an outfit* because of it.”

Osamu blinks. “Wow.”

“Then he said he did it because it makes him *happy*,” Atsumu laughs, disbelieving, half-hysterical. “And—fuck—he keeps calling me *stardust*.”

Osamu stares. “Okay. That’s... yeah, you’re definitely more than an employee.”

“He lent me his Rolex,” Atsumu whispers like it’s a war crime. “And then said I could keep it. *Samu*. What the fuck does that *mean*?”

He pauses. Then, like a sudden sharp pebble in his shoe: “Do you think he’s propositioning me?”

Even as he says it, he knows it’s wrong. Sakusa has never crossed that line. Atsumu flashes back to that day on the couch, when Sakusa looked like he’d swallowed a lemon at the very idea.

I have never, and would never, solicit sexual favours from my staff, Miya.

“Uh,” Osamu scratches at his cheek, unsure. “I don’t think that’s it, Tsumu. Sounds... a bit more serious than that.”

Atsumu deflates like a collapsing lung. “I’m so screwed.”

And then Osamu hits him like a freight train.

“Do you think your boss has feelings for you?”

The words poke something deep and unsteady. Atsumu curls in on himself. His stomach churns. His breath catches in his throat.

Does he? Does Sakusa— *could* Sakusa—?

But how? Why? When did that start?

Atsumu's brain starts trawling every moment in high-definition: the study sessions. The calls. Oat-san. The gentle tucking in. The spontaneous days off. The way Sakusa texts like he wants to be known. The late-night phone calls that turned into constellations shared over a speakerphone.

Sakusa waiting outside stations. Sakusa holding open doors. Sakusa taking him to lunch like it's nothing. Sakusa *dressing* him.

"Fuck," Atsumu breathes. "I don't know. *Maybe.*"

Osamu doesn't miss a beat. "Do *you* have feelings for *him*?"

Atsumu's chest lurches, like his heart just tripped down a flight of stairs. "I— I don't know. *Maybe.*"

"I see," Osamu says, suddenly solemn. He gets up, grabs a blanket, and dumps it over Atsumu's lap like he's preparing him for emotional surgery. "Why don't you just ask him?"

"Are you *insane*?" Atsumu hisses, face burning. "I'd die."

"Okay, don't ask him," Osamu shrugs. "Make a move. See what he does."

"I'd die *faster.*" Atsumu groans. "I'm not sure I can even *look* at him right now."

"Wow," Osamu says, with the air of someone diagnosing terminal stupidity. "You're down *bad.*"

Atsumu doesn't even argue.

And the worst part—the *baffling* part—is that when he looks at Sakusa, he doesn't see a powerful CEO or a man above him. He sees—

A soft, aching man. A locked-away soul with brittle walls. A bleeding heart held together by silk and silence.

He sees *Kiyoomi*. The voice on the other end of the phone. The man who listens as Atsumu weaves galaxies between them like lifelines.

"Why don't you try to get some sleep?" Osamu coaxes, nudging him down against the couch. "Things'll make more sense in the morning."

Atsumu slumps like a felled tree. He doesn't protest when Osamu tucks the blanket over him properly.

"Seriously. Sleep," Osamu says, voice steady. "Stop spiraling. If you want him, go after him. If you don't, put up some distance. He's a smart guy. He'll get the message."

Face buried in his pillow for the night, Atsumu shuts his eyes like it'll make the world quieter.

And just before sleep drags him under, he whispers, with every ounce of weary certainty:

“I'm gonna die.”

He doesn't die.

Miraculously.

He wakes up to birds tittering outside Osamu's window like nothing in the world is wrong.

The apartment is empty — Osamu's probably at work by now. Atsumu peels himself off the couch, still sticky and gross from last night's impromptu cardio meltdown, and briefly considers setting his clothes on fire so Sakusa won't ever see them.

Good thing he and Osamu are the same size.

Then it all comes flooding back:

The outfit. The Rolex. The way Sakusa said *keep it if you want*, like it was nothing. The murmured half-confessions—more dangerous than any outright declaration.

It would've been kinder if Sakusa had just brained him with an iron bar.

Atsumu drags himself to the bathroom. *Would it be too dramatic to drown himself?* Probably. Doesn't stop him from considering it.

He can't even look at his own body in the mirror. Not out of modesty, no, just the desperate, undignified need to avoid sparking any kind of inappropriate fantasy. He's got enough going on without adding a guilt spiral to the pile.

Scrub scrub, dissociate, rinse, repeat.

Scrub scrub, glare at the shampoo bottle, rinse, repeat.

Almost slip on the tile floor, laugh hysterically, then seriously consider getting institutionalised.

What stage of grief is this?

He skips breakfast, too queasy with butterflies to make space for food.

Instead, he runs.

Not through the pent-up streets near Sakusa's building, but through a local park. Somewhere green and open and less terrifying. It's quieter than he expects at ten in the morning, the sun slanting through trees, a light breeze tugging at him with playful fingers.

He lets it push him forward.

There's a concrete ramp separating the park from the street. Atsumu, running on instinct and old muscle memory, vaults it cleanly. His soles hit the brick fence. One leap and he's on a foot-wide ledge, arms loose, balance tight.

Below, traffic hums. Yellowing leaves swirl in the air.

It's not a route he knows, but Atsumu's never minded improvising. His eyes scan it—rooftops, balconies, railings, stairs. A playground for the restless.

He flips off the ledge and lands light, startling a man walking his dog as he blurs past into the crosswalk, red light holding cars at bay.

A chorus of honks breaks out behind him as he vaults across each hood, sliding across glossy metal like he's weightless. One, two, three. The world flashes by in chrome and wind.

On the other side, he scales a tree, grabs the highest branch, launches onto a balcony, swings over the railing, and lands squarely on a sloping rooftop.

This is where his body remembers how to breathe.

Free running clears his head like nothing else. It collapses the world into each moment; each landing, each breath, each twist of muscle. There's no room for spiralling when he's calculating angles mid-air.

His feet hit the next roof clean. He keeps moving.

A rusted fire escape greets him like an old friend. He descends flight after flight, skipping every other step, dropping down with a roll that absorbs the force and carries him into a full run again.

The next jump is pure showmanship: a handplant into a wobbly handstand, arms trembling, before he locks it.

Then: one breath in.

And a triple backflip.

He lands hard, knees bent, sweat dripping down his face, the chain of his ring necklace tangled and catching against his throat.

So much for showering before he left.

But it did the trick.

His chest is still heaving, but his mind—finally—is quiet. Lighter. Calmer. The mess hasn't gone, but it's not suffocating him.

Above him, the sky yawns wide and blue, clouds drifting like cotton over the edges of the world.

But he's done running.

Atsumu shoves his hands in his hoodie pocket, exhales, and walks home.

The Sakusa residence is quiet when Atsumu finally steps inside.

Sakusa's slippers are neatly lined along the genkan and he notes that his suitcase is gone.

Atsumu allows himself an exhale, his shoulders dropping. It takes him a moment to resettle into a space that's grown familiar—even comforting—though it now holds a silence that nips at his heels.

Then he showers. Again.

Shaves. Moisturises. Goes through the motions.

His hair could use a touch-up. If Yachi-san is free, maybe she can squeeze him in. He shoots her a quick text as he towel-dries his hair, and mentally ticks off the list of chores awaiting him.

Toilet Haider behaves. Cooperative today. Less judgmental, somehow, like even the bleach can tell this Friday is already on thin emotional ice.

The Dyson hums softer than usual—or maybe it just feels that way, his thoughts loud enough to drown out everything else.

The dishwasher sloshes without rebellion, even as Atsumu's feelings threaten to bubble over like foam through a faulty seal.

“On the one day I needed solidarity,” he mutters, shaking his head as he starts the cycle.

Does Sakusa even know he didn't come home last night?

Maybe it's better if he doesn't.

Atsumu's not sure he could handle the humiliation of having run away like a moody teenager because he got... feelings.

He's twenty-six.

“This is so embarrassing,” he says aloud, scrubbing harder at a counter that's already clean.

So what if he's being romanced? Hell, what if he's actively being pursued and is too dense to realise it?

Since when does he run from that?

He has a stash of old love letters in a shoebox under his childhood bed—ones he wrote his first girlfriend in high school. She returned them when they broke up. Said it didn't feel right to keep them.

He once let a handsome stranger kiss him breathless in the middle of a packed bar, sweat and music crashing around them, an audience be damned.

He used to fold paper rings for his first boyfriend, scribbling pick-up lines on the inside just to make him blush.

Atsumu has never been afraid of loving.

He's always thrown himself in headfirst—chasing connection, craving intimacy, offering himself up like his heart is not something sacred and breakable.

So why does this feel different?

He bites his lip, catching his reflection in the counter, scrubbed so clean it shines.

Maybe it's because he's never met anyone like Sakusa.

Sakusa isn't a boss. Or a friend. Or even a lover.

He's a piano piece still being written—something unfinished and unbearably beautiful. A melody that pulls Atsumu in even when it frightens him.

It's not just attraction.

It's gravity.

And if he steps closer, it'll nest in his ribcage and beat beneath his skin, in time with his heart, until he can't tell where it ends and he begins.

He folds the dish towel and places it gently by the sink.

Breathes in. Exhales.

Okay.

Fine.

There's really only one way forward— and it's not by turning back.

The day passes rather... uneventfully after that, considering the revelations Atsumu has had in the last twenty-four hours.

Past stepping out again to get a retouch, the day is quiet, and the sun is lazy as it dips behind the horizon—a sharp contrast to the thrum of anticipation in Atsumu's chest.

Will he be able to look Sakusa in the face when he sees him again, or has their last interaction obliterated his composure forever?

The stillness of the house presses down on his skin, nervous tension rising as midnight draws closer.

He finds himself padding barefoot around the apartment, lost and strangely bereft, fingers dragging across smooth surfaces, dipping into untouched crevices.

Here, Sakusa rests in thought. Here, Sakusa sips his chamomile. Here, Sakusa pressed a bottle of vitamins into his palm.

Atsumu's feet slow by the piano—always gleaming, always tuned—and he touches the surface with ginger fingertips. Sakusa would usually be here by now, fingers dancing over the keys, music speaking where words wouldn't dare.

In a trance, Atsumu lowers himself onto the bench, brushing the pad of his thumb along the lip of the fallboard before coaxing it open.

The keys catch the soft light of the city in an otherwise dark room.

It's been a while since Atsumu's played.

But the moment his fingers touch the keys, it feels like slipping underwater—weightless, slow, the world above fading into silence. He doesn't need to think. [*Turning Page*](#) isn't something he plays. It's something he remembers. Muscle memory. Heart memory.

The opening notes spill out like a secret not meant to be whispered between these walls. It aches in the silence. His fingers move gently, reverently, pressing and sliding over where Sakusa's touch had lingered.

Skin to ghostly impression.

His voice rasps out—quiet, out of practice:

I've waited a hundred years

But I'd wait a million more for you...

Warm, round harmonies bloom between the notes, wrapping around the murmur of his voice.

Nothing prepared me for

What the privilege of being yours would do...

His eyes fall shut. He sinks into the languorous haze of melody. He plays it slower than usual, dragging time a little, falling deeper. Because the song doesn't want to be rushed. It wants to ache. To hold something just long enough to feel it slip away.

If I had only felt the warmth within your touch

If I had only seen how you smile when you blush

Or how you curl your lips when you concentrate enough...

His voice regains rhythm—soft, but clear. Like a caged bird finally taking flight.

He croons the lyrics into the dark, into the safety of silence, into the arms of his own vulnerability.

Your love is my sweetest page

Where only the sweetest words remain...

The room is quiet, but his chest isn't.

His chest wants to cry out. So Atsumu lets it.

Every kiss is a cursive line

Every touch is a redefining phrase

I surrender who I've been for who you are

For nothing makes me stronger than your fragile heart...

And oh, how it carries him—riding the rush on the wings of his voice.

This wasn't just music. It was the sound of him imagining what it would be like to stay. To love someone so much, the idea of leaving would feel like forgetting how to breathe.

As the last notes fade, Atsumu lets his fingers hover, reluctant to lift them. Tethered by what he's feeling.

A slight rustle startles him out of it, and he looks toward the stairs to find Sakusa standing there.

Still in his work clothes, though the day has worn them in. Sleeves rolled up, tie loosened and askew. Hair ruffled like he's run his hands through it too many times. He looks... soft around the edges. A man caught in the moment between exhale and confession.

But what arrests Atsumu is the expression on his face—splintered open, vulnerable. As if his song has reached into something quiet inside Sakusa and held it.

"How long have you been there?" Atsumu asks, heat flooding his cheeks.

“You play?” Sakusa asks, like he’s been dazed by a spell. He approaches, not quite steady. “You play the piano?”

“A little,” Atsumu admits. “My music teacher recommended learning piano before picking up guitar. This is just an old favourite I haven’t forgotten.”

Sakusa stands there framed by city light, dishevelled—the most put out of order Atsumu has ever seen him. “It’s beautiful.”

“What is?”

“Your voice, the way you play,” Sakusa says. And the strange longing in his voice nearly unspools Atsumu.

His heart sounds and resounds like a string plucked by hungry fingers.

“Kiyoomi,” Atsumu says, as steadily as he can manage, “I hope you realise what it sounds like when you say things like that...”

Sakusa licks his lips, hesitant.

Atsumu sees it in the twitch of his fingers, the bob of his throat, the careful stillness of a man on the edge of doing something irreversible.

Then—his hand rises.

Slow. Intentional.

Every inch of motion telegraphs itself, giving Atsumu time to pull away, time to stop this—

But he doesn’t.

He can’t.

Atsumu holds his breath, heart racing and racing and racing, as the backs of Sakusa’s fingers brush ever so softly down the side of his face. “I know,” Sakusa murmurs.

The achingly gentle touch withdraws too soon—leaving tingles, leaving a warbling heart and a trembling soul, questions dissolving over Atsumu’s tongue before they can take form.

“I’ve had a long day,” Sakusa says then—and Atsumu doesn’t miss the way he flexes the hand that had touched him. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Atsumu stares after his retreating figure, breath gone.

Thoughts gone.

Heart stolen.

Born Anew

Chapter Summary

An inscription on the caseback immediately catches his attention.

Sakusa Kiyoomi, written in looping English letters, waiting to be noticed.

“Oh.”

Hesitant, as if even his bedroom walls might judge him, Atsumu runs his thumb over the letters. This isn't just a watch. It feels like... a mark.

Chapter Notes

I've been put on mandatory rest by the TMLTL discord peeps because I hurt my wrist but I am back baby!

I bring you a chapter that was very difficult to write to be honest, I really struggled. But I hope you like it!

Here's a [link](#) to the playlist we collaborated on making, go shake your hips with Atsumu ✨

And last but not least; look at the fanart ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) TMLTL received 🥰

Thank you so much for 1.5k kudos!!!! You guys are awesome ♥

Atsumu lies in bed, wide awake and humming with nervous energy.

Five hours of sleep—hardly ideal, but better than nothing for someone who'd spent the night tossing, burying his face in his pillow like it could muffle the heat in his chest.

It's 10 AM. Nine whole hours before the party.

The compact black box on his desk gleams with the Rolex logo, a smug reminder of its intended recipient.

Sakusa's words from last night still curl through his mind, soft and inescapable. A spell he can't shake.

He drags his hands over his face, exhales shakily. “Dammit...”

His phone buzzes: four messages from four different people.

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: *hey, rin said he'll pick us up for the party*

Atsumu thumbs back a quick 👍, then, because he's a decent twin and a good brother: *Happy Birthday* ❤️

My Clo(w)ne 🤖: *nu-uh! We're doing this in person, save ur wishes* 🧑

Atsumu huffs a laugh, moving to the next thread.

Roosterhead: *yo, heads up, we got like 50+ people coming*

Atsumu blinks. *Fifty?*

Roosterhead: *yessir, everyone's bringing plus ones and friends. kinda got outta hand.*

Terrified: *do you know who the guests are?*

Roosterhead: *most of em yeah, decent people dw*

Well, if ya say so...

Roosterhead: *need a ride?*

Nah, Suna and Samu are picking me up.

Bokuto confirms last minute that he'll be there, and Oat sends a flurry of emojis asking if she should bring anything.

Just your wonderful presence ✨, he replies.

Oat 🌻: 🙄

An hour slips away in a haze of birthday replies, a call from Ma, and clearing *It's Your Birthday!* spam from brands that should never have had his number.

By noon, he finally peels himself out of bed.

Outside his door, the low whir of the blender hums, and like some Pavlovian curse, his pulse leaps.

He curls his fingers into his palms, forces a grounding breath. Then he walks out with the overdone cheer of a student presenting in front of a class for the fiftieth time—not because they're confident, but because they've learned to fake it.

“Morning!” he greets, beelining for the fridge. Smooth. Unbothered. Definitely not thinking about last night's near-confession.

“Morning,” Sakusa returns, blinking at the preppiness before his mouth lifts into a small, relieved smile. “Happy birthday.”

“Thanks!” Atsumu says, fighting to keep his voice light. “Did you end up getting some rest last night?”

Only the faintest hitch in his tone betrays him over *last night*.

“Somehow,” Sakusa says, sipping his smoothie. “And you?”

“Somehow,” Atsumu echoes, smiling sheepishly.

He tells himself to leave it there—but the words are already climbing up his throat.

“Hey... I’m not sure if it’s your type of scene, but you should come to the party tonight. If you want. No pressure.”

Sakusa’s gaze holds his, steady and unreadable. “Do you want me there?”

The question hits harder than it should. Atsumu swallows, forcing a smile. “Why wouldn’t I? There’ll be a lot of people. No one’s gonna feel left out.”

“I might be late,” Sakusa warns, but there’s something softer in his voice now. “I’ll make sure to be there.”

Atsumu can’t help the shy curve of his lips. “I’ll hold you to that.”

Back in his room, Atsumu leans against the door and exhales slowly, lighter somehow despite the constant undercurrent of anxiety.

Do you want me there?

Had he done something to make Sakusa think otherwise?

He drags a hand down his face, mind racing. Of course he wants him there. Maybe it had taken him this long to ask because, on some subconscious level, he’d been bracing for rejection—preparing for it before it could happen.

Yet...

The Rolex box catches his eye again, and his wrist burns with the ghost of Sakusa’s careful touch.

Drawn to it like a magnet, Atsumu crosses the room and lifts the lid. The stainless steel case and silver fluted bezel catch the afternoon light, throwing a faint glint across the room. He picks it up gingerly, turning it between his fingers, admiring the sunburst blue dial and the five-link Jubilee bracelet.

An inscription on the caseback immediately catches his attention.

Sakusa Kiyoomi, written in looping English letters, waiting to be noticed.

“Oh.”

Hesitant, as if even his bedroom walls might judge him, Atsumu runs his thumb over the letters. This isn’t just a watch. It feels like... a mark.

Heat crawls up his neck as his pulse quickens. Before he realises what he's doing, he slips it onto his wrist until Sakusa’s name rests flush against his skin, fastening the clasp with careful fingers.

It sits there, silent and heavy, as though aware of the magnitude of what it represents.

A warmth blooms in Atsumu’s chest as he stares at it, letting the knowledge settle—Sakusa’s name pressed against him, hidden from sight. Like a quiet claim.

“Oh,” he breathes again, shakier.

Did... did Sakusa mean it that way?

The thought knots his stomach.

There are still more than six hours until the party, but Atsumu closes the box and leaves the watch on, even though the implications fuzz the edges of his thoughts.

Gathering the tattered remains of his composure, he grabs his laptop and heads for the library to kill time.

How embarrassing, he thinks ruefully, *that I’m already hoping he notices I’m wearing it.*

Atsumu doesn’t see Sakusa again before leaving for the party, but it hardly matters—the weight on his wrist is *present* enough. By the time Suna’s car pulls up, he’s already in the entryway, foot tapping, phone in hand, trying not to wrinkle the expensive outfit that refuses to let him sit still.

He’d glanced in the mirror earlier to fix his hair for the *real* last time and was startled at how much clothes can transform a person. He looks good. Not just handsome, but the sort of good that would turn heads.

Suna and Osamu are waiting at the foot of the building in Suna’s pristine white Toyota, looking like they’ve either come from a photoshoot or a minor heist.

“Hey,” Atsumu says, sliding into the back seat. “Thanks for the pick-up.”

“It’s no biggie,” Suna says cheerfully. In the rear view, Atsumu sees he’s wearing eyeliner sharp enough to perform surgery. The green in his eyes looks radioactive. “Happy birthday.”

“Thanks,” Atsumu grins before turning to Osamu in the passenger seat. “Am I allowed to greet you now?”

“Not until we arrive,” Osamu smirks. “The car is a lame place for a birthday wish.”

“Yer such a menace,” Atsumu chuckles, leaning forward to tug playfully at his earlobe. “By the way, there’s lip gloss on your neck.”

Osamu’s face goes tomato-red as he scrubs at it.

“Oops,” Suna says serenely, smacking his glossed lips like he’s on a cooking show.

“Is that the outfit...?” Osamu asks once he recovers, turning to properly take in Atsumu.

“Yes,” Atsumu says, doing his level best not to blush. The outfit sits on him like it knows it’s a ten. Like it knows exactly *who* picked it out.

“And is that...?” Osamu’s gaze drops to his wrist. His eyes nearly fall out of his head. “Holy fuck, Tsumu.”

There’s no stopping the flush creeping up Atsumu’s neck now as Osamu grabs his hand for inspection.

Suna slows at a stop sign, glances over, and then blinks. “Wait... is that a real Rolex?”

Atsumu yanks his hand back. “Yes.”

“It’s a long story,” Osamu cuts in before Suna can launch into the inevitable twenty questions. “I’ll tell you later.”

‘Later’ shows up faster than expected as they pull into Kunimi’s driveway. It’s seven-thirty, but the party is already in full swing—bass thumping through the walls, strobe lights flaring in the windows, and clusters of people loitering on the lawn with beers like it’s a music festival.

“Holy shit,” Osamu mutters as Suna parks. “We’re only thirty minutes late. What the hell.”

Atsumu takes a steadying breath and steps out. Osamu rounds the car to join him, both staring at the mansion like it might explode.

“Can I wish you a happy birthday now?” Atsumu asks, eyes still fixed on the house.

“Yeah,” Osamu says, equally mesmerised.

Atsumu tears his gaze away, chuckling with an eyeroll before pulling Osamu into a hug. “Did ya know yer the most insufferable person on the planet?”

“Thank god there’s two of us then,” Osamu snorts, squeezing back. “Happy birthday, Tsumu.”

“Happy birthday, Samu,” Atsumu returns, giving him a tight hug before letting go. “Now let’s go see what unholy things Kuroo’s done this time.”

Kunimi meets them outside.

“Dude,” Atsumu says as they greet each other with a one-armed hug. “You didn’t say your parents were *rich rich*.”

“I don’t because people would then assume I’m rich,” Kunimi snorts. “And I’m not.”

“Sure sure,” Atsumu sniggers, clapping him on the back before braving the entrance.

The air inside is already thick with bass, the kind that thuds in your chest and rattles the doorframe. Warm light from a hallway lamp bleeds into the party glow ahead.

Kuroo stands in the doorway like a carnival barker, christening people with neon glow accessories and party hats, looking like a clown who escaped the circus and wound up in a house party.

“Yo, birthday boys!” Kuroo grins when he and Osamu appear. Behind him, purple and blue lights flash intermittently, strobing across his wild smile. “Fashionably late, I see. Come on in, come on in.”

Atsumu is dragged into a hug and then unceremoniously decorated like a festive tree. A *Happy Birthday* sash is shamelessly draped around him, a party hat is snapped into place, then he’s collared by a neon blue necklace and glow-in-the-dark glasses.

Finally, a red plastic cup full of a bright green liquid is thrust into his hand. “Cheers!”

Osamu, having undergone a similar ritual, stumbles to Atsumu’s side with wide bewildered eyes. “Dude.”

“This is insane,” Atsumu says, looking around at the groups of people spread across what he assumes was the living room before half of it was cleared out to make space for a dance floor. The walls are washed in coloured light from an LED strip looping the ceiling. In the corner, a disco ball spins lazily, scattering pinpricks of blue and magenta across shoulders, hair, and the glossy wooden floor.

“Yo, birthday boy is here!” Kuroo yells, grinning like a roosterhead, “Turn up the music!”

“Hell yeah!” yells back a gingerhead from the corner, twisting a dial. The bass deepens, pulsing like a heartbeat underfoot.

“You hired a DJ!?” Atsumu shouts over the thump of *I Gotta Feeling*.

“Nah dude, that’s my friend Hinata! He’s visiting from Brazil!”

Atsumu’s head whips around again. Hinata hops onto a corner table with a microphone, the crowd cheering at the sight. “Everybody say Happy Birthday!”

The room erupts, a wall of noise made up of shouts, pounding bass, bursts of laughter, and the shuffle of sneakers sliding over the floor. A few people raise their drinks before downing them.

“Jesus Christ, Kuroo, we ain’t twenty anymore!”

Kuroo cackles mid-way through snapping a party hat’s string onto an unsuspecting girl.

“Says who!? Go on and shake some ass, twenty of my friends collaborated on this playlist so you’d all have something to dance to!”

Atsumu tilts his head back with a groan. “Fucking Black Eyed Peas is playin’, how old are yer friends?”

“90s babies, all of them,” Kuroo salutes. “Off you go!”

Kunimi steers Atsumu through the crowd, the air now thick with perfume, deodorant, and the faint chemical bite of glow paint. He points to a long table lined with chips, pretzels, and gummy bears spilling from a plastic bowl. “Snacks.” Then he nods to a modest home bar that’s already ringed with people waving their cups. “Bar.”

They pass a group crouched over a wobbly Topsy Jenga tower while others yell distractions at the players. A cheer erupts when the tower falls. “Games corner,” Kunimi says.

On the dance floor, people bounce in unison to the beat drop. Light flashes over a pair attempting a messy moonwalk, and Atsumu helplessly nods along to the rhythm. “Hey, thanks for this. Really.”

“Come on, I’m not done,” Kunimi says. That’s when Atsumu notices there’s glitter in his hair.

They weave through to a side corridor. “Bathroom down here, and one behind the kitchen. Two more upstairs for emergencies, but only select people are allowed up there.”

“Aw,” Atsumu grins. “I’m special enough to gain access?”

Kunimi rolls his eyes and hauls him into a quieter room where a pool table and a dartboard glow under a low-hanging light.

“Whoa,” Atsumu says, impressed. “Can ya convince yer parents to adopt me?”

“If you were my brother I’d kill myself,” Kunimi says without heat, redirecting him to the kitchen.

Here, the soundtrack is a little muffled, replaced by the hiss of soda bottles being opened and the low hum of a fridge. A dozen pizza boxes are stacked like bricks beside trays of karaage and fries. Fizzy drink bottles stand in rows on the counter.

“Water in the fridge. Throw-up bags under the sink. If you see someone trashing anything, you have full authority to kick them out.”

Atsumu mock salutes. “Sir, yessir.”

A sharp pop, and suddenly confetti and glitter explode overhead, showering him and Kunimi in a dazzling mess. “...So that explains the glitter in your hair.”

“Kuroo’s idea.”

“Of fucking course it is,” Atsumu raises his cup in a toast and takes a sip.

Talk Dirty kicks in from the living room, and Atsumu bursts out laughing, nearly choking on his drink. “Wait, were you involved in this playlist nightmare?”

“Maybe.” Kunimi sticks out his tongue with a perfectly straight face. Atsumu almost spits out the sweet alcohol. “The masterminds are lurking somewhere out there. If you see a hot girl, just assume she’s guilty. Kuroo’s basically turned this into a beauty pageant.”

“Kuroo knows hot girls?” Atsumu arches an eyebrow skeptically.

“Black magic might be involved, or possibly a bribe.” Shirabu’s voice cuts in behind him. Atsumu whirls around, grinning.

“Bu-chan!”

“I told you to stop calling me that!” Shirabu brandishes his hands like he’s issuing a mock death threat.

Atsumu takes a few steps back. “Oi, I just turned twenty-six—bit early for an assassination attempt, don’t you think?”

Shirabu rolls his eyes, dropping his hands. Then, with a reluctant smile, he ruffles Atsumu’s hair hard enough to earn a yell about ‘messing it up.’

“Happy birthday, asshole. Congrats on surviving another lap around the sun.”

Pouting, Atsumu tries in vain to fix his hair into something that doesn’t scream *just went through a blender*. “Barely made it this year.”

“Yeah,” Shirabu drawls. “If we left you to your own devices, we’d be scraping what’s left of you off the chem lab floor.”

“Thank God for Kuroo,” Kunimi adds.

Atsumu shudders. “No more uni talk. I’m here to get shit-faced.” He drains his cup in one go, then refills from the punch bowl on the kitchen counter. “Cheers.”

Kunimi and Shirabu clink their cups with his, and all three down a generous gulp.

“Phew,” Atsumu says, already feeling a pleasant fuzz settling in.

From the other room, the music shifts again. Atsumu squints at the wall like it's personally hiding the answer—until it clicks.

“Oh my god, is that from the *Cars* movie?” He bursts into startled laughter.

““Life is a Highway,”” Shirabu confirms dryly.

“I guess Kuroo's friends have a sense of humour,” Atsumu snorts, shaking his head. He takes a slow, savoury sip, letting the drink slick his lips and roll over his tongue. “Hey, this is actually good. Who's mixing these?”

“Kagehira,” Shirabu points to the redhead tearing up the dance floor with a posse of about five people. “Figured a chem student can be trusted with alcohol.”

Atsumu shoots Kunimi a suspicious side-eye. “No way. Do you, for example, actually trust Bu-chan here with alcohol?”

Shirabu smacks him upside the head. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Hey, you're the one constantly threatening me!” Atsumu yells. “For all I know, you'd spike my drink just for fun, Bu-chan.”

“If you keep calling me that, I will spike your *head*.”

Atsumu throws his arms up, turning to Kunimi. “See?! Exhibit A!”

“Yeah, this is my cue to leave,” Kunimi says, completely heartless. “If you kill him, don't get caught, Shirabu.”

“Kunimi!” Atsumu whines while Shirabu snickers at him.

The sudden blast of K-pop draws cheers from a crowd of girls, breaking the exchange.

“I've been ordered to shake my ass, by the way,” Atsumu announces with a mock-sultry hip roll. “Shall we?”

“I need more alcohol in me,” Shirabu says with a shudder and heads to the home bar to pour himself a generous shot of tequila, lemon at the ready.

Atsumu sniggers at the sour face he makes.

A sweet voice calls for him: “Atsumu-san~”

He turns to see [Oat](#) standing there in a cute mini skirt and a leather jacket that swallows her whole, hair let down in gentle waves.

“Oaty-san!” Atsumu cheers, pulling her into a quick hug. “Thank you for coming!”

“Of course!” She beams. “Happy birthday! Kuroo-san said to leave your gift in the hallway closet.”

“Aww, thank you!”

She adjusts her neon cat ears with a grin. “I haven’t partied in forever.”

“Tell me about it,” Atsumu says. “This is my first since New Year’s Eve—can ya believe it?”

They weave through the crowd toward the snack table, Oat gleefully grabbing a fistful of gummy bears while Atsumu tosses a piece of popcorn into the air and catches it in his mouth.

“I don’t even know who half these people are,” he says, scanning the room.

“Does it matter?” Oat laughs, already nodding along to the beat, her smile wide and unbothered.

Just then, *Super Freak* blasts through the speakers at full volume: *She’s a very kinky girl~*

“I love this song!” Oat yells, grabbing Atsumu’s sleeve like she’s commandeering a dance partner. “Come on, Atsumu-san! Let’s dance!”

Laughing, Atsumu lets himself be dragged onto the dance floor. The music pulses through his bones, and his hips start shifting, shoulders relaxing, feet tapping in time. “It’s been so loooong since I let loose,” he admits, downing his drink. “Let me at least get you one of these first, Oat-san!”

“Stay here, I’ll grab some for the both of us!” she calls over the music, already making her way through the crowd with a happy bounce in her step.

She returns a little later, handing him a fresh drink just as the song winds to an end. Together, they toast and drink.

Then a new track kicks in—a proper ass-shaker.

Tempted and a little shameless, Atsumu lets his hips sway—one swirl here, a little shake there—edges on the verge of playful touch...

“Birthday boy!”

He glances over to see Kagehira and his crew in full dance mode. Kagehira, clearly no amateur, throws a finger at Atsumu like he’s issuing a challenge. “Join us!”

Atsumu raises an eyebrow, then looks at Oat.

“Hold my drink, Oat-san,” he winks, handing his drink over, and casually steps into the circle to mirror the redhead’s moves.

That nets him an impressed raise of Kagehira’s brow.

“What, you think you’re the only one who can dance?” Atsumu smirks as Candy Shop cuts too soon through the previous song, someone with nefarious intentions having gotten hold of Hinata’s phone.

Easily, his hips pivot with a sinuous rhythm, feet flicking just above the floor, heels tapping syncopated beats. Knees bend and straighten in a smooth pop-and-lock flourish. “If you’re gonna show off, at least do it right.”

Kagehira’s stunned look melts into a sly smile. He grabs the fabric of his oversized jeans and flows into a liquid body roll—rippling from chest to pelvis—before snapping into a quick spin. Arms flare wide, then he lands a sharp forward lunge, breaking the beat like a burst of fireworks.

Atsumu whistles despite himself. “Oh, so it’s like that.”

He counters with sharp arm snaps and finger clicks, melting into rolling waves that trace his torso’s curves. The music pulses, and he moves like it’s fueling him—each pop and slide soaked in candy-coated swagger.

Mid-beat, Atsumu pivots sharply on one heel, spinning with precision—then freezes. His foot almost falters, and he stumbles as his eyes lock with a dark, unshakable gaze across the room.

The one he’s been wondering about all day.

His breath snags. Any thoughts of dance battles vanish, blown out like a candle in the wind. “I forfeit,” he blurts without looking back.

“Huh??”

Ignoring the bewildered cries and teasing jeers, Atsumu plucks his drink straight from Oat’s hand. “Sorry, Oaty. Gotta go.”

Oat follows his line of sight, then smirks knowingly. “Ah. Have fun.”

Atsumu slips into the current of moving bodies, weaving between them with single-minded focus. The bass thuds somewhere far away now—muted, distant—while every heartbeat pounds in his ears.

Sakusa doesn’t look away. Not once. His gaze pulls Atsumu in, narrowing the space between them until he stops a single step away.

“Hey,” Atsumu says, breathless, tilting his head up to meet that ruinous gaze. “You came.”

“I told you I would.” The corner of Sakusa’s mouth twitches upward. “Having fun?”

“Yes.” Atsumu grins, throwing a glance over his shoulder. “I was sorta in a dance-off.”

“Yeah? I could tell.” Sakusa’s chuckle is low, warm, and he leans in—

Atsumu’s lungs stall. His eyes flick to Sakusa’s hand as it reaches up, fingers brushing his temple, gentle and deliberate. Sakusa adjusts his paper party hat. “Your hat’s crooked.”

“Oh.” Atsumu swallows. Then—because maybe the alcohol is making him reckless—he smirks. “And here I thought I was about to get a birthday kiss.”

Sakusa blinks once. Atsumu's stomach drops, heat flooding his cheeks at his own audacity. He's about to laugh it off when Sakusa's gaze darkens—slow, molten—and flicks to his mouth with enough gravity to steal the air from his chest.

Wait—

Sakusa's calloused palm cups his cheek, steady and unyielding, pulling him closer. Atsumu stumbles forward, his breath faltering as Sakusa's face looms nearer, those dark eyes a universe ready to swallow him whole.

They hover there, caught in a moment stretched taut. Sakusa's thumb grazes the curve of his cheek as if holding something rare, something precious.

Atsumu shivers, eyes falling shut, his stomach curling tight with want—want—want.

The air changes. The music vanishes. All that's left is heat, skin, breath.

Sakusa's mint-tinged exhale ghosts over Atsumu's chin, luring him in like a siren's call. Atsumu tilts toward it—ready to drown—

And then—

Soft, warm lips press against his cheek. Slow. Certain. Lingering. Not just a touch, but a brand. A promise. Atsumu's knees threaten to give out, but Sakusa catches him, one arm securing around his lower back, drawing Atsumu into the steady warmth of his body.

A quiet breath ghosts past Atsumu's ear, curls brushing his skin, sparking another shiver down his spine.

Sakusa leans in, his voice low enough to belong only to them.

“Happy birthday, stardust.”

Crashing Into You

Chapter Summary

“There’s plenty of stuff I’m not good at.”

“Yeah?” Sakusa tilts his head, his scent wrapping Atsumu in a dizzy haze. “Like what?”

Atsumu’s gaze drops to Sakusa’s mouth—those plush lips and the ghost of how they’d felt against his skin. What would they be like against his own? He swallows hard. “Like getting this one guy to kiss me.”

Chapter Notes

yeets this at you and runs away

Oh, but first things first, WE HAVE MORE FANART 🥹💖💖💖💖💖💖

[This](#) and [this!](#)

Atsumu stumbles back when Sakusa releases him, cheeks on fire, his entire being on the verge of collapse. Something in his brain has disconnected. He isn’t sure what—only that it must have been something vital, because the room spins a little.

The spot Sakusa kissed burns in the exact shape of his lips, like a phantom determined to haunt him. And god, he’s so doomed—has never been more doomed—as his gaze catches on Sakusa’s pretty, blushed lips with enough longing to melt his stomach.

“That’s not—” Atsumu blurts, about to throw caution to the wind and demand a proper kiss, when Kuroo materialises at his side with a tequila bottle.

“Birthday boy, I didn’t throw this banger for you to drink punch!” Kuroo says, scandalised. Whether he’s oblivious to the moment he just crashed—or enjoying it—he hooks a finger under the elastic of Atsumu’s party hat and yanks him down into a half bend. “Open up.”

Atsumu blinks, bewildered, but obeys. Gleefully, Kuroo pours a shot into his mouth. A thin stream escapes the corner of Atsumu’s lips and trickles down the column of his neck. He doesn’t dare look at Sakusa—not with the heat and embarrassment rushing through him like wildfire.

Did he really just—?

He wipes his mouth, still off-kilter.

Before he can recover, Kuroo grabs him by the wrist. “C’mon, your friend Bokuto’s here—wants to say hi.”

Kuroo throws a jaunty wave over his shoulder. “Sakusa, right? There’s a man looking for you. About this tall, buff, unnecessarily handsome. Please get him before he steals all the girls.”

“If you mean Wakatoshi, you won’t have to worry about that—he’s gay,” Sakusa says flatly, his eyes flicking to Kuroo’s hand on Atsumu’s wrist like it’s a personal affront.

“Okay, then please get him before he steals all the guys.”

“He’s married,” Sakusa counters, but grabs his drink (whiskey, Atsumu thinks) and heads for the door. “I’ll go see about him.”

Once Sakusa is out of earshot, Atsumu whirls on Kuroo. “Dude! What was that for?”

Kuroo’s expression turns serious, his eyes narrowing. “Isn’t that your boss?”

“Uh, yeah?”

“He was too close,” Kuroo says carefully. “I wasn’t sure if he was forcing himself on you. You looked like you were about to pass out.”

Atsumu’s sigh is half groan, half misery. “Kuroo, I love you, and I appreciate the thought, but that? I really, really wanted that. Like... an embarrassing amount.”

“You want your boss?” Kuroo arches an eyebrow, impressed and disbelieving. “I mean—yeah, okay, I get it. He’s hot. But seriously?”

Atsumu buries his face in his hands and tries not to scream. “It’s... a recent revelation. But yeah. He’s hot—thanks for pointing out the obvious—but it’s more than that, okay?”

Kuroo raises his hands in surrender, a smug smile tugging at his lips. “Hey, I’m not one to judge. If you want a piece of hot DILF, by all means, I’m rooting for you.”

“You’re terrible,” Atsumu mutters through a raging blush, but can’t stop the reluctant smile that breaks through. “Come on, let’s find Bokkun.”

They brave the crush of dancing bodies toward the pool table and dart boards.

“Tsum-Tsum!” Bokuto greets with his trademark beaming smile, pulling Atsumu into a hug against his obscenely broad chest. “Happy birthday!”

“Can’t—breathe—” Atsumu wheezes, patting his bicep until the other man finally releases him. “Wow. What are they feeding you?”

Bokuto beams proudly, buffing his chest out. “Just a lot of construction work. And gym. A lot of gym too.”

“Damn,” Atsumu whistles, poking his very solid, very unfairly delectable chest. “I gotta step up my game.”

Bokuto claps him on the back, throwing a friendly arm around him. “Hell yeah—if you ever need a gym buddy, you know where to find me!”

Their exchange is interrupted by an uproar in the living room.

“Yo, check this out!” A guy pokes his head around the corner, party hat halfway off his head, shirt missing a button at the collar, grinning like he’s just won the lottery. “Fuckin’ Kodzuken just showed up!”

“What?” someone gasps.

Feet shuffle. People cheer. Others skid around the corner with far too much enthusiasm—one of them slips and hits the floor, sending their friends into peals of laughter.

“Kodzuken...” Atsumu repeats slowly, blinking. “As in, the YouTuber?”

“Ah,” Kuroo smiles guiltily.

“What have you done?” Atsumu whirls on him.

“Nothing!” Kuroo yelps. “He’s my childhood friend! We went to school together and we still hang out sometimes. I might have invited him—casually. I wasn’t actually expecting him to show up.”

Atsumu narrows his eyes. “So first you’re rumoured to know hot girls, and now you’re buddy-buddy with a celebrity? Just who are you?”

“You’re so dramatic.” Kuroo rolls his eyes, already turning toward the door. “I better go greet him. Also, you look way too sober for a birthday boy—drink up.” He thrusts a tequila bottle into Atsumu’s hand. “Responsibly though. Let it be said that I said responsibly.”

Atsumu watches him go, stunned, then looks down at the bottle in his hand like it’s an alien artifact.

“Hey, quick question,” Bokuto says, pulling his attention away from questionable decision-making. His eyes are fixed on something behind Atsumu’s shoulder. “Who’s that guy?”

Atsumu follows his gaze to a sweet-looking man in a cardigan and glasses, chatting with Osamu and Suna. He laughs demurely behind his hand at something they say.

“Uh... wanna go find out? I think he’s Samu’s friend from uni.”

“He’s...” Bokuto tips his head, gaze intent. “Real damn pretty.”

Atsumu snorts. “Alright, I see how it is. Go get ’im, tiger.”

Bokuto grins, clapping him on the back before heading over. Atsumu is left with his bottle and three other guys playing darts with a pretty girl—each sporting a red lipstick kiss mark on their cheek. Huh.

He’s just about to leave to find Kuroo when Ushijima, Tendou, and Sakusa step into the room, the purple and blue lights slicing across cheekbones carved from glass. Atsumu is instantly, irrationally jealous of Ushijima’s perfect bone structure—so much so that he almost throws a fit.

Keyword: almost. Because the moment Sakusa follows, running a hand through his hair, expensive watch catching the light, and stepping into the warm glow of the pool corner—Atsumu forgets how to breathe.

“Atsumu-san!” Tendou beams, his fiery hair grown longer since they last met, a playful strand falling over his brow. “Happy birthday!”

Atsumu smiles—helpless, charmed—and accepts the hug. “Hi, Tendou-san. It’s really good to see you again.”

Ushijima joins them, a hand resting casually on Tendou’s waist. Tendou glances at him fondly. “You remember Waka-chan, right?”

“Yes, the mysterious husband.” Atsumu chuckles, offering his hand for a polite shake. “I was going to invite you guys, but Samu beat me to it.”

“Well, we’re here now.” Tendou’s smile turns serene. “About to declare war against Kiyoomi-san. Do you play billiards, Atsumu-san?”

Atsumu blinks, gaze flicking too quickly between the table, Sakusa’s unreadable face, and Tendou. “Uh... a little. Not that good, to be honest.”

“We need a fourth for doubles,” Ushijima explains. “Kiyoomi-kun is very good—he can cover for you.”

Atsumu looks at Sakusa, his insides tightening like a loose thread wound mercilessly around a finger. Sakusa gives a single nod. That’s all Atsumu needs to round the table.

“Hi again,” he says, almost shy.

Sakusa’s bearings soften just enough to notice. “Hello. Still having fun?”

“Yes.” Atsumu sets his bottle down—and then, emboldened by something he doesn’t name, adds with a crooked smile, “More so now that you’re here.”

“Oh?” Sakusa’s head tilts, eyes scanning over him. When Atsumu only offers a tight-lipped, innocent smile, Sakusa huffs—and Atsumu swears he catches a quiet *brat* under his breath.

“Satori and I against you and Kiyoomi-kun—how does that sound?” Ushijima says, grabbing the cues. He passes one to Atsumu like an unspoken pact to bond over the table.

“Sure,” Atsumu says easily.

Sakusa pulls a small wipe packet from his pocket, tearing it open. He takes Atsumu’s cue and methodically scrubs it down while Tendou racks the balls, the black eight landing in the center on the foot spot.

Ushijima takes the break, all sinew and focus, scattering the balls with a satisfying clink. One drops neatly into a pocket.

“Stripes,” Ushijima announces, passing the cue to Tendou, who lines up for a striped ball—only to miss by an inch.

“Aw, man! Alright, your turn,” Tendou says brightly.

Sakusa rolls his shoulders like he’s preparing for a competition—which, technically, he is—and Atsumu’s heart drops and bounces like one of the balls on the table.

He can’t look away when Sakusa leans over, cue lined and ready, and takes one measured shot.

The solid red ball he aimed for snaps off the rail, hard, and shoots clean into the intended pocket.

Atsumu swallows, body flushing hot. Oh no...

Sakusa straightens with a faint hum, circling the table like a prowling tiger hunting for prey. He eyes every option with clinical precision.

“Atsumu,” he says—quiet, commanding. The sound jolts Atsumu, heart ricocheting into his throat. “Come here.”

Uncertain, Atsumu edges to his side and accepts the cue.

“This one,” Sakusa points to the blue solid, “hit it at a slight angle, right there. Can you do that?”

Atsumu tries not to shiver as he takes position. “Like this...?”

Sakusa hums again and leans closer, adjusting Atsumu’s elbow with a steady hand. “Keep your elbow straight,” he instructs, then—slowly, deliberately—shifts Atsumu’s hips into place with two warm hands bracketing his sides. Atsumu forgets how to breathe.

“And keep your body in line with the shot. Now, take aim.”

Take aim? Atsumu can barely remember which way is left or right anymore. He tries anyway, takes the shot, and winces as the ball bumps the pocket’s edge and rolls away. “Shit, sorry.”

Sakusa pats his side. “It’s okay.”

“Just have fun,” Tendou grins. He slings himself over Ushijima’s shoulder despite the man clearly lining up his shot. “Isn’t that right, Waka-chan?”

“Mm.”

The ball rockets across the table like an arrow, hitting dead center.

“Damn, yer really good at this, Ushijima-san,” Atsumu says.

“Thanks,” Ushijima replies, passing the cue to Tendou and leaning casually against the table. “I’ve had lots of practice.”

“Ya play often?”

“We have a table at home.” Ushijima glances at Sakusa. “Bring him over with you sometime, Kiyoomi-kun.”

Atsumu catches the flicker of something between them—a silent stare-down he’d pay good money to dissect.

“We’ll see about that,” Sakusa says eventually, then sinks his shot with effortless grace, hair falling artfully into his eyes. For a heart-stopping moment, he looks like a vintage magazine spread—one Atsumu would’ve ripped out and tucked into a notebook.

“Your turn,” Sakusa says.

“I’m really not good at this,” Atsumu admits, stepping closer—drawn less by the table and more by Sakusa’s heat, his cologne curling in the air between them. “I’m sorry if you lose because of me.”

Sakusa hovers behind him again, guiding his stance with feather-light touches that set Atsumu’s skin ablaze. “You don’t have to worry about that,” he murmurs near his ear. “...I’m surprised to learn there’s something you’re actually not good at.”

“Ha.” Atsumu glances back—only to instantly regret it when their faces end up mere inches apart. His breath catches. “There’s plenty of stuff I’m not good at.”

“Yeah?” Sakusa tilts his head, his scent wrapping Atsumu in a dizzy haze. “Like what?”

Atsumu’s gaze drops to Sakusa’s mouth—those plush lips and the ghost of how they’d felt against his skin. What would they be like against his own? He swallows hard. “Like getting this one guy to kiss me.”

“Oh?” Sakusa’s eyes darken, more dangerous than any black hole, and Atsumu feels himself drawn in—helpless, weightless.

He might as well be drowning, caught in Sakusa’s event horizon where the pull is so strong nothing escapes. He licks his lips. “Yeah,” he breathes. “I’m starting to think he doesn’t

actually want to.”

Sakusa’s gaze dips, just for a second, to his mouth. “Hmm... can’t imagine that’s true. Maybe he just doesn’t want to come on too strong.”

Atsumu’s knees threaten mutiny. He leans back enough to feel the faint brush of Sakusa’s chest against his shoulder, his pulse a bullet train on a collision course. “Well, what if I want him to?” His voice is dry, threaded with heat.

Sakusa’s mouth curves—the barest, most infuriating smile. “Then you’ll have to tell him, Atsumu.”

Atsumu barely processes the words before Sakusa tips his chin toward the table with warm fingertips. “Now—eyes on the ball.”

Oh, but Atsumu only has eyes for one thing right now. He drinks in Sakusa’s scent, intoxicating as any liquor, and readies his shot.

It’s enough to make him tipsy.

He misses again. Not that he cares. Sakusa’s arms are bracketing him against the table, intoxicating heat radiating against his back, breath warm against the side of his head. When Sakusa steps away to watch their friends play, Atsumu misses the heat immediately.

Watching him is an exercise in restraint—poised, picturesque—drawing the eyes of everyone in the vicinity.

And when Sakusa steps back in to help him line up the next shot, Atsumu decides: to hell with it. If Sakusa wants signs, he’ll get them.

Atsumu leans over the table, deliberately pressing his ass back into Sakusa’s thigh. Heat sears through the thin fabric, a spark skittering up his spine, and Sakusa’s breath hitches right beside his ear.

Smugly satisfied, Atsumu takes the shot and sinks it. “How about that?”

For a beat, Sakusa says nothing. Then, warm and low, right against Atsumu’s ear: “Very good, Atsumu.”

The words curl through him like smoke, slow and deliberate, and he’s glad the table is holding him up.

Heat pools in Atsumu’s belly, a glow spreading through his chest.

He lines up the next ball, his hips brushing against Sakusa’s crotch. Normally, Atsumu would be scandalised by his own audacity—but here, in the low spotlights, caged between Sakusa’s arms while a couple makes out in the corner, it feels exactly right.

If Sakusa’s affected, he hides it well. Still, Atsumu swears his grip on the table tightens, knuckles whitening. His gaze seems fixed—not on the game—but on the watch circling

Atsumu's wrist.

Outside, a Spanish song he recognises starts blasting. "Ooh!" he perks up. "I love this one!"

He knows some of the lyrics from playing it on repeat, even if he barely understands them. He sways to the rhythm, dragging out the seconds before his turn, drinking in Sakusa's closeness for as long as he can get away with it.

He misses. Of course he does. Half his mind is elsewhere. Leaning against the table, he lets the music wash over him—until Sakusa steps back. Not too far. Not too close. Just far enough to make Atsumu's fingers itch.

"Si tú me pruebas te casa", ey, ese cabrón ni te abraza," Atsumu sings along, voice low and vibrating in his throat.

Sakusa straightens, blinking.

"What?" Atsumu asks, curious.

"Do you know what that means?" Sakusa's tone is careful.

"Uh..." Atsumu shuffles. "Not really. What's it mean?"

Sakusa glances toward the ceiling, clearly suppressing a smile. "Well..."

When he doesn't continue, Atsumu insists, "Tell me!"

"Ah." Sakusa scratches the side of his nose, then crooks a finger. "You might want to come a little closer."

"Huh?"

But Atsumu gladly steps in—into that same intoxicating body heat he wishes he could bottle.

His lips brush the shell of Atsumu's ear—not quite a touch, but close enough that Atsumu swears he feels it—and his voice is a slow pour of heat. *"If you taste me, you'll marry me."*

"Oh."

When Sakusa leans back, a small, amused smile plays on his lips.

"Taste me as in..." Atsumu trails off, face burning.

"Yes," Sakusa confirms, smirking.

Fuck. Sakusa is going to be the death of him.

They lose the match, much to Atsumu's consternation. He doesn't even like billiards. But he craves those strong arms around him with the kind of heat that would cripple lesser men.

Maybe it's time to move to plan B (a plan he just made up on the spot). He weighs his options as they return to the main room and settle on the high stools at the home bar. He wants to crack Sakusa's perfect composure so badly it makes his teeth ache.

"This is very nostalgic," Sakusa says, pouring himself another whiskey.

Atsumu blinks back to the present. "What? Being young?"

Sakusa huffs, half amused, half offended. "I meant the party."

That piques his interest. "You used to party?"

"I was your age once too, Atsumu," Sakusa chides, voice dropping, like he's guarding a secret. "Of course I used to party."

"Tell me more," Atsumu leans his elbow against the counter, eyes locked on Sakusa. "Was it like this party? Ever get blackout drunk and wake up in a stranger's bed?"

"Uh," Sakusa frowns slightly. "No. That's not quite how I partied. Is that common nowadays?"

"Depends on who you ask," Atsumu shrugs, reaching over for a tequila bottle and a shot glass. "I know friends like that."

"Are you like that?" Sakusa asks, regret flashing across his face as soon as he speaks.

"Nah," Atsumu smiles slyly, throwing back his shot and sucking on a lemon wedge. The sting bites his lips, slicking his mouth. He licks the residue off—slow and deliberate—feeling Sakusa's eyes flick to the motion. "I don't do one-night stands."

Sakusa's shoulders loosen, relief washing over him.

Fuck, Atsumu wants him. It took this long to realize it, but now that he knows, the need burns hot and relentless.

"I do love the occasional make-out session though..."

Sakusa blinks, eyes narrowing—sharp, unreadable—before he asks, "With strangers?"

"Only with those who pursue me," Atsumu shrugs casually. "It's nice to be wanted."

"I imagine that's not a problem for you," Sakusa says carefully.

His heart leaps.

"I dunno," Atsumu says with a sideways glance. "You tell me."

Sakusa looks away, chewing on the inside of his cheek.

Another little push... "Do you dance, Kiyoomi?"

Sakusa blinks at the change in topic. “Depends. What kind of dance?”

Atsumu offers his hands. “C’mon,” he says with a sly grin. “I’ll show you.”

A flicker of hesitation before Sakusa places his hand in his. The touch is warm, elegant fingers curling around Atsumu’s. He tugs him along, the drunken dancers pulling them into their thrumming, sticky heat—a pulse that matches the wild rhythm pounding in Atsumu’s veins.

The music thumps through Atsumu’s body as the singer croons *[baby, I’m yours...](#)*

He draws Sakusa closer, holding his gaze as he carefully places Sakusa’s hands on his waist.

He winds his arms around Sakusa’s neck, leaning into the gravity of those dark eyes. *You’re so pretty, it hurts...*

The music swells, hitting a crescendo, vibrating in Atsumu’s bones, filling the space between them. Atsumu turns in Sakusa’s arms, pressing his back flush against his body. They sway together, Sakusa a little stiff but leaning into Atsumu’s heat like he can’t help himself. Lost in the intoxication of the moment, Atsumu’s fingers slip between Sakusa’s on his hips and he rests his head against Sakusa’s shoulder.

He tips his head back to murmur into the underside of Sakusa’s jaw. “Hold me, Kiyoomi.”

Sakusa’s hot breath burns against his neck as he leans his head against Atsumu’s. His hands slide beneath Atsumu’s, slow and sensual, rising beneath his ribs to grip his waist. They interlock around his middle, holding Atsumu close, making his heart race like a crashing vehicle.

He hugs Sakusa’s arms around him, shivering when Sakusa tucks his face into the juncture of his neck.

“You don’t know what you do to me, Atsumu,” Sakusa murmurs into his shoulder—almost too quiet to hear.

The words scald Atsumu’s skin like fire. His chest shivers.

The song winds down and shifts to *[something](#)* decidedly more salacious. It’s an old track, but Atsumu knows it well.

Let me feel you

It’s been about a month and twenty days

And we’re goin’ ’round and ’round, playin’ silly games

“Kiyoomi,” Atsumu says, reaching back to thread his fingers in Sakusa’s soft curls. “I’m not playing a silly game.”

Sakusa’s hands tighten on him.

Touchin' and teasin' me, tellin' me no

But this time I need to feel you

we're all alone

(Ride it) just lose control

(Ride it, ride it) come touch my soul

(Ride it, ride it) let me feel you

(Ride it) turn the lights down low

(Ride it) from head to toe

(Ride it, ride it) come touch my soul

(Ride it, ride it) let me feel you

Atsumu grinds his hips harder against Sakusa, hand tangling in his hair, fingers digging into the taut muscle of Sakusa's arm wrapped around him—clawing all the want and ache clogging his chest into the unyielding hold.

His heart thunders in time with the bass—euphoric, raw, burning alive. He melts into Sakusa's grip like their bodies were carved to fit together, edges blurring, fusing.

The song fades, [another rises](#), a sultry pulse surrounding them. Strobe lights flicker, swallowing them in darkness between flashes—until the world shrinks down to the two of them.

I'm into it, I'm into it

I'm getting way too deep

I'm fucking into it

I'm into it, yeah I'm into it

I wouldn't change it for the world

I'm fucking into it

Atsumu twists in Sakusa's arms, hands sliding down his back, pulling their fronts together with desperate need. He buries his face shamelessly in Sakusa's throat, thigh slipping between Sakusa's legs to grind, hips rolling in a slow, intoxicating rhythm.

He sucks in a dizzying breath of Sakusa's scent—clean sweat, heated skin, spicy cedar. Fueled by alcohol and raw desire, he licks a fiery strip from Sakusa's neck to his ear.

“Kiyoomi...” he sighs.

Sakusa's hands dig in deeper at the small of Atsumu's back, pulse pounding beneath Atsumu's lips.

"Atsumu, I'm really trying," he rasps, head dipping to hide in the curve of Atsumu's neck, lips hot, sinful against his skin. "To be a gentleman."

Atsumu tangles his fingers in Sakusa's hair, anchoring them both to this fierce moment.

"I know."

Relentlessly, he grinds against Sakusa's thigh, lips dragging a filthy kiss up the tendons in his neck until Sakusa exhales sharply, long fingers tangling in Atsumu's hair, yanking his head back to stare deep into his soul.

Dark, hungry eyes bore into him with breathtaking weight.

"You're going to be the death of me," Sakusa rasps, eyes flicking to Atsumu's lips like he's already lost.

Atsumu's breath hitches, every nerve firing—he can't wait to fall into those depths, to lose himself completely.

Finding his voice is a fight, but he manages: "Kiss me."

It's a plea. A demand.

Sakusa's eyes blaze, unrelenting.

Large palms slide from Atsumu's head to his cheeks, tilting his face, drawing him closer—pulling him from solid ground into freefall as their lips crash together.

His knees buckle. Fingers claw for purchase in the back of Sakusa's pristine shirt, leaning in, falling in—lips parting under the tidal wave of heat rising, ready to swallow them whole.

Sakusa's tongue sweeps over Atsumu's lips, spinning his head.

Somewhere far away, the lyrics throb around them.

I wanna fuck you slow with the lights on (Lights on, lights on, lights on)

You're the only one I've got my sights on (Sights on, sights on, sights on)

Type of sex you could never put a price on (Price on, price on, price on)

I'll take it off, you're the one I'll roll the dice on

Atsumu's mind fogs into a cottony haze, thoughts dissolving as everything contracts into the searing heat of Sakusa's lips—claiming his like they're set on stealing his breath and never giving it back.

He surrenders, no fight left. Lips parting, tongue sliding against Sakusa's in a slick, fevered dance—wet heat and raw need knotting together like an addictive poison.

This isn't just a kiss. It's a takeover. A possession.

Atsumu loses track of where he ends and Sakusa begins—only knows he never wants to break free, that no one else in the room exists, that this kiss might just be the end of him.

Sakusa pulls back, teeth grazing Atsumu's lower lip in a burn that sets his whole body alight.

The universe in Sakusa's eyes drags him deeper, his thumb tracing Atsumu's slick lips with aching, tender hunger.

“Is that what you wanted?”

“Fuck,” Atsumu breathes, voice trembling as he clings to Sakusa like a lifeline. “Kiss me again.”

Sakusa's thumb presses softly against his lower teeth, eyes locked on Atsumu's mouth—like he's barely holding himself together, seconds from snapping under the weight of it all.

Lost in the haze, Atsumu's tongue flicks over the pad of that thumb, then seals it with a hot, plush kiss.

Sakusa's throat bobs—a raw, hungry sound slipping out. His wet finger swipes over Atsumu's lips, then trails across his cheek.

“Close your eyes.”

Atsumu's body trembles, eyelids fluttering shut. The soft press of Sakusa's hand cradling the side of his neck sends his world tumbling into sweet oblivion.

And when those fiery lips claim him again, Atsumu sinks—deeply, irrevocably—into an abyss with no return.

Burning From Skin to Bone

Chapter Summary

“So,” Atsumu says, aiming for levity, “this willing hostage earns gentlemanly privileges, huh?”

“That’s right,” Sakusa replies, lips twitching, “by virtue of being a special hostage.”

“What if the hostage decides to rebel against the gentlemanly conduct?” Atsumu pushes, grin crooked.

A glance flashes his way—dark eyes sparking with amusement, maybe something sharper. “Oh?”

“I mean... it’s still my birthday.”

“And?”

“I might have the opposite of gentlemanly desires.”

Chapter Notes

Writing block gave me a beating but I emerged victorious. Thank you for your patience!

I’ve received a lot of beautiful fanart since I last posted, I’m linking them here:

[Miya twins stargazing](#)

[SakuAtsu playing pool](#)

[Atsumu being a tease in chapter 28](#)

[Sakusa kissing Atsumu’s cheek](#)

[SakuAtsu kissing during the party](#)

Finally, [Tofuya Ukai restaurant and Takeshi Saji knife](#) as a visual reference for this chapter.

Cw: mature themes ahead!

The bass slams back into his chest like someone hit unpause on the world.

For a moment, Atsumu just stands there—breathless, lips tingling, Sakusa’s hands still framing his face. The space between them feels fragile, like if either of them moves too fast, it’ll shatter.

Around them, the party rages on—laughter, clinking glasses, a chorus of hoots. None of it reaches right.

Sakusa’s gaze lingers for one beat too long before he steps back—barely. Enough to break contact, not enough to leave. His voice is low and rough, scraped raw over gravel.

“You’re trouble.”

Atsumu lets out a breathless laugh, aiming for casual but missing by a mile. “You’re just figurin’ that out now?”

It almost makes Sakusa smile—almost.

He shakes his head, as if clearing a haze, then offers his hand. “Let’s go find our friends?”

“Yeah,” Atsumu breathes, grateful for steady ground, even while his head reels. He slips his hand into Sakusa’s. “Samu and Suna should be around...”

As if summoned by twin telepathy, Osamu’s mop of messy hair cuts through the crowd, Suna in tow.

“There you are,” Osamu says, tugging sweat-damp strands back. He pulls out his phone, squinting at the screen. “Battery’s dying. Wanna bail and grab some real food?”

His gaze drops to their joined hands, flickering with surprise, but mercifully he says nothing. Not that he has room to talk—his lips are bruised and there’s more lip gloss smeared across his neck. Shameless. (And yes, Atsumu’s a hypocrite.)

“I am kinda hungry,” Atsumu admits, stubbornly refusing to let go of Sakusa’s hand despite the flush creeping up his neck. He throws Sakusa a glance, trying for casual. “What do you say? We could rope in Ushijima-san and Tendou-san, too.”

“Sure.” Sakusa pulls out his phone, already texting. “Any place in mind?”

“Was hopin’ Tsumu would decide,” Osamu says, passing his phone to Suna, who tucks it into his pouch. “We aren’t picky.”

“Hey, I’m not picky either,” Atsumu protests. He hasn’t survived on slob his whole life to be slandered like that. “Maybe Kiy—*Sakusa* should choose.”

Sakusa glances up. “I know a few places. Depends if you’d rather a buffet or a set menu.”

Osamu blinks. Suna does too. “Don’t buffets need reservations?”

“Usually,” Sakusa hums, slipping his phone away. “But that won’t be a problem.”

Atsumu presses his lips together to hide a smile. “Maybe somethin’ lowkey? Cozy dinner after this mess sounds nice.”

Sakusa nods, pulling his phone out to start typing again. “In that case, Tofuya Ukai. They have private tatami rooms. Wakatoshi keeps a permanent reservation. I’ll send you the address, Osamu-san.”

Of course Ushijima Wakatoshi would have a permanent reservation.

“Need a ride?” Sakusa asks.

Osamu glances at Suna, then back at their hands, lingering one beat before answering. “We’ve got Suna’s car and we need to load the gifts somewhere, anyway. But Tsumu can ride with ya, if you want.”

A slow, amused smile breaks across Sakusa’s face—uncharacteristically unguarded. His eyes find Atsumu’s, bright with mirth.

“What do you say? Want to be my hostage for the next twenty minutes?”

Atsumu arches a brow. “Do hostages usually get a choice?”

“I suppose not,” Sakusa muses. He squeezes Atsumu’s hand. “Then I’m kidnapping you. We’ll meet you there.”

Osamu raises his brows as he takes Suna’s hand, voice dry. “Godspeed, Sakusa-san.”

“Hey!” Atsumu splutters at their retreating backs.

Sakusa chuckles, tugging lightly. “C’mon, willing-hostage.”

Sakusa’s car gleams under the streetlights, drawing a couple of guys who linger nearby, murmuring about the sleek model with awe. Atsumu barely spares them a glance—his attention snags on the way Sakusa opens the door for him, steady and deliberate, the ghost of his touch still burning on Atsumu’s sides.

“Do willing hostages usually get such gentlemanly treatment?” Atsumu teases as he slides in.

“You’re a special willing hostage,” Sakusa says, a quiet smirk tugging at his mouth.

The giddy warmth that blooms in Atsumu’s stomach is ridiculous, infuriatingly so, but he doesn’t bother fighting it.

They pull out of the lot, the uproar of the party fading behind them, replaced by the hum of the engine and the muted thrum of Tokyo nightlife. Atsumu’s gaze drifts to Sakusa’s hand on the gear shift like it always does, fingers long and elegant, the faint scar cutting through the

perfection like a secret. It would be so easy to just... reach over and hold his hand. Too easy. And yet the thought sends his stomach swooping with butterflies, traitorous little things that don't know when to quit. It would be too... *intimate*, even though the taste of Sakusa still lingers on his lips.

"What are you thinking about?" Sakusa asks suddenly, his steady tone cutting through the quiet enough to make Atsumu jolt.

"Um—why?" Atsumu stammers.

"You're fidgeting."

Cursing himself, Atsumu stills his restless hands. "Sorry."

"Is this about the kiss?" Sakusa asks, calm as anything.

"N-not exactly," Atsumu blurts, face heating. "I was kinda... wondering about holding your hand. Which sounds stupid, I know. And you're probably squeamish about touch. And maybe we should actually talk about the kiss but—"

His rambling cuts short when Sakusa's hand shifts, palm up, waiting in the space between them.

Atsumu stares. At the open hand. At Sakusa's profile—sharp, handsome, lit in passing flashes of neon, with the faintest curl of satisfaction to his mouth. Atsumu's heart lurches hard enough to bruise.

Carefully, tentatively, he lets his fingertips graze Sakusa's. Warm. Smooth. A spark straight to his ribs. He slips further, sliding between Sakusa's knuckles, and nearly stops breathing when Sakusa's fingers curl back, weaving between his own.

"I never said I was squeamish about touching you," Sakusa murmurs, thumb brushing over the back of Atsumu's hand so softly it makes him shiver.

Atsumu swallows, dazed. "I... didn't force myself on you back there, did I?"

"You didn't," Sakusa reassures. "I wanted it too."

The butterflies riot. Unruly little monsters tearing through him. Atsumu turns to the window, watching neon blur by, his skin buzzing, his chest tight. Still, he can't resist the impulse—his thumb skims across Sakusa's hand in return, tentative. Sakusa's fingers twitch at the contact before answering with his own soft brush, a slow give-and-take that leaves Atsumu dizzy.

"So," Atsumu says, aiming for levity, "this willing hostage earns gentlemanly privileges, huh?"

"That's right," Sakusa replies, lips twitching, "by virtue of being a special hostage."

"What if the hostage decides to rebel against the gentlemanly conduct?" Atsumu pushes, grin crooked.

A glance flashes his way—dark eyes sparking with amusement, maybe something sharper. “Oh?”

“I mean... it’s still my birthday.”

“And?”

“I might have the opposite of gentlemanly desires.”

“Mm.” Sakusa hums, thumb circling lazily over Atsumu’s skin, thoughtful. “Is this a warning that you’re going to misbehave?”

“Dunno,” Atsumu shrugs, biting back a grin. “You don’t seem too opposed to my misbehavin’...”

Sakusa chuckles low, the sound curling heat straight into Atsumu’s stomach. “Don’t make it a habit, though. The body is willing, but the mind leads. And I have my reservations.” He pauses, deliberate. “How about this—we have dinner, and afterward we see about these... ungentlemanly impulses. In a more private place.”

Heat pools low in Atsumu’s belly, sparking bright.

He grins, lopsided, heart hammering. “Sounds like a plan.”

Sakusa glances back with a smile of his own, and Atsumu forces his gaze to the streets melting by, pulse racing far too fast for the calm night outside.

Tofuya Ukai, it turns out, is no ordinary restaurant but a luxurious kaiseki house devoted to the craft of tofu, tucked neatly beneath the looming silhouette of Tokyo Tower.

The noren curtains part to reveal a kimono-clad hostess, who welcomes them with a graceful bow before leading them through a lantern-lit garden. The stone paths glisten faintly from a recent misting, winding between koi ponds and low bridges, the quiet burble of water setting a hushed rhythm beneath the night.

They’re guided to a private zashiki-style room where their friends are already waiting. Atsumu steps in behind Sakusa, his gaze catching on every detail—the tatami mat sighing softly under his feet, the faint cedar-and-straw scent that seems to cleanse the air, the low black lacquered table stretched long and waiting, already dressed with folded napkins and shining ceramic plates. Red cushions ring the space, their fabric thick and inviting, framing the table like an unspoken invitation to sit and settle into ritual.

He takes his place between Osamu and Sakusa, the cushions dipping beneath him as the others glance up.

“Took you guys long enough,” Osamu says, narrowing his eyes in mock suspicion.

“Sakusa’s a careful driver,” Atsumu replies smoothly, carefully omitting that the ‘care’ was due to his own shamelessly clinging hand. What Osamu doesn’t know won’t kill him.

His eyes wander to the corner, where a heap of gift bags has been stacked like a festival offering. “You actually hauled all that here?”

“Sunarin insisted,” Osamu mutters.

“I thought it would be fun to open them together,” Suna says mildly, sipping from his water with infuriating poise. “We’re just waiting for the tea.”

Atsumu arches a brow. “Whose birthday is it again, mine or yours?”

Osamu elbows him in the ribs. Suna only shrugs, utterly unrepentant. “What can I say? I love watching people open presents. Especially if one of them is embarrassing.”

“You better not have gotten me anything embarrassing,” Atsumu warns.

“Who said I got you anything?”

“Guys,” Osamu sighs heavily, already defeated. “Can you behave in front of my boss?”

Ushijima, seated in impeccable seiza posture while everyone else sprawls comfortably cross-legged, blinks as if the request is unnecessary. “Technically,” he says evenly, “I’m only the owner of the restaurant. Your direct employer is Ohira-san.”

“Even so,” Osamu mumbles. “I’d rather not humiliate myself in front of the people who sign my paychecks. So behave.”

Tea arrives then, carried in by another hostess in a soft rustle of silk. The cups are set down with practiced grace, steam curling faintly above the pale porcelain.

Atsumu takes his first sip as she leaves, the warmth sliding down his throat with a faintly roasted depth, earthy and clean. The pleasant haze from the earlier party softens into something easier here, more a background buzz than a fog.

Suna seizes the moment to drag the nearest gift bag toward him. “This one says *to Osamu, from... Sakusa-san.*”

Both twins turn in perfect unison.

“You got me a gift?” Osamu blinks.

Sakusa takes a slow sip of his tea. “Of course. It’s your birthday. I wasn’t sure what you’d like, so I asked Satori.”

It only then occurs to Atsumu that Sakusa and Tendou weren’t just colleagues but friends—his casual tone makes that much obvious.

Osamu whips toward Tendou, scandalised. “*Tendou-san?!.*”

Tendou throws up his hands. “Don’t look at me—he asked.”

“Come on, open it already,” Suna cuts in, shoving the bag into Osamu’s hands and immediately fishing his phone out. “I need this on camera.”

Carefully, Osamu peers into the bag and draws out a wooden box. It’s plain and understated, engraved with neat kanji and tied with a simple cord. Nothing flashy, nothing gaudy. Yet Osamu stares at the name branded across the lid like he’s just been struck: Takeshi Saji.

When the lid slides open, even Atsumu holds his breath.

He doesn’t know knives the way Osamu does, but he knows this isn’t some grocery store cleaver. The blade gleams with rippling, wave-like patterns that seem alive under the light. The handle is dark, heavy, serious—capped with a fine gold edge. But it’s the sheath that really gets him: lacquered black, painted with brilliant cranes that look mid-flight, as if meant for a gallery instead of a kitchen.

“Sakusa-san,” Osamu croaks, voice breaking. “Is this...?”

“Unfortunately, Takeshi Saji’s custom orders take months to forge,” Sakusa replies evenly, lifting his tea for another sip. “So I had one from a ready-made set slightly customized.”

He gestures toward the steel, where the kanji for Miya Osamu glints faintly.

For a long moment, Osamu simply stares at the knife like it’s a newborn child. His hands look almost too careful, his expression too fragile. Atsumu honestly thinks he might cry.

“This is— Sakusa-san, this is too much. They’re—these are so expensive—”

“It’s my pleasure, Osamu-san,” Sakusa says smoothly, his smile faint but undeniably warm. “Please don’t worry about the cost.”

Osamu swallows hard, then bows his head once, reverently. “Thank you. I... I don’t even know what to say. It’s perfect.”

“Man, I’ve been upstaged,” Suna sighs, though there’s no real disappointment in his grin. “Tendou-san, you pick next.”

Tendou reaches for a small red bag, flipping the tag with theatrical flourish. “Oho~ Atsumu. From Kuroo.”

Atsumu raises a brow, suspicious already, but accepts it. Inside is a sleek black leather box, oddly heavy. His stomach twists with apprehension as he opens it—only for a slip of paper to tumble into his lap.

The unmistakable gleam of leather-padded handcuffs catches the light in a grand reveal.

He yelps, face going scarlet, and slams the box shut so fast it rattles. “What the—what the *fuck*—”

Atsumu snatches the note in disbelief and his eyes blaze as he reads:

For when you finally decide to stop being cuffed by science and get cuffed for fun.

—Kuroo

Atsumu is going to combust. “I’m going to kill him.”

Suna snatches the slip of paper from his fingers with lightning reflexes. “Oh-ho, what’s this?” he crows, reading aloud with relish.

“Oh my god,” Atsumu groans, mortified, burying his face in his hands as Suna howls with laughter and Tendou joins in.

Osamu looks like he swallowed a lemon. Ushijima looks exactly the same as he did five minutes ago. And Sakusa—Sakusa’s eyes glint sharp as glass for just a heartbeat before smoothing back into perfect composure.

Meanwhile, Atsumu debates how best to disappear from existence. Suffocation by tatami mat? Implosion? Accepting divine smiting? Any would do.

Mercifully, the shoji doors slide open just then, attendants gliding in with trays of tofu dishes. Atsumu thanks every god he’s ever heard of.

A pair of fucking handcuffs. The *audacity*. He can already hear Kuroo’s deranged cackling in his head.

He glares at his dinner plate with enough force to burn a hole through it, refusing to so much as glance sideways at Sakusa. His skin buzzes with the knowledge that Sakusa saw—that everyone saw.

“I’m going to need sake,” Atsumu croaks. “Immediately.”

“Don’t be like that, Atsumu-san,” Tendou says, amused. “We’re all adults here.”

“Can I be a concussed adult with amnesia for the rest of the night?”

“Nope!” Tendou chirps. He waves a hand for the waitress. “But we *can* accommodate you on the first part of that request. Two bottles, please.”

Atsumu groans into his palms. “This is ridiculous.”

“Kuroo has the strangest sense of humour,” Osamu agrees, sympathetic. “Now I’m terrified to see what he got me...”

Atsumu shoots him a death glare. “If I had to open mine, you’re opening yours.”

“Handcuffs might be fun,” Suna muses, shameless.

Osamu smacks him across the head. “Sunarin! Behave.”

Suna only grins wider, leaning against him with mock affection. “Don’t be mad, babygirl~”

Osamu sputters, flushing crimson. “I’m leaving.” He makes an abortive attempt to rise before Suna hauls him straight back down, giggling like a child.

“Sorry, sorry! I’m just teasing. Look—delicious food, comfy seat, your scary boss right there. You really want to leave?”

Grumbling, Osamu settles back in, ears pink. “Fine.”

“Fine, no more gift opening,” Atsumu declares firmly. “I mean it. That’s enough trauma for one evening.”

“Boooring~,” Tendou singsongs.

Atsumu ignores him in favour of clutching the sake bottle when it arrives like a lifeline. He fills his cup to the brim, lifts it to his lips, and resigns himself to drowning his humiliation one sip at a time.

Fucking Kuroo.

They don’t make it home until midnight, Atsumu pleasantly buzzed and a little unsteady, Sakusa in a similar state though infinitely more composed.

“We might have overdone it,” Sakusa remarks as they stumble into the lobby and step into the elevator. “Don’t you think?”

“I was tryin’ to drown my humiliation, what’s your excuse?” Atsumu retorts, leaning back against the sleek white panels. He lets his eyes fall shut, savoring the cold press against his overheated skin. “Still can’t believe that lunatic...”

Unbidden, Sakusa’s composure fractures into a ripple of laughter—low, boyish, the kind Atsumu almost never hears. “Your face when you saw—god, you could’ve fried an egg on it.”

Atsumu cracks one eye open, glaring. “Glad to know my misery entertains you.”

“It was cute,” Sakusa says, almost apologetic, but his lips are still twitching.

Atsumu arches a brow. “The thought of me in handcuffs is cute?”

Sakusa blinks. His words falter. Whatever amusement he’d held vanishes into a guilty grimace. “Not... not exactly.”

“Oh?”

His eyes flick upward, a faint flush painting his cheekbones—though Atsumu can’t tell if it’s the alcohol or not. “The idea of you in handcuffs is what I was trying to drown with sake.”

The haze of drunken ease vanishes so abruptly Atsumu feels whiplash. His whole body snaps taut. “What.”

The elevator dings. The doors part. Sakusa straightens, eyes fixed firmly ahead. “Sorry. That was completely inappropriate. Forget I said anything.”

“Wait, no.” Atsumu lurches after him into the entryway, pulse hammering. “You were imaginin’ me in handcuffs?”

“No,” Sakusa flushes deeper, “I said I was actively trying not to.”

He pushes the door open. Atsumu crowds in after him, suddenly giddy at the thought, words spilling faster than his sobriety can filter. “But you wanted to.”

“Atsumu.” Sakusa sighs, sharp and weary, kicking off his shoes—maybe the clearest sign he’s not sober.

“Hey,” Atsumu defends, fumbling with his laces to copy him. “It’s still my birthday, you can’t be mad.”

“It’s midnight already.”

“It’s five minutes to midnight,” Atsumu insists. “I get five more minutes.”

Sakusa tips his head back as though bargaining with god. “You’re insufferable.”

“You’re the one imaginin’ me in handcuffs!”

“I just said I *wasn’t*—”

“There’s no need to be shy!” Atsumu crows, opening the bag with gleeful abandon. “I can try ’em on right now, save you the trouble of imaginin’.”

Sakusa’s hand clamps around his wrist, startlingly firm. His fingers tremble slightly. His pupils are blown wide. “Dear god, stop.”

“Or what?” Atsumu challenges, too enthralled to back down.

For a split second—so quick it could be denied—Sakusa’s gaze flicks to his lips.

Atsumu grins, pulse thrumming in his ears, and lets the bag thud to the floor. He leans into Sakusa’s touch, emboldened. “You want me soooo bad it makes you look stupid~”

Sakusa’s grip tightens. His gaze catches on Atsumu’s mouth again, then locks with his eyes, dark and molten. He leans in—barely an inch, but the air between them changes, sharp with intent. “Yeah?”

Atsumu’s breath stumbles. Every nerve lights up at once as he becomes intimately aware of the quiet hush of the penthouse, Sakusa’s nearness, the heady possibility hanging between them.

His throat works around a swallow. “Y-yeah.”

He can’t stop staring at Sakusa’s lips: pink, soft, unbearably close.

“Hey,” Atsumu murmurs, leaning in a fraction more, testing. “Remember those ungentlemanly impulses?”

“How could I forget?” Sakusa breathes. He doesn’t retreat. His hand gentles, thumb tracing over Atsumu’s pulse, holding him like something precious instead of restrained.

Atsumu shivers.

“Well,” he manages, eyes darting from Sakusa’s mouth to the molten weight of his gaze, “we’re finally in private.”

“And what, pray tell,” Sakusa murmurs, his fingers sliding beneath Atsumu’s cuff to graze warm skin, “did you have in mind?”

Atsumu’s free hand finds Sakusa’s waist, tugging him closer, savoring the slow give of muscle under his palm. “Dunno. Less space between us, for starters.”

Sakusa obliges. One step forward and his breath fans hot against Atsumu’s jaw. “Like this?”

“Well,” Atsumu says, voice trembling as he fists Sakusa’s shirt and drags him closer still, “a little closer...”

Sakusa’s knee slots between his. Their foreheads brush. Then Sakusa winds an arm tight around his waist, pulling them flush chest to chest. His breath hitches, then steadies against Atsumu’s skin.

“How about this?”

Atsumu sighs shakily, eyes fluttering shut to feel the ghost of Sakusa’s lips on his own, so close yet so far away. His whole body aches with the distance of that fraction.

“Somehow,” Atsumu manages, sliding both hands up Sakusa’s back, feeling the heat beneath his shirt, holding him just as close as he can. “I wish I could pull you even closer...”

“You’re trouble,” Sakusa whispers, and their lips brush—just barely, a cruel tease. Atsumu slumps back against the wall more heavily, letting it and Sakusa’s arms keep him standing.

“Maybe you secretly like trouble,” Atsumu purrs, pressing his thigh up between Sakusa’s, a little bolder than before.

“Maybe I just like you,” Sakusa sighs out. His voice wavers, unsteady, and then their lips brush again—a fleeting impression, a siren call that leaves Atsumu burning.

“Well...” Atsumu murmurs, their breath curling hotly together, “lucky for you, maybe I just like you too...”

“You’re trouble,” Sakusa repeats, like it’s a prayer, or a warning. His hand comes up to cradle Atsumu’s cheek, thumb dragging once across his flushed skin, holding him there, suspended in that fragile space where want threatens to spill over. The tension between them hits a fever pitch.

“Kiss me,” Atsumu whispers, buzzing, voice trembling with need.

Sakusa tips his head and claims his mouth, not tentative, not careful—just *there*, consuming, surrendering. Atsumu feels it like a plunge into fire, his knees nearly buckling as his whole body lurches toward Sakusa.

He kisses back like he’s starved—slow at first, then deeper, slick lips sliding, trading breaths until their mouths mold to each other. They tilt and tilt again, searching for more angles, more closeness, until Atsumu’s lungs burn.

He moans softly when Sakusa sucks at his tongue, the sound muffled, needy. Atsumu clutches him tighter, greedy, desperate for more, for *anything*, for—

The kiss breaks when Sakusa’s mouth trails lower, sliding heat over Atsumu’s chin, then the sharp line of his jaw, down into the crook beneath his ear. Atsumu shudders violently, breath catching.

They flutter down his neck, soft and searing at once, before Sakusa drags his tongue in one long stripe up the side of his throat, imitating Atsumu’s reckless move at the party.

“Oh my god,” Atsumu whimpers, shivering, tugging Sakusa’s hair to keep him close.

“Yeah?” Sakusa murmurs against his skin, the word reverberating in his neck like a spell. It spreads, sparking fire through his veins.

“Fuck yes,” Atsumu groans, head falling back, tugging greedily.

Sakusa’s mouth closes over his pulse, sucking just enough to draw a gasp, then soothing with his tongue. Atsumu’s head spins, his toes curl, his breath stutters—he squirms helplessly when Sakusa nips at his skin, sending shocks straight through him.

And then—oh god.

A solid heat presses into his thigh. Heavy. Insistent. Unmistakable.

Sakusa is hard.

And Atsumu is going to combust.

Brain blank, loins ablaze, he slides his palm between them to cup the straining tent of Sakusa’s trousers. The sheer weight and heat of it punches the air out of him.

Sakusa freezes, breath hissing sharp, body taut as a wire. “Atsumu.”

“You’re hard,” Atsumu rasps, words trembling out of him. His hand squeezes, just once, hungry.

Sakusa doesn’t move. His breaths fall fast, hot, feathering over Atsumu’s neck. One palm is braced beside Atsumu’s head, holding himself up like the wall is the only thing keeping him steady.

The seconds drag. Thick. Agonising.

“Can I touch you?” Atsumu whispers, voice hushed, reverent.

“It’s—” Sakusa licks his lips, hiding his face in Atsumu’s shoulder. “Been a while.”

“Fuck.” The noise that escapes Atsumu is guttural, almost pained. “That just makes me want to touch you more.”

“You’re trouble,” Sakusa wheezes, broken, when Atsumu palms him again. He’s so hard, so thick, Atsumu feels like he’ll go insane from just holding him. “We’re in the genkan.”

“Kiyoomi,” Atsumu pants, fire licking his spine, pressing up against him deliberately. “I need a yes or no.”

“Ha—” Sakusa lets out half a laugh, half a groan, shaky at best. “You think I can say no to you?”

Heat floods Atsumu, tearing into him mercilessly. “But you’re not saying yes.”

“It’s your birthday,” Sakusa strains, twitching against his palm, trembling.

“It’s after midnight,” Atsumu entices. “Besides... don’t I deserve a nice treat?”

Sakusa doesn’t stop him when he sinks to his knees, hands firm on Sakusa’s hips to draw him close. He mouths over Sakusa’s erection through the fabric, wetting the cloth, voice husky: “I need that yes, Kiyoomi.”

“Fuck—” Sakusa’s other hand slaps the wall, searching for balance. “Yes. Yes.”

Atsumu grins, triumphant, hunger flashing wild in his eyes. He fumbles with Sakusa’s belt, reverent even in his urgency, every movement shaky with anticipation. Each layer peeled away leaves Sakusa barer, breath rougher, until Atsumu finally drags his underwear down beneath the curve of his ass—

Sakusa’s cock springs free, flushed, heavy, slapping against his stomach. Atsumu stares, breathless, drunk on desire.

“Happy birthday to me,” he whispers, voice thick with awe.

Above him, Sakusa’s face is the deepest shade of red he’s ever seen as Atsumu takes him in hand and gives an experimental stroke.

Sakusa makes a sound in the back of his throat that would've sent Atsumu to his knees if he'd been standing. He holds Sakusa's gaze—desperate, desirous—takes in his split-open expression as he sticks out his tongue to tease the underside of his cock. His lips close around the head in a plush, deliberate kiss that has Sakusa shaking.

“Did you imagine this too?”

“N-no,” Sakusa manages, one hand moving to cradle the back of Atsumu's head. “I wanted to, but— but I wouldn't let myself—hah...”

Atsumu grips his hips and takes more of him in his mouth. He burns like embers in the night at the way Sakusa looks at him, like he's never seen anything so captivating. Atsumu relaxes his throat, pulls him closer, deeper—until Sakusa's scent floods his senses like a drug, until there's nothing but heat and want and the rasp of Sakusa's broken breaths.

He bobs his head, once, twice, then swallows him down.

Sakusa spits out expletives, throwing his head back as Atsumu presses in, nose-to-pelvis, and holds him there. Lets himself get drunk on the lack of air, on Sakusa's taste, on the sheer power of undoing him like this.

“Shit—shit,” Sakusa whispers hoarsely, voice so hot it drives Atsumu halfway to madness. “Look at you... you're perfect. Better than any fantasy I could've imagined...”

Atsumu pulls back with a gasp, eyes watering, throat aching, his hand replacing his mouth as he coughs softly. “Careful,” he rasps, hoarse but smug. “I've got a praise kink.”

“You're a goddamn dream,” Sakusa says in a trembling voice, the rough pads of his fingers brushing Atsumu's jaw with reverence. “Maybe I am dreaming...”

Atsumu nuzzles against him, presses a kiss to the underside of his cock, and looks up with a crooked smile. “Nu-uh...” his tongue slips out to curl over one heavy sac. “This is real, darlin'...”

Sakusa's head falls back with a sigh steeped in wanton heat. “I'm not going to last much longer,” he warns, grimacing in regret. “It's been too long.”

“I don't care,” Atsumu hums, kissing along Sakusa's length to the flushed head. “I'll take it as a compliment.”

Sakusa looks undone as Atsumu takes him in his mouth again with the single-minded intent to devour. Faster, deeper, messier—the obscene sounds of his throat working around Sakusa echo off the walls, wet and lewd and relentless.

More. Atsumu wants everything, every sound, every expression, every shiver.

As much as he can take, as much as Sakusa can give; until the world fades away and all that's left is the slide of Sakusa's cock down his throat.

“Atsumu,” Sakusa gasps out, scrambling for purchase in his hair, clutching at the strands.
“I’m going to—”

Atsumu doesn’t let him retreat. He holds him steady, swallowing him down as Sakusa comes apart.

Sakusa curls over him, groans shattering against the quiet walls, as Atsumu squeezes his eyes shut and takes it all. He swallows until it overflows, chokes once, but refuses to let go.

Drinks in every broken sound.

When he finally pulls back, dazed and breathless, Sakusa looks reduced. His thumb swipes gently at the corner of Atsumu’s lips where some of him lingers. His dark eyes are hazy, wrecked. “Are you okay? I tried to warn you.”

“Mm,” Atsumu hums, leaning into the touch, eyes fluttering closed. “I know. But I wanted you to finish in my mouth. I know how you feel about mess.”

Surprise flickers through Sakusa’s gaze at the admission, piercing the haze. “I—seriously?”

Atsumu only hums again, careful hands already moving to fix Sakusa’s clothes back into place.

“How are you this perfect?” Sakusa breathes, almost helpless.

Before Atsumu can answer, Sakusa is kneeling in front of him, cupping his face, kissing him with a fervor that steals the last of the air from his lungs.

“You’re on the floor,” Atsumu says, bewildered, when Sakusa leans back to gaze at him like he’s holding the sun in his hands.

“No,” Sakusa murmurs, brushing his thumb over Atsumu’s cheek before kissing him again, slower, savoring—tasting himself on Atsumu’s tongue. “I’m on my knees.”

“That’s the same thing—”

“For you.”

Atsumu’s stomach swarms with wild, feverish butterflies. “You’re going to ruin me for everyone else if you keep saying things like that.”

“Good,” Sakusa breathes, drawing him into another kiss, softer, deeper. “Stay here with me.”

Atsumu falls into the kiss like a lifeline, arms locking around Sakusa’s shoulders as he surrenders completely.

Down, down, down—where falling feels like flying.

End Notes

Your reviews are my life blood and will motivate me to write more! ♥

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