

Kunimi Akira is NOT a boy

Tags: Kunimi Akira-centric; Self-Discovery; Non-Binary!Kunimi Akira; Coming Out

"Dude!!! That was brutal," Kindaichi slammed a hand onto Kunimi's shoulder; he was still looking back at the third-year crying on the ground.

Kunimi shrugged off Kindaichi's grip. He wasn't sure why, but he was more annoyed at Kindaichi in that moment than the guy he had just rendered useless with a comment about everything physically wrong with him. Comments that were more than deserved because the guy had made fun of the way another student looked.

As Kindaichi retold the story (as if Kunimi hadn't been the one that said it), Kunimi tucked himself into his jacket. Something was annoying him, but he couldn't place his finger on what it was. All Kunimi knew was that something in his body just felt off. It felt like some part of him was out of place, and not being able to locate what was wrong only made him more agitated.

Having to walk to practice with Kindaichi wasn't helping either. Every word out of Kindaichi's mouth felt like nails on a chalkboard. With his friend yapping in his ear next to him, he couldn't focus on figuring out what was wrong. He found himself just repeating the phrase "shut up" in his mind over and over again like a mantra. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up.

Kunimi was thankful when Kindaichi finally had to stop telling the story in order to lead the team in stretches. Maybe what was annoying Kunimi was the fact the story wasn't even that great. He didn't understand why Kindaichi seemed so proud of him, or why he had to tell the entire team about it.

On a normal day, Kunimi hated attention. Today, he loathed it.

"Can you believe he made a bully cry?" a first-year whispered as Kunimi walked by to grab a water bottle.

"How'd he do that? He doesn't look very tough!" another whispered back. Kunimi pretended not to hear them.

"Kunimi-senpai doesn't need to fight someone to make them cry. I heard him lay-in to

Kindaichi once, it was scary," a third member of the club said. "He was all calm and he was saying all of these things that, although true, were very mean. I almost cried for Kindaichi."

As the younger members continued to talk, it felt as if the air was thickening around Kunimi. He felt like walls were closing in on him and the oxygen was thinning in the room.

Something was wrong. Kunimi had never been this upset by his teammates talking about him before. (At least, not that he could remember.) It wasn't even that his teammates were saying anything bad about him. If anything, they seemed impressed with what he had done.

So then, why was he so angry?

Kunimi stormed off. Pretending his water bottle was empty, he unscrewed the top and placed it under the drinking fountain. Eventually, the water began to flow over and down the drain.

"Hey, you okay dude?" Kunimi jumped at Kindaichi's voice.

Dude . It was a dumb word. Kindaichi used to never call him that, but after hanging out with Kyoutani all last year, he had picked up the habit. Kunimi hated that habit.

"No, I think I'm coming down with something. I'm going to head home," Kunimi said. He wasn't asking permission.

"Oh, okay yeah... Make sure you drink water and get a lot of rest!" Kindaichi called as Kunimi walked away.

Kunimi entered his home and took off his shoes, aligning them neatly along the wall. When he walked into the kitchen, he found his mother chopping vegetables for dinner. He crossed the room for a glass of water, greeting his mother politely along the way.

"You're home early," she said.

"Yeah, I wasn't feeling good, so Kindaichi sent me home."

His mother set down the knife she was using and wiped her hands on her apron. She walked toward Kunimi, getting close enough to press her forehead to his to check his temperature. The contact lasted only a moment before she pulled away.

"You don't have a fever." Her brows were furrowed as she thought through what might have her son feeling under the weather.

"It's probably just stress," Kunimi said, trying to expunge her worry before changing the topic. "Can I use the computer in the study? I have to do a little research for school."

"I'm sure that would be fine."

His mother returned to her task, and Kunimi rinsed his cup and placed it on the rack to dry before leaving toward his father's study.

Walking into the room, Kunimi was hit with the smell of leather and whisky, and he wondered if his father had spilled his late-night drink again. Kunimi crossed the room and took a seat at the desk. After he turned on the computer, he opened a new browser.

He watched the cursor blink in the search bar.

The internet was bound to have some answer, but the problem was Kunimi wasn't sure what he needed to search for. He thought back on the day, replaying the events and focusing on the moments he had felt the urge to punch someone—mainly, Kindaichi. Then he typed.

Why don't I like being called "dude"?

Kunimi hit search. The results included several forums; most were written by women claiming to be annoyed with the use of a male term to refer to them. None of it felt particularly helpful. After all, Kunimi wasn't a girl.

I'm a boy who hates being called "dude"

The cursor hovered over the search button, but he didn't click it—he couldn't. The sentence he had typed made him angry. It wasn't right.

As Kunimi reread the sentence, his eyes paused on the word boy . Just looking at the word made his skin crawl. Eventually, he erased the text and tried something new.

How to know if you aren't a boy

The query came back with hundred results talking about how parents can tell whether they are having a boy or girl. He clicked through, trying to find anything relevant. Ten pages in and Kunimi started to give up. Then, he saw a blog: Born a boy, but I don't feel like one. How I discovered I am non-binary .

Non-binary. Kunimi searched for the term in the one place he knew would have all the answers: Wikipedia.

"Non-binary identifying persons may see themselves as being between a man and a woman."

That seemed to match at least a little of Kunimi's experience. Though, he wasn't sure if he felt so much between as simply neither. Was that even possible? Kunimi continued skimming through the page.

"They may adopt neutral-pronouns."

Did he want neutral-pronouns? Did he want to be a they ?

A knock on the wall brought Kunimi out of their trance. Instinctively, they minimized the browser. They looked up to see their father standing in the doorway.

"Dinner is almost ready. Your mother wants you to wash up beforehand."

"Okay, I'll do that as soon as I finish this last thing," Kunimi said.

"What're you working on?" their father asked. He was just trying to be polite; they both knew it. Kunimi answered him anyway—though it was a lie.

"Just a report on different mammals native to Japan."

Their father nodded and replied with an uninterested, "Interesting."

Kunimi waited for him to leave before reopening the browser. Then, they quickly cleared the history and turned off the computer.

As much as they tried to forget about everything as they ate dinner, the questions and confusion wouldn't go away.

Like when someone finds a snag in their clothing, and it becomes all they can think about. The way that person will instinctively reach for the snag. How they'll inspect the snag to see if it's getting larger, and all of this interaction with it only makes it worse.

Kunimi had found a snag in the way they saw themselves.

The occasional light of cars passing by zipped across Kunimi's bedroom ceiling, disrupting the dark. In an attempt to think about anything besides how they might be non-binary, they started counting in their head. They were some number past two-hundred when it became clear that sleep would not come easily that night.

Rolling over, they grabbed their phone from their nightstand and started scrolling through Instagram. It was a lot of the usual: Iwaizumi posting another sunset picture overlooking the ocean in California; Yahaba posting images of a grumpy Kyoutani; and a plethora of volleyball related posts.

Among all of them, an image of Oikawa caught their attention. Their old captain was posed in his signature peace sign and smile, wearing small hints of green eyeshadow and a beauty mark drawn under his left eye. Kunimi read the caption: asked @itsakaashi to do my make-up and he gave me a beauty mark like @sugaspace !!

Without thinking, Kunimi opened their messages and sent him a text.

Conversation: Oikawa Tooru

Hi Oikawa-senpai...

Kunimi-kun!!! My favorite kohai!!!

What sends you to my inbox so late at night

[Kunimi is typing...]

Kunimi stared at the words they had typed: "how do you know if you might not be a boy?"

They erased the text and set their phone down on their bed. Why were they even asking Oikawa? Why was he the first person they thought to reach out to?

Kunimi had seen Oikawa present more femininely on multiple occasions. (He posted pictures with his nails done often to Instagram.) However, given everything they had researched on the internet, none of that guaranteed Oikawa would know how Kunimi was feeling.

Additionally, it wasn't that they wanted to explore their femininity. They just felt off with being described as a boy, even though outwardly it might appear that they are as such. After all, their interests overlapped with those typical for boys, yet being labeled as such was becoming increasingly uncomfortable.

Their phone buzzed again. Kunimi sighed, realizing there was no point in pretending like nothing was wrong now because Oikawa wouldn't believe them.

Conversation: Oikawa Tooru

...

Kunimi??? You okay?

I need to ask you something, but I don't know how to phrase it

You know you can ask me anything

This is a judgement free zone

Do you know anything about being non-binary?

Me personally, not much. But I am familiar with the term and know a little bit about it from an outsider's perspective

Oh...

Well, just forget about it then

Kunimi, please know that I would never ask you to tell me anything you aren't ready to share

But I am here if or when you wanna talk

Thanks Oikawa

Kunimi locked their phone and placed it back on the nightstand. Knowing Oikawa was there if or when they felt like sharing was enough to calm them; the exhaustion finally won as they drifted to sleep.

The next few days at school, Kunimi felt like he couldn't relax. He felt that everyone was staring at him like they knew. Did he look different? Was he talking differently? Walking differently?

No matter how irrational Kunimi told himself it was, he couldn't shake the sense that everyone knew. Every time someone looked at him a little longer than normal, he wondered if they had figured out his secret. He couldn't shake the feeling that everyone was judging him.

Nonetheless, he tried to keep up appearances. He made sure to talk the way he always has and pretended that nothing was wrong. It became easier to mask his discomfort as the week went on.

Now that he knew Kindaichi's dude -habit was part of the annoyance, he could brace himself for it. Kunimi reminded himself that the anger he had been directing at Kindaichi was unnecessary. It wasn't like Kindaichi knew what he was doing.

If Kunimi never told Kindaichi what was going on, it was unfair of him to treat his friend like crap when he wasn't even being honest. But, he wasn't ready to open up to Kindaichi. Kunimi had so many questions, and he honestly didn't even know how he identified.

However, since Monday night, there had been one question that had been ever present in the back of his mind. What if I'm not a boy?

Thursday evening, Kunimi was in the shower when the pit that had been growing in the stomach turned into an ache that spread throughout their whole body. They buried their head in the water, hoping to wash away the soreness. However, the pain did not go away.

They tried to focus on the physical reality. The way their feet were grounded on the floor; the heat of the water that was filling the room with steam. Finger by finger, they balled their hand into a fist and then released it, exhaling as they did so.

Knock knock.

Kunimi jumped. They heard their father yell something about how long they had been in the shower, and they shot back a quick apology. One more quick rinse before they exited.

After a quick dry, Kunimi wrapped the towel around their waist. The air in the bathroom was still warm and dense, making the world feel a little less abrasive. Kunimi stood in front of the fogged mirror, looking at their blurry image.

They wiped the steam to reveal a clearer reflection. Sad, expecting brown-eyes stared back at them.

"Kunimi Akira is... tired."

They gripped the edge of the sink and took a deep breath. If they couldn't say it alone, how could they tell their friends?

“He”—they flinched away from their reflection—“they are not a boy.” The words passed their lips as a whisper, and tears welled behind their eyes.

They inhaled, counted to three, and exhaled slowly. Turning back to the mirror, they spoke again. This time it was louder and clearer.

“They are not a boy.”

Kunimi crumpled to the ground, tucking their knees in. Tears fell silently through their hands and to the tiles below. They weren’t crying because they were sad or shameful.

No. Kunimi cried because when they spoke those words, their whole body relaxed—as if a breath they held for years was finally released.

A puzzle piece clicked into place and Kunimi was starting to be able to determine what the image was, and although there were still many pieces left to place, they could imagine what the final picture would be—it was them.

Conversation: Oikawa Tooru

I'm not a boy

You are not a boy

Kunimi Akira is not a boy

I'm still confused

That's okay, you don't have to have everything figured out

Yeah...

Kunimi, I know it isn't easy telling another person these things, so I appreciate that you feel comfortable enough to tell me.

I also know figuring these things out can be difficult to navigate, and I want you to know you don't have to do it alone. If you are comfortable, you should come spend the weekend with me, Akaashi, and Suga. I think they could answer questions I can't

Okay

A few minutes later, Kunimi received a confirmation for a train ticket to Tokyo for Saturday morning.

It was easy convincing their parents to let them travel to Tokyo for a last minute visit. Kunimi told a lie about wanting to look at the university, stating Oikawa offered to give

them a grand tour. But, if they were being honest, their parents would have let them go even without the excuse.

Kunimi absently watched the world go by out the window of the train; their thoughts were empty as the music in their headphones faded into the background. The world was quiet. There was a tree, a building, a field, a small town...

The scenery changed from that of the countryside to the city, and Kunimi felt like they could breathe. It felt refreshing to be going to a place where they didn't have to pretend. All week they felt they had been hiding from their family, from their teammates, from Kindaichi...

Kindaichi . Kunimi looked at their phone, at the conversation they had this morning when they got on the train.

Conversation: Kindaichi Yuutarou

Kunimi!!! Why didn't you tell me you were going out of town this weekend?

Sorry... Slipped my mind.

It was pretty embarrassing going to your house and your mom telling me you were on a train to Tokyo

Why are you going anyway?

I am just visiting Oikawa to hang out with him and his roommates

Doesn't answer my question about **why** dude

It's none of your business

No need to be so prickly. Keep your secrets then

I'll talk to you tomorrow

Okay? Bye then

They hadn't meant to be so cold. There was just a lot going on with Kunimi, and they didn't know what to tell Kindaichi, so they would rather he leave them alone. It just felt easier to push Kindaichi away until things were sorted out in their own mind.

Eventually, Kunimi would tell him, but, right now, they couldn't. They didn't have any language to explain how they felt—they didn't even fully know how they felt. Kunimi decided to push it all to the back of their mind. They would deal with it tomorrow evening when they were back in Miyagi.

Oikawa was waiting outside the station, waving to get their attention as he called their name. "Kunimi-kun!"

Kunimi did a half wave back. Readjusting their bag, they crossed the crowd of people to meet Oikawa. They weren't sure if they were supposed to hug him, but Oikawa didn't seem to force any greeting other than a hello.

"How was the train ride?" Oikawa asked as they walked down the street.

"It was fine... Uneventful." Kunimi followed next to Oikawa, keeping him in their peripheral as their gaze wandered.

There were so many people, and they looked so different from those in Miyagi. They dressed differently, they walked faster, and they were younger. People didn't really seem to care about each other either—they were all just people in a crowd.

"Kunimi... You listening?" Oikawa turned back to look at Kunimi.

They looked at Oikawa, feeling a little guilty for not paying attention. For a moment they worried their old captain was about to get angry, which happened when someone wasn't listening to him. However, Oikawa simply shot his signature smile at Kunimi, no hint of malice or anger.

"I just asked if it would be okay if we stopped by the konbini near the apartment. Suga texted me to pick up some ice cream on our way back," Oikawa said again.

"Yeah. That's no problem."

Kunimi paid enough attention to Oikawa after that. They listened to Oikawa tell stories about college, answered questions about how Seijoh was doing, and asked how Iwaizumi was doing in California. It was the typical conversation you would expect from people who had gone to the same high school.

The closer they got to Oikawa's apartment, the more Kunimi wondered if coming to Tokyo was a good idea. Were they intruding? Would the whole trip be pointless if they didn't talk about their identity crisis?

By the time they were ascending the stairs of Oikawa's apartment building, Kunimi decided it was too late to worry about any of that. After all, Oikawa had invited them to visit, and on top of that, Kunimi knew that Oikawa would never force them to talk about something they weren't ready to discuss.

When they got into the apartment, the scent of freshly baked cookies filled the air. Kunimi took off their shoes and followed Oikawa, who led them through the living room and into the kitchen where his two roommates were hanging out.

The ashen-haired they recognized as Suga, who they knew from when they played against each other in high school. The second person Kunimi only recognized as Akaashi because of Oikawa's posts on social media.

"Suga, you remember Kunimi, right?"

"Of course. You know, Kageyama used to mumble grumpy things about you during our matches, but I think it often came from his own frustration of how he messed up your friendship." At the mention of the Karasuno setter, both Oikawa and Kunimi flinched.

"Suga-chan! What is my number one rule?"

"Don't use your shampoo," Akaashi chimed in.

"What? No! I mean, yes. Please do not use my shampoo. But tied with that rule is that we do not talk about that prodigy setter in this house," Oikawa whined.

"We live in an apartment," Akaashi quipped, and Oikawa scoffed at him. Suga decided the best way to break the tension was to throw a cookie at Oikawa.

As Oikawa switched his attention to Suga, Akaashi introduced himself to Kunimi. After the quick exchange of pleasantries, Kunimi looked back to see Suga and Oikawa making a mess of the kitchen.

"You better take a seat and get comfortable," Akaashi said, grabbing a few cookies from the plate and holding one out for Kunimi. "These two are going to be fighting for a while." Kunimi nodded and accepted the treat.

Kunimi watched as Suga stuck his finger in the brownie batter and painted it across Oikawa's cheek. In retaliation, Oikawa reached into the flour bag, grabbing a handful and threw it in Suga's face. The two proceeded to make a mess of the already chaotic kitchen, while Akaashi simply munched on the sweets and read a book.

Oikawa and Suga continued to talk as they fought in the kitchen. Occasionally Akaashi would chime in, signalling that he was paying attention to everyone else as well as what he was reading. Even though there was a lot going on, it didn't feel overwhelming. It was a comfortable sort of chaos.

Kunimi hadn't really spoken since they arrived. But, it seemed that no one was put off by their silence. The three roommates continued to do what they would do any other weekend, and Kunimi appreciated that. They were happy to just watch.

When they did address Kunimi, they were careful with the language they used, and Kunimi wondered if Oikawa had informed them about why Kunimi was there—how they were struggling with their identity. Regardless of if they knew, no one was pressuring Kunimi to open up, and for this, they were grateful.

Kunimi wasn't sure if they were going to be able to bring up the conversation, but in any case, it was nice to get away from their life in Miyagi for the weekend.

They felt an odd sense of freedom being in Tokyo. As if the crowd of people gave them a shield to be more who they felt on the inside, instead of presenting who they thought people wanted them to be.

In less than a half hour, Suga and Oikawa had made the kitchen appear as if a windstorm

had blown through the room. Deliberately, Akaashi dog-eared his book, finally looking up at the chaos that had been created.

"I'm going to go get us take-out, and when I come back, I expect this room to be clean again," Akaashi said sternly. He then turned to Kunimi. "Kunimi, would you like to come with me? I could use the help carrying things back."

Kunimi knew it was a lie, but between helping Akaashi carry food back and having to clean the kitchen, they felt Akaashi was the better choice.

"Sure."

Akaashi and Kunimi stood in silence as they waited for the food, and although Akaashi seemed more than comfortable with the quiet, Kunimi was feeling increasingly like they should fill it with conversation.

"Do Oikawa and Suga always fight like that?" Kunimi asked, filling the silence between them.

"It's pretty common for at least two of us to be getting into an argument at any moment, but it all comes from a place of love," Akaashi said. He was playing with his fingers, though more as something to do and less out of nervousness.

"That's good," Kunimi mumbled to the ground.

"It can be nice to have friends who aren't afraid to call you out on crap, and who will also be by your side, no questions asked," Akaashi looked to Kunimi. In his eyes, Kunimi saw something—like recognition that Kunimi was looking for support. "Oikawa is a great friend to have in your corner."

"Yeah..."

"Don't get me wrong, he can be a giant pain-in-the-ass and holds a grudge like no other, but that same energy will have him fighting anyone who might hurt someone he cares about."

Kunimi nodded, eyes fixed on their feet as they dug the toe of their shoe into the ground.

It wasn't like Kunimi didn't have support. Deep down they knew that the volleyball team—current and past members—would be supportive, and they knew if they told Kin-daichi they hated being called "dude," he would stop doing it, no questions asked.

Yet, it didn't feel that easy. Kunimi had taken days to build up the nerve to message Oikawa, and although they suspected Suga and Akaashi already knew at least a small part of the story, the thought of having to say it all out loud again was just as scary as the first time. (If not more so.)

The restaurant called Akaashi's name, and the two of them grabbed the order and started to walk back. They fell back into silence, and—this time—Kunimi found it comfortable as

well.

Although Kunimi had only known Akaashi for a few hours, they already felt relaxed around him. He wasn't too loud, and he was observant. Akaashi might often be abrasive with his roommates, but he could also be subtle and delicate in the way he communicated if need be.

As Kunimi ran through scenarios in their head, they realized that there was nothing Akaashi had done so far that would make Kunimi believe he would be judgemental or rude. It was quite the opposite, and Kunimi felt coming out to Akaashi would be easier than coming out to Oikawa—which they had already done.

"Akaashi-san," Kunimi whispered as they ascended the stairs of the apartment building.

"Hmm?" Akaashi turned back to look at Kunimi, pausing when he saw Kunimi had stopped.

"I..." Kunimi wasn't sure how they wanted to tell Akaashi. They settled for something simple and informative. "I use neutral-pronouns."

A smile donned Akaashi's normally cold expression. "You use neutral-pronouns." It was an echo of Kunimi's words, stated as fact. There was no question about it in Akaashi's tone. Instead, there was only acceptance and warmth, and Kunimi broke down, tears falling down their cheeks.

Akaashi descended the stairs between them. He spoke softly. "Kunimi, can I hug you?"

Kunimi nodded and Akaashi wrapped his arms around them and pulled them into a tight embrace. He didn't say anything else, just held Kunimi in the empty stairwell.

Wrapped in Akaashi's arms, Kunimi cried. After a few minutes, they got their tears under control, and they pulled away, drying their face with the sleeve of their jacket.

"You know, technically it's Oikawa's turn to choose the movie we watch tonight, but since you are our guest, I'm sure we can convince him to give his movie-power to you if you don't want to watch an alien movie." Akaashi turned to move up the stairs, continuing as if nothing changed because Kunimi was the same Kunimi they had been all day.

"I actually don't mind alien movies," Kunimi said, following behind Akaashi.

Akaashi looked back, shock written across his face. "No wonder he says you're his favorite kohai."

Kunimi sat on the couch next to Oikawa, watching *Alien vs. Predator*. Suga and Akaashi had taken a spot on the floor, resorting to painting each other's nails as this was at least the fifth time Oikawa has chosen this particular movie this year—and it wasn't even February yet.

Though Kunimi tried to pay attention to the movie, their gaze kept drifting to Suga and

Akaashi. After Oikawa had shushed them, the two settled to silently paint each other's nails. It felt careful, the way Suga brushed the red polish onto Akaashi's nails. The delicate way he held each finger and painted them in three clean strokes.

It was a natural thing between them, a ritual that they had probably done hundreds of times before. Kunimi couldn't help but think about how there was no judgement. The two of them enjoyed painting their nails, and it was accepted as a given.

"You want your nails painted?" Suga asked Kunimi, and Kunimi wondered how long they might have been staring at the pair. However long it had been, Suga had taken notice.

"Oh... um... sure."

Akaashi moved from his spot on the floor, and Kunimi slipped from the couch and settled into the recently vacated space next to Suga. After grabbing a drink from the kitchen, Akaashi returned and sat on the couch. Oikawa swung his legs over Akaashi's lap, almost hitting the other in the face during the process.

"Any preference on color?" Suga pointed at the box filled to the brim with nail polish of all different colors.

Kunimi browsed through the box. They didn't think they were really someone who wanted bright colors, or someone who would wear anything too flashy with glitter. From the bottom of the box, they pulled out a color they felt comfortable with: black.

Similar to the way he had painted Akaashi's nails, Suga delicately grabbed their fingers one by one and brushed the black polish on. It was nice having someone pamper them. There was an odd sense of calm as Suga did their nails—it was therapeutic.

As Suga let go of the first hand, Kunimi brought it up to look at the finished product. Having their nails painted was a new look, but they felt the black almost suited them. It wasn't overly feminine—which they were thankful for. Though, they worried that maybe that invalidated their claim to be non-binary.

"Can I still be non-binary even if I am not a feminine person?" The question blurted out of Kunimi's mouth before they had time to realize what they were saying.

Akaashi reached over Oikawa to grab the remote. He paused the movie, and Oikawa started to protest, obviously having not heard Kunimi. The complaint got him a swift punch in the arm from Akaashi, followed by a stern look.

"Of course. Your gender identity doesn't dictate how you must express yourself," Akaashi replied, turning to meet Kunimi's gaze.

"Akaashi's right. Gender is a complicated thing. After all, you can't just look at someone and determine their gender because gender identity is different from gender expression," Suga said, still brushing the nail polish onto Kunimi's other hand.

"There's a difference between gender identity and gender expression?" Kunimi gave Suga a confused look, but it was Akaashi who answered their question.

"I guess a simple way to explain it is that gender expression is how you present yourself outwardly, usually around ideas of femininity and masculinity, and gender identity is more about how you feel personally. And, although gender expression may align with someone's gender identity, it isn't always the case.

"For example, I enjoy wearing dresses, make-up, nail polish"—Akaashi displayed his wine red nails—"and just generally being feminine. I also like when people give me compliments like pretty and beautiful because that is how I want to feel, and underneath it all, I am still a boy."

Kunimi nodded. Akaashi enjoyed expressing his femininity, but that didn't mean he wasn't a boy. Therefore, being non-binary didn't mean Kunimi had to start dressing more androgynous or feminine, which was a relief since they liked their clothes.

Suga finished painting Kunimi's other hand. He released the last finger and capped the nail polish, placing it back into the box. The room was quiet, the three roommates letting Kunimi lead the discussion at whatever pace they were comfortable with.

"Do you also feel like a boy who likes to express his femininity?" Kunimi asked Suga.

"Not really. My experience is a little different than Akaashi's," Suga said, picking out a new color from the box: turquoise. Then, he held out his palm at Oikawa, who complied and let Suga start to paint his nails.

"I do like feminine things, but I also like feeling masculine, and sometimes I feel like being somewhere in the middle. It really just depends because some days I feel like a boy, some days I feel more like a girl, and other days I feel like neither or a little bit of both."

Suga finished painting Oikawa's first hand and blew on his fingers briefly before gesturing for his second hand. Again, he meticulously brushed the polish delicately onto each finger.

Kunimi looked down at their hands. They felt like they had a million questions, but weren't sure exactly what they were. "So... Do you always use masculine-pronouns, even when you don't feel like a boy?"

"Usually."

"Why?" Kunimi wasn't sure if it was a rude question to ask, but they were genuinely curious.

"Mostly because it's what I've always used and it doesn't feel wrong. But I don't have any issue if someone were to use neutral- or feminine-pronouns with me. They all feel fine, but it's just been easier to keep on using he."

Kunimi leaned back against the couch, staring off at the TV, where the movie was still paused. Was there something wrong with them for not wanting to use masculine-pronouns? Had they been bothered by masculine-pronouns in the past?

They couldn't really remember when exactly they started to be annoyed with being called a guy. It felt like it just happened all of a sudden one day, and then they couldn't stop thinking something was wrong.

Suga placed a hand on Kunimi's shoulder, pulling them from their thoughts.

"There is no one way to be non-binary, remember that. If you want people to use neutral-pronouns with you, then neutral-pronouns you shall have. If you want people to stop calling you dude , my guy , or anything of the like, that is all valid."

"What if I don't want to be a boy, but I still want to be called handsome?"

"Then our handsome friend you shall be called."

Kunimi wrapped their arms around Suga and pulled him in for a hug. They weren't sure what had come over them. It was abnormal for them to be this physical with other people, but Kunimi felt like they needed a hug from someone who saw them.

Suga had seen them, not as a boy, but as a person. Even though Kunimi hadn't even known Suga or Akaashi very well before that morning, there was no doubt in Kunimi's mind that the two would jump into a fight to defend them.

Click . A flash of light pulled Kunimi from the hug, and they turned to see Oikawa with a camera in hand.

"Sorry, Kunimi-kun. You just never hug anyone, so I had to get proof," Oikawa stated as he took the polaroid from the top of the camera and placed it face down on the table beside him.

"Really? We hugged in the stairwell," Akaashi said.

Oikawa scoffed, looking at Akaashi, Suga, and then to Kunimi. "The most I've ever gotten is you leaning your head on my shoulder, and I've known you since middle school! You never once talked to Suga in my last year of high school and you just met Akaashi today, yet you give them both a hug! Not nice, Kunimi."

Kunimi shrugged, "I guess they aren't as annoying as you. If I gave you a hug, you would never shut up about it."

Akaashi and Suga burst out laughing as Oikawa crossed his arms and then resumed the movie, pretending to ignore everyone else in the room.

Suga rolled his eyes and grabbed the camera from beside Oikawa. "Alright, everyone, put a hand in. I need to document my wonderful handiwork," Suga ordered. They each placed a hand, forming an X. Suga hovered the camera above and snapped a picture.

There was no more talk about gender. Instead, they finished the movie; they made ice cream sandwiches using the cookies Suga had made earlier; Kunimi listened to the other three discuss college life. It was like any other sleepover that one might have with their friends, and Kunimi did think of them as friends.

The night ended with them stripping all the blankets from the beds and crashing on the living room floor, looking up at the glow-in-the-dark stars that painted the apartment ceiling. Kunimi fell asleep to the sound of Oikawa talking about the different constellations,

curled up next to Suga.

Kunimi's phone chimed as they waited in the park for Kindaichi. It was an Instagram notification; Oikawa had tagged Kunimi in a new photo. In the image, the polaroids that had been taken the night before were scattered on the table, and it was posted with the caption: our handsome friend came to visit us this weekend.

They liked the image and placed their phone back into their pocket. Absently, they kicked at the ground, waiting for Kindaichi to arrive.

"Kunimi!" Their friend called from a few meters away.

A lump formed in Kunimi's throat. They thought back to Oikawa's last words to them before they had boarded the train to go back home: Being non-binary doesn't change who you are, and your friends are your friends because they like you for you.

"Are you going to tell me why you were such a—"

"I'm not a boy," Kunimi blurted it out as if it was a greeting, but it wasn't. Kindaichi gave them a confused look.

"What do you mean you're not a boy?"

Kunimi took a deep breath. Of course this wasn't going to be as easy as telling Oikawa or his roommates. "I mean that I do not identify as a boy."

"So does that mean you identify as... like... a girl?"

"No. I identify as neither a boy nor a girl." Kunimi saw the confusion still on Kindaichi's face, so they decided maybe giving their friend actionable steps might help. "Basically, I would appreciate it if you would stop calling me dude or other gendered terms... And I would also appreciate it if you would use neutral-pronouns when referring to me."

"Oh..." Kindaichi looked down. On his face, Kunimi could still see the confusion as he worked through what they had said. Before Kunimi could worry about Kindaichi not accepting them, his expression changed to a smile.

"I will do that," Kindaichi spoke similar to the way Akaashi had spoken in the stairwell—matter of fact.

"Thanks."

A beat of silence fell between them. Kunimi wasn't sure what to do now. Luckily, Kindaichi had an idea.

"Want to go get ice cream?"

"It's freezing outside."

"Is that a no?" Kindaichi raised his eyebrow at Kunimi, a goofy quizzical look on his face.

Kunimi shook his head and began walking toward the nearest konbini. When they didn't hear Kindaichi following, they turned to look back. "You coming?"

"Oh... Yeah." Kindaichi caught up to Kunimi and they walked together, settling back into conversation that they had been having for years. It was comfortable, familiar, and this time, Kunimi didn't have to pretend to be someone they weren't. Kunimi was himself.