

*Naoya and Naru go to the swimming baths, and then practise some sword fighting.
Unfinished.*

Order is Naoya, then Naru.

It had been a while since the trial and his rather short-lasting meal (at least supposedly short-lasting compared to everyone else's), and he had heard the news of the locked room now revealed so Naoya decided to explore it. He headed to the staircase and in a short time span, he arrived at the second floor.

Once finally arriving there he noticed a rather worn-out looking piece of paper on the last step. It was small, but definitely couldn't go unnoticed. He picked it up and read the rather short sentence in it.

< Killer? Do they mean the latest one? I mean, we all couldn't find it but.. >
Why was Narukami called out specifically? Was it about something he wasn't told about?
The boy shook his head as he moved away from the stairs slightly, to not take up any space.

He reread the note a few times, still confused about what it meant. He rested his hand on his chin, thinking. < Maybe I should ask him about it.. >

Even though there was no kind of announcement, everyone gradually discovered that the middle room was now unlocked- the room that he'd once seen that misery figure run into.

But it wasn't like some kind of secret Mastermind room- just a spiral staircase. He soon followed suit after several others and ventured up the stairs into the unknown. It didn't look vastly different in terms of layout, but-

"Naoya. Good to see you."

It seemed that his friend had gotten here before him- and he was quite preoccupied with whatever he was holding.

"What's that? Have you found a clue?"

As the silent boy was preoccupied with his thoughts, he didn't realise that someone else had just arrived.

The rather familiar voice startled him a little, but he looked over of who it came from and well it was Narukami himself. Hadn't had his company for a little while...

But that's besides the point. As of right now, Naoya simply headed closer to him, showing him the note he found. "It's only calling you out. Why's that?" he asked, hoping he wouldn't have to interrogate one of the only people he's close with here.

"...Calling me out-?"

What could that mean? Had he done something wrong? Now with a look of concern, he peered over Naoya's shoulder to read whatever it was on the page.

'don't trust yu couldn't find killer'

Reading it over and over didn't provide any new answers. Did they mean Hifumi? It was true that they didn't find her-

Who was he kidding? He knew exactly which killer they were talking about. But... that didn't make any sense. Namatame confessed, didn't he? And he was given a death sentence for it.

Was the Mastermind suggesting that the Investigation Team had messed up somewhere? That he'd messed up somewhere?

"I... I don't know." It wasn't entirely a lie- he was sure that they'd caught the killer. "Namatame was the one who..."

He wasn't so sure anymore. While it was true that the Mastermind wasn't to be trusted, did they know something about the Inaba case that nobody else did?

Naoya observed Narukami, the other boy seemed clearly confused, but he perked up as another name was mentioned.

"Namatame? Who's that?"

Well whoever this person is, it seemed like something was clearly off in the note. It almost reminded of his situation with Kandori, who was actually not the cause of the parallel world he was in, but rather it was...

< Wait- I'm thinking too much, we didn't go through the same thing.. > But it seemed like Narukami might've been mistaken about this 'Namatame' person, judging from his reaction to the note and the note itself.

There wasn't much chance of escaping out of this- he'd have to explain himself. Now, how to condense one year's events into a few sentences?

(It felt too much like he was being interrogated. Suspected. Naoya was a friend. He hated it.)

"When I was staying in Inaba, there was a serial murder case where people would end up dead on the TV wires after going missing for a few days. My friends and I formed the Investigation Team to find the killer, and we discovered a world inside TVs- the place where we faced our own Shadows and gained our Personas."

Yu paused, looking away.

"Taro Namatame was the one we found guilty. He even confessed. We found him in the TV world, and-! And... he kidnapped Nanako. She almost died because of him. It wouldn't make sense for the culprit to be anyone else."

The boy listened and observed Narukami, waiting until he could respond. He didn't want to interrogate him but this note... it was suspicious. Something must've been off..

Well, he also made a discovery that the other boy could summon a persona, but that wasn't important right now. Seemed like Namatame was pretty suspicious but he felt like maybe he could've been a cover up for the real killer. That's only a possibility but..

"Narukami, this person does seem guilty, but don't let that fool you. From my personal experience, I was in a world parallel to my own. My companions and I thought this man... Kadori, was behind it all. But during our final parts of the journey, it was revealed that... a close friend of mine created that world, because they envied everyone outside."

< They've learnt from their mistakes, but that isn't the main point. >

"But if not him, then who? He's... already been executed for his crimes since he confessed. The case is closed."

And the Investigation Team was falling apart from the very beginning of the Mastermind's so-called 'game'.

"Maybe you'd have been better off leading the investigation, Naoya." It was meant to be a joke, but it came out sounding much more crestfallen than intended. The boy seemed to have a much better idea about the case than him, and Yu had been looking into it for just under a year.

"You do have a point. Even after he was caught, the fog that came from the TV world got so bad that nobody can even live in Inaba anymore. Nanako and Uncle had to move out, as well as my other friends there."

Was that it, then? The case wasn't closed after all? After promising he'd protect Nanako from then on, his continued failure led to her suffering even more?

Naoya shook his head. If what this note and everything that Narukami told him proved that this case was supposedly closed, then that completely contradicts it. As for the joke, the boy took it a bit seriously, raising his brow in confusion.

If Narukami's team was in here, slowly falling apart there may be a possibility that... "Maybe the actual killer is behind this." he let out.

Though it wouldn't be likely, judging from everything Narukami told him, it was possible that his theory might be right, though he'll have to find out.

That... actually made a lot of sense. If it turned out that the killer really was still out there, then maybe that's why they were all here.

It'd explain why there were so many Persona users in the same place despite many having no connection with each other. Since Nanako was also involved with the case, it'd make sense for her to be here too. And Uncle, and even the fox.

"So, the Mastermind who keeps giving us motives and put us here is likely someone from Inaba."

But then, who would that be? Namatame was dead, and Mitsuo surely wouldn't have the influence to do anything like this.

He was so sure at the time that they'd reached the correct verdict. Now that he had to go back to square one, nobody in particular came to mind- it had been so long since he'd thought about it that there were likely things about the case he'd forgotten, too.

"But if that's the case, why leave this note? It's as if the Mastermind wants to be found."

Naoya nodded. It'd explain a lot and yet..

'Why leave the note?'

That was... actually a good point. Why would the mastermind want to be found out so easily? It wouldn't make sense unless...wait.

< Aki.. >

That.. 'child'. The one who was offered so called paradise by Kandori, helping him out as much as possible, only to be betrayed by that man. A deal like that was something to be wary of, but again, he could simply be thinking too much and yet...

He shrugged. His answer might likely be wrong, so he shouldn't feel like he's solving all of this. This note could just be throwing them off..

It seemed that both of them were stumped, if that shrug was any indication.

"It'd explain a lot, even if there are still questions that need answering. Let's keep it in mind."

Yu tried keeping a positive spin on things. They needed to in a place like this, or they'd all fall apart.

"I'm glad I can talk to you about this, Naoya. You have a lot of good ideas." Almost made him wish they could have met in Inaba. Would things have turned out any different with his help?

He shook his head. There was no point in considering what could have been- what mattered most was finding the person behind this.

And if it was the person who had killed Yamano and Saki, and kidnapped his friends and his sister, then they would get no mercy. Not even from him.

Naoya looked at Narukami, who also didn't seem to know what was up, but he appreciated his efforts on staying positive. He's dealt with a lot, most likely more than Naoya, so he's certainly quite strong.

And as for his next message, he simply let out a small smile. He wasn't the best with helping out people, but he appreciated it when some of his companions (mainly either Maki, Kei or Eriko) went to him for comfort or some help. "It's nothing."

The sooner they find it out the better, jumping straight into conclusions would be a bad idea, but they're both starting to get the grasp of what's going on. He hoped they'd find out more, since they seem to work well together.

"It's not nothing. I appreciate it."

Now, at least they had a glimpse of an idea of what could be going on behind the scenes. It was by no means a guarantee that the real killer was behind this, but... it was likely.

Maybe thinking about it too hard without much evidence would prove unhelpful, though.

"Should we have a look around now? We've stood around here for a while."

If they were lucky, they might even find another clue. Who knows?

Though he didn't feel his face getting warmer, Naoya's cheeks did turn a little pink by that comment. He usually had that happen when he was happy, so it wasn't exactly a bad thing.

As for Narukami's request, the boy nodded. "Sure."

It wasn't like they had anything else to do, so some exploring would be okay. And the other boy had a point, maybe they could find another clue. In the meantime, he'll let Narukami lead the way.

After a nod, Yu picked a door to go through at random.

He wasn't exactly sure what to expect, but it definitely wasn't a set of expensive-looking swimming pools. There was even a jacuzzi in the corner.

"Haven't gone swimming in a while. Have you?" He turned to the right to see two changing rooms- a red figure with a dress on one door and a blue, dressless figure on the other.

Ah, yes. The two genders.

"Let's hope they have swimming gear in the changing rooms." Without waiting for an answer, he went into the blue, dressless door, even though he certainly wouldn't mind wearing a dress.

And wouldn't you know it, there were several pairs of swimming trunks laid out for them.

"Let's get our swim on." It was said so seriously that it was difficult to tell whether he was joking.

As he followed Narukami to the random, Naoya also noticed the swimming pools and jacuzzi. He furrowed his brows a little, swimming wasn't really his thing, he only ever stayed in bathhouses. He looked over at Narukami, who seemed to be interested in swimming. "Me neither." < Not my thing. >

As he observed the area, he noticed they were changing rooms for both male and females. I mean, of course there were, why wouldn't there be..

He noticed Narukami immediately enter the boys' changing room, to which he followed shortly after. If there wasn't any swimming gear, then uh... kinda pointless to be here..

"Spoilt for choice."

He really had to think about which pair he'd choose. It had to be a mixture of stylish and effective- not too much material that would lead to more drag in the water, but enough to remain decent.

Without any warning, he took his jacket and shirt off, folding them neatly, and grabbed the bright yellow pair with blue Hawaiiin-esque flowers.

Fashion.

"I'll be a minute."

Completely calm, as though he hadn't just taken his shirt off with Naoya right in front of him, he hopped into one of the cubicles to change.

Spoilt for choice? Well, he certainly is interested in swimming. Naoya didn't care much and went for simple black swimming trunks. He was about to take his jacket off until he forgot one thing..

< I need to remove my lipstick... >

Luckily he had lipstick back in his room, but he could find anything to wipe it out with except his arm. So, after taking his jacket and shirt off, he tried to remove his current lipstick with his arm. After a bit, it seemed to be gone, but it kinda smudged his arm but that'll be easily removed soon enough.

He folded his jacket and shirt, finally looking over at Narukami again, who picked out his final choice and excused himself. He shrugged as he got into his swimming trunks before Narukami came back.

At last, he emerged, like a newly born butterfly coming out of his shell after years of-

Ahem.

"Looking good." Yu offered a thumbs up which he considered not awkward at all before going back out to pick a pool.

...Hm. It was then that he was reminded that there were no 25m lengths, and so swimming competitively or as a race would probably not be possible. Instead, he went for the more relaxing option of the decently sized jacuzzi.

As soon as he stepped inside it, it began to bubble underneath him, creating a comfortable massage of jets as he eventually sat down in the hot tub.

This was the life.

"Come in, the water's fine." This was an experience everyone had to go through at least once in their lives, Yu decided in that moment.

Had he ever even been in one of these before?

After waiting for surprisingly not that long, Narukami finally got out. Naoya didn't mind his choice, it actually suited him pretty well. He received a thumbs up from the other boy, to which he accepted with a smile.

After that they both got out and stood for a bit before Narukami headed to the jacuzzi. Ah well, it'd certainly match with his fashion choice. He shrugged as he observed the other boy once again.

Though after he went in, it started to bubble, to which Naoya stepped back for. Bubbles were cool to watch but he's been bathing in still water in bathhouses for the majority of his life. This thing is something Mark or Uesugi would dream of being in, with their female companions of course. Typical cliché for boys like them..

'The water's fine' pointed the other male not too far from him. He shrugged as he decided to get inside as well. The bubbles felt weird at first, maybe they'll eventually get comfortable. He stuck his arms his sides and knees to his torso.

He sat a few feet away from Narukami, not too far though.

Judging from how reluctant Naoya seemed to get into the water, it was likely that he hadn't been in a jacuzzi either. It was a new experience for the both of them.

"The water won't bite," he encouraged in his odd little way. To prove his point, he stretched out his arms and rested his elbows outside the tub.

If he had some shades, the look would be complete. But no matter.

"I've heard hydrotherapy can be good for stress relief. The jets and bubbles relax your muscles." As if on cue, the second round of water jets came on.

Incredibly relaxing. If only they weren't stuck inside a murder mansion.

Naoya furrowed his brows at this new experience. Again, literally been in bathhouses all his life. The other boy told him that water doesn't bite, probably assuming he's afraid of this.

"It's not that. I just bathed in bathhouses for the majority of my life, that's all.." Yknow, where the water is mostly still.

Narukami then went on to explain a summary of hydrotherapy. It's like he needed it though... But then right after that, he jumped slightly at the new but similar feeling. His shoulders rose as his eyes widened slightly. < This is gonna be hard to get used to. >

It wasn't a bad feeling, just weird and new..

Yu cocked his head to the side in slight confusion. The only time he'd been in a bathhouse was when he and his team unfortunately had to venture into Kanji's dungeon.

Kanji...

"I didn't think you'd be comfortable in that kind of place. Isn't it... well...?" He recalled Kanji's Shadow in nothing but a loincloth- if Naoya wasn't at ease here, how would he have dealt with that?

Or... maybe he was used to loincloths, and hadn't worn swimming trunks much before.

Yu watched Naoya jump at the water jets with a slight smile. With all of his stoic demeanour, he seemed to have a hard time adjusting to things he hadn't done before.

Naoya tilted his head. Did Narukami not have a good time in a bathhouse? They were always pretty calming for him, but opinions can vary..

"It's really calming for me, no one can disturb me and I like the atmosphere around places like that." he replied, sinking his shoulders into the water, now slightly more calm now than from his reaction a few minutes ago.

The feeling was still weird, but it didn't bother him as much.

Calming? Even if Kanji's dungeon wasn't filled with Shadows, it didn't seem like the most relaxing place to be- especially for someone like Yosuke, who seemed pretty sensitive to those kind of things.

Naoya had some odd tendencies. With a shrug, Yu decided to just leave it at that.

"To each their own. No need to judge you."

After all, he hadn't judged Kanji, despite his friend's insistence that he didn't swing that way. Was that why Naoya was embarrassed before?

You learn something new every day.

Naoya raised his brow, still confused. Yeah, he probably didn't have a good time in bathhouses.

"If you want, after we get out here, I could take you to one of the bathhouses in Mikage-cho." Maybe Inaba didn't have the best ones... he shrugged. But he definitely went to a pretty relaxing bathhouse.

At the offer, Yu widened his eyes. Was this what he thought it was? He was flattered, but... wasn't that a little scandalous?

Well, not quite scandalous, but it definitely wasn't what he was expecting.

"You're more forward than you look." But maybe it'd do him some good to properly broaden his horizons- there was no reason to refuse.

And he didn't really want to refuse an offer from his friend, anyway.

"It's a plan."

The boy perked up, rising his shoulders from the water. < Forward? But a bathhouse is the least 'forward' place.. > he still looked very much confused.

Wait, was Narukami thinking this was a...? "I'm not that forward.." the thought of his invitation possibly being misinterpreted as a date made his cheeks rosy again. The other boy didn't have to accept it..

And now Naoya was blushing... was he getting cold feet? (Figuratively, of course, since it was probably impossible to get cold in the jacuzzi.)

"No need to be humble. I admire your confidence."

Yu was never as bothered about being in a relationship as anyone else in his city's school, but that didn't mean he had to stay closed off to the possibility.

Well, for now, it was just a day out, he supposed.

Naoya sighed, his cheeks still rosy. Sure, he was known as the pretty boy in school and would have some girls send him letters and ask him on that. But this was more of just... being assumed that he was using that to his advantage to date someone he just met.

"Narukami.." he let out as he looked over at the boy properly, "I'm not asking you on a date."

He was embarrassed because of the assumption, that's really it. He was just offering to hang out..

Was that not what a trip to the bathhouse entailed? Maybe Yu was just assuming what it was like based on his experience in the TV world.

"Hm? Okay," was his calm response, as he remained completely straight-faced.

If it was just a hangout, that'd likely made things much less awkward when the time came, seeing as he didn't know Naoya that well yet.

The silent boy looked away for a bit, his cheeks now weren't as rosy. Narukami was good company to have around, but this assumption was a bit too... much. But it's understandable, they haven't known each other for the longest time.

He relaxed a bit in the jacuzzi before finally looking at Narukami once more, his stoic expression now not being as.. pink. "You seem rather comfortable in here, been in a jacuzzi before?"

"Not that I remember." But now that he was here, he sure wished he had. The water jets acted like a massage, and the hot water let him relax even more.

...How long had it been since they were in here?

As much as he would have loved to spend the rest of his days here, it probably wasn't good to soak for too long.

"Maybe we should be getting out- we've been in here a while." He sounded more disappointed than anything, but it was probably the best thing to do.

Insert them getting changed here because Grace cannot be bothered to go through that whole thing again. Yu is now back at the stairs with Naoya beside him, I think.

"Let's see what else this floor has."

Behind his randomly chosen door, there was a huge collection of weapons. Guns, swords, knives, even more traditional weapons like bows and arrows. Another door within the armory was already open, and Yu could see an area for target practice.

It was very much an unwelcome surprise.

He simply frowned, knowing that this would open up a lot more opportunities for people to...

"...Do you want to put in some practice?" He was rather conflicted himself. It would only encourage the murders, but that katana on the wall looked too much like the one he used in the TV world to resist it.

Insert timeskip here.

Anyways, Naoya also got changed and went back to where they first were a few er..hours ago? He couldn't really tell.

But it felt weird, not wearing lipstick or even lipgloss when in his uniform or casual wear, it'd probably be noticeable, but no one really pointed it out to him unless they were a typical entitled girls who felt the need to expose a simple man's choice of appearance.

He headed to the room Narukami opened the door for, a bit surprised to see what was inside. It was filled with weapons but... one of the swords looked just like a replica of the sword Nanjo gave him and... there were similar guns to those his companions used.. it was weirdly unsettling.

He shrugged, still slightly unsure if he should use these without shadows around.. "I wouldn't mind.."

Naoya seemed equally reluctant to admit that he wanted to. Yu followed his gaze and noticed him eyeing one of the swords.

"Do you have experience with a sword, too?" If slashing at Shadows counted as 'experience', that is. "It'd be difficult to use swords for target practice, but..."

With almost an air of reverence, he took the katana he'd spotted before, testing the weight in his hands. It seemed like an uncanny replica of the one Yosuke gave him...

"Why don't we practise against each other?" He'd never had a sword fight against another person before. It'd be a new experience- but they had to be careful.

The silent boy approached the replica closer. < Why is it here out of all places? It's... something of value. > Nanjo gave it to him for a reason, even if it was just to look out for him, it still meant something. Apparently, it seemed like his observation caught Narukami's eye, asking him if he was good at using a sword.

Naoya wasn't necessarily bad at using a sword or gun... he just used his persona a lot more. And his fists. Yeah. He shrugged, "I'm decent."

But his attention was now on the other boy in the same room, who now got a two handed katana. He was asked to be sparred with. He carefully took out the sword from the display beside him. Closest thing to sparring he got was fighting zombies, but he was mostly used to... punching them. Ahem.

"Why not.." he shrugged once again. Though if they were going to do this, they're gonna have to be extremely careful..

"Let's find a good spot."

He was honestly a little surprised that Naoya agreed to it- it wasn't the most responsible of practices, and he knew he wouldn't hear the end of it if Mitsuru found out.

But despite himself, he went into the middle of the range, getting into a starting position.

"When you're ready. You can have the first strike, if you'd like." He faced each challenge with equal determination, whether it was a game of cards or a swordfight.

That familiar look of utter determination took over his expression as he held the sword in front of him with two hands.

Naoya entered the uh... current fighting area. Definitely better than a broken down hospital, a rather complicated facility and the void, he supposed. He looked over at Narukami, who was already getting in position.

He inspected his sword a little. It certainly felt like he was holding the one Nanjo gave him but.. it looked completely brand new. Huh.

He perked up as the boy stated he could start. He held his sword in the position he usually held it and then struck with a slash. Of course, a rather simple starter but it was effective at times..

In response to the slash, Yu blocked the attack by raising the sword vertically to create a makeshift shield, and pushed at his opponent with surprising force.

"Better than decent." For a moment, they remained locked in contact, the practice fight already getting rather intense.

And then, almost as soon as the moment began, the boy shifted to Naoya's left and went for a strike to his side with an upwards cut so as not to leave his chest vulnerable- carefully aimed, but also not forceful enough to go too far and accidentally hurt him.

Naoya's attack was quickly blocked, to which resulted in him being pushed a few metres back.

< Huh. Guess he might be right. > It wasn't like Narukami wasn't as good as compared to him. It was clear that he had another thing in mind however, seeing as launched to his left, which he dodged.

To counter attack that, he launched his sword to Narukami's left, mainly towards the lower parts, being below the chest, since the area above it was very vulnerable. He tried to not do a damaging aim, but his force could be considered a bit careless..

As much as he wanted to throw a compliment out as they continued to fight, Yu was finding it rather difficult to keep up compared to how he fought for hours on end in the TV world.

He was... very rusty. In fact, he only just managed to dodge by leaping over the sword with essentially accidental grace, following up with an upwards slash angled towards his neck as he rose from his makeshift barrel roll.

Of course, it could potentially kill a real enemy, but Yu was making sure that he wasn't using enough force for that.

After catching his breath for a short amount of time, Naoya was encountered with another attack, to which he blocked, making the swords clash.

He didn't find time to flatter him, for as he pushed Narukami off of him before attacking with another slash. He was doing... surprisingly well. Maybe Nanjo's sword techniques helped him out a little, to which he was surprised about how much he even remembered..

Once they'd broken apart after the clash, Yu thought he'd have some time to breathe after all the action- but with only a few seconds to himself, Naoya came back in with yet another attack.

His stamina was likely better than his, even if Yu had more power. (Yu wanted to say that aloud, but he found that he lacked the extra breath to do so.)

Instead of trying to counterattack like he had been doing until now, he instead dodged and moved backwards to create some space between them.

After a few breaths, he focused again, returning to his starting position.

The boy was getting ready for another attack before looking over, seeing Narukami in his starting position again. He lessened the rather tight grip on his sword, slightly tilting his head at the other boy.

< Should I attack or is he just catching his breath? > he thought, panting slightly from the fight. He slightly tightened his grip on the sword, in case Narukami struck again.

"Haven't fought like this in a while. You have good form."

He'd finally caught his breath for long enough to speak, more grateful than he was about to admit that Naoya had stopped to let him recharge for a minute or two.

Okay, what had he learned? Naoya had good stamina. It would do him good to conserve his own energy instead of going all out with each attack.

Once he'd circled around his opponent to find a good opening, Yu dashed in again, aiming for the sword's hilt instead of the person wielding it.

He figured that this swordfight would be much easier if he took the sword off of him.

Naoya simply stood in his current spot for a bit, before Narukami started circling around him, almost as if he---

< Shit-!! > Wide-eyed, Naoya dodged the next attack by faith. He felt a small cut forming, though that was the last of his worries. He stepped back for a bit, before initiating another attack.

He dashed towards Narukami's right. Again, careful aim, careless force. He didn't notice these things as of yet, which he really should've from past experience.

Naoya seemingly wasn't expecting such an attack, and even from where Yu was standing, he could see the red line on his hand where his sword accidentally broke skin.

"Are you alr-?"

While trying to apologise and check to see if he was okay, Yu had been caught off-guard, too. He only just managed to block as he swept his sword to the side, but he had no time to think about a counterattack.

He was left open.

< It worked! >

His carelessness claimed to be his helpful guide, since Narukami was now open to attack.

With that, Naoya wondered if he should do something like Kirishima would usually do.. nah. Too much distraction, get to the point.

He launched his sword at Narukami, hoping to pin him on the ground since he was now vulnerable.