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# turn the rain into gold

breedlejuice

## Summary:

Some things will never change, Sakusa thinks. Some things remain the same, like the sun in Atsumu's eyes and the weight of his crooked smile. It is all bright, all yellow, all never ending. Inside of Sakusa's chest, there is still only love.

Sakusa is 16 years old when his world gets painted yellow.

## Notes:

Hello!! Welcome to this 20k+ journey. There are more author's notes at the end!! :)

(See the end of the work for more notes.)

Sakusa is 16 years old when his world gets painted yellow. It is day one of the All-Japan Youth Training Camp, and the gym is alive around him. It is full of chattering mouths and too many sets of hands, too many bodies pressed together in the summer soaked room. There is a month of this camp ahead of him, a month of strangers disrupting peace and flooding his brain with noisy conversations. Sakusa scans the scene fretfully, eyes searching for somewhere quiet and safe to rest himself. There is a nervous tension thrumming in his head, nagging him to get away from it all.

Sakusa's cousin, Komori, is off somewhere in the crowd, undoubtedly chatting with a group of strangers about the weather and God knows what else. Komori has always been that way; warm, welcoming, and easy to talk to. Komori has always been everything that Sakusa is not.

Sakusa has never been good with crowds; or with people, really. Social anxiety is not something one can bury in the dirt and make bloom into a pretty flower. It is biting and gripping; it is Sakusa's cross to bear. Anxiety is what leads Sakusa to empty corners in full rooms. Anxiety is what makes him smother his loneliness instead of making friends. Sakusa is only lonely when he's honest with himself.

Finally, Sakusa picks a spot in the left corner of the gym and settles there, as far away from the commotion as he can get. It's only getting louder the longer that people file into the room, all sporting varying levels of excitement. He allows himself to "people watch" for a short while, his dark eyes tracing different faces and heads of hair.

Sakusa and these strangers are all here for the same reason; they're here because of the same passion for volleyball, passion that has made them

some of the best players in Japan. It should be easy to fit in here, easy for him to loosen up and mute the loud, antagonizing fear in his belly that decides when he gets to speak. Yet, having that common ground makes it no easier for Sakusa to inch himself forwards and away from the corner; it makes the idea of starting a conversation no smaller inside of his head. So, he scrolls absentmindedly through his Instagram feed instead, trying anything he can to keep his mind off of the too full space he's occupying.

Sakusa is halfway through watching a video about a chubby white cat named Petunia when the space is no longer his own. Rather, there is now a head of brassy blonde hair in his peripheral line of view. Sakusa turns towards the intruder. A fearful part of him wants to make a snippy comment about personal space or having manners. Maybe then the stranger will catch a hint and leave him to his own overthinking. He turns his head to speak, expecting the worst for no rational reason. Instead, he is met with curious brown eyes and a charming smile; a welcoming face that seems to shine. Sakusa's heart stutters inside of his chest, and suddenly he's not on the defensive. Rather, he's mostly entranced.

"Whatcha watchin'?" the now notably 'half' stranger asks. Sakusa knows of who he is, of course. It's impossible not to know about him, as a fellow volleyball player. He's one of the infamous Miya twins; the more "annoying" Miya twin, rumors say. Atsumu is his first name. His face has been plastered on television screens and magazines across the country, what with him being the #1 setter in their age group. He has quite the reputation for being cocky; nothing like the patient, friendly face he's staring back at. Sakusa clears his throat, turning his phone towards Atsumu in reply. He doesn't trust himself to speak. Atsumu watches the video beside him in silence, the chubby cat frolicking across Sakusa's phone screen on repeat. The video plays 3 times over before Atsumu speaks again.

"Soooo, do ya like cats or dogs?"

Sakusa swallows. He's unsure of what Atsumu wants with him. He's even more unsure of why he cares to know. It's quiet once again for a few lingering seconds. "Both. I have a soft spot for cats, though." he mutters.

"I like 'em both, too. Ya seem like a cat kinda guy though, ya know? M'not surprised that ya like 'em the best."

Sakusa's nose wrinkles under his mask at this, his eyes narrowing. "You don't know me. How would you know what I like?"

Atsumu's smile never falls from his lips. In fact, it only grows. "I don't know ya. I just had a feelin', s'all. I'm Atsumu Miya. What's yer name?"

"Sakusa."

Atsumu brightens. "Sakusa.." he murmurs, like he's testing the taste of the name in his mouth. "Can ya tell me yer first name ta go with yer family name?"

Sakusa sighs. "Why would I want to do that?"

"Because ya know my first name already! S'only fair."

Sakusa knows that he doesn't owe Atsumu a response; it doesn't work that way. He'll hear Sakusa's first name one way or another this month, whether it's through word of mouth or from one of the coaches. But Atsumu looks impossibly bright beside him, with his caramel skin and way too brassy hair. It's almost yellow underneath the fluorescent lights, and it should definitely look more offensive than it actually does. He wonders absently when Atsumu dyed it; Sakusa remembers it being brown in photographs. Still, he doesn't allow himself to ask. Sakusa pockets his cell phone. "Kiyoomi." he mumbles. Atsumu blinks back at him. "What?"

"My first name. It's Kiyoomi."

A laugh escapes the blonde, and Sakusa doesn't like it. He doesn't like that sunny sound, and he doesn't want to hear it again.

(But he does, he does, he does)

Atsumu snaps his fingers, like he's remembered an important bit of information. "Omi then! I'll call ya.. Omi-kun!!"

Sakusa bristles, leaning off of the wall to begin his stride towards the middle of the gym. Everyone is lining up for practice now, and he can see Komori staring at him across the way. That's what Sakusa is here for: volleyball practice. He's here for blocks, spikes, and a month of perfecting his nasty spin on the ball. He's not here for Atsumu Miya, a stranger who's too chatty for his own good. "No. You won't call me that. I'm going to line up." he deadpans.

It isn't long before Atsumu is matching his steps, walking in sync beside him. Atsumu flashes a shit-eating grin and oh, there's that cocky demeanor plaguing Atsumu's reputation. "Sure thing, Omi-kun. "

Sakusa groans. "You are already insufferable."

Inside, he feels yellow.

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Their interactions don't dwindle from there. In fact, they only grow in their frequency. Atsumu is, funnily enough, his assigned roommate at the hotel. When the coaches booked their rooms for the month, they clearly missed Sakusa's accommodation request.

Komori spares him worried glances when they head up to his floor but Sakusa doesn't make a fuss. Their room is clean enough to the naked eye

but it's small , something that should pull at his lungs. And it does, to a degree. Sakusa doesn't do well cramped up in tiny rooms, let alone with another person occupying the same space with him. So, he wipes all the tables and sprays down the bathroom, scrubbing at surfaces until everything feels safe. This ritual is one he repeats each day; once in the morning, and once before he sleeps. It is admittedly unnerving for someone else, someone that is not Komori, to be bearing witness to his routine. It makes Sakusa anxious and uptight for the first 4 nights of their stay, and the pair doesn't speak much when they're inside the room. Yet, the arrangement isn't particularly uncomfortable.

Atsumu doesn't gawk at him while he cleans. He doesn't complain when Sakusa wants to shower first, or roll his eyes when he double checks that Atsumu washed his hands. Instead, he's surprisingly considerate, and he gives Sakusa just enough space to breathe. He even offers to help Sakusa out with the sanitizing of the room. Sakusa declines curtly, of course, preferring to straighten up the room in the ways that he knows best. Still, it is nice to know that he cares enough to ask.

On the 5th day of camp, something shifts. Atsumu wakes Sakusa up for practice with a smile on his face.

"Good mornin', Omi. Yer alarm went off but ya slept through it, so I thought I'd wake ya now."

Sakusa blinks up at him blearily, rubbing at his eyes with the base of his palm. "Oh. What time is it? It's so bright already." he mumbles, voice thick

with traces of sleep. He sits upright with a small groan and his curls are no doubt sticking up in every which direction, judging by Atsumu's amused grin. Sakusa glares back at him, albeit a bit petulantly. He doesn't feel fond of the teasing chuckle that follows. He doesn't.

"Oh! It's 11 am! Probably explains why it's so bright in here, hm? I tried ta draw the curtains ta make it darker in here for ya but it didn't really work."

Sakusa's sleep muddled brain clears up at that, dark eyes widening with panic. "Miya.. did you just say it's 11 am? My alarm was set for 6:30 am. I missed morning practice."

There is a pause. "Well, yeah."

"Are you fucking kidding? Why wouldn't you wake me up sooner? Now I look irresponsible." Sakusa bites.

"Omi."

"I don't understand why you would let me go back to sleep, the coaches are going to be so aggravated with me. I-"

Atsumu interrupts his panicked ramblings with haste. "Omi! S'all good, breathe. I told 'em that ya weren't feelin' well n'they said ta let ya take the day off ta rest. They know how ya feel about bein' around a buncha people anyways, so they didn't make it into a big deal. Ya just looked so peaceful n'ya were so tired yesterday. I wanted ta let ya rest."

Sakusa's shoulders slump. He takes a minute to process. "Oh."

They stare back at one another for a while, eyes interlocked and watching. They're both observing this new, bright something that is brewing; interaction. Atsumu is holding a bag. Atsumu is holding a bag out to him, more specifically. Sakusa cocks up a curious brow, regarding it. "Is that for me?"

Atsumu nods, allowing Sakusa to take the bag from his hand. "Yeah. I washed my hands when I got back fer ya, too. It's those umeboshi candies ya like. I saw ya eat 'em a couple of times this week, so I thought I would get ya some. Got ya a bottle of green tea, too. S'good fer ya." Atsumu rambles on, scratching his cheek with a crooked finger. It's painfully endearing. It twists Sakusa's stomach in knots. He's never been good at accepting or receiving gifts from others. Sakusa's grip on the bag tightens. Maybe today that will change, at least for a little while.

"I'm sorry for snapping at you. Thank you for.. being thoughtful." He murmurs.

Atsumu grins. "S'cool. Do ya want ta go on a walk? We can toss a volleyball 'round outside ta catch ya up on practice from this mornin'. Not that ya need it."

Sakusa studies him, hesitant. "What about afternoon and evening practice for you?"

Atsumu smirks back. "Well, I get a jail outta free card 'cause yer 'sick.' I could say I had ta take care of poor, hopeless Omi-kun. Aren't I sucha good roommate?"

Sakusa huffs. "No. You're a pollution."

"Yer so rude, Omi!"

"Yeah, sure. I'm going to shower.

"Oh. Okay."

"And then... we'll go on that walk?"

Atsumu brightens, sporting that megawatt grin. "Yeah. I'll be waitin' here."

They do go on their walk. They walk for hours around the park outside, chatting about everything and nothing. Atsumu is a big talker, but Sakusa is content with that. He's content to listen. Their morning walks become a routine at camp, with their chats quiet and strides slow. As it turns out, Sakusa doesn't hate sharing his living space with a stranger. It definitely isn't Atsumu's thick thighs, loud laughter, and piercing gaze that makes it unacceptable. But it is acceptable, staying with him. It might even be something that's okay.

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The 14th day of camp brings Sakusa something old and something new. The air has been scalding since sunrise. Tokyo's weather reports rave about the record high temperatures, and Sakusa suffers in his own head. Brutal summers are hard enough to handle when a person is unmoving. So, the non-stop physicality that comes with training is admittedly grueling, even for a natural like Sakusa. Typically, Sakusa spends his summer days indoors and in the comfort of air-conditioned rooms. He has never fared well with extreme temperatures, what with his sensitive skin and general distaste for still, dry air.

As an athlete however, both sweating and consistent practicing are inevitable; they're a part of playing volleyball that Sakusa has grown to accept. He chooses passion and his drive over discomfort. On the court, Sakusa shines with precise movements and confident hands. Volleyball is a different language, one that's built out of instinct, willpower, and control. It leaves no room for his anxieties or his overthinking.

And yet, today's heat is too brutal on his brain to ignore. June in Tokyo is a dangerous cocktail when combined with the stuffy gymnasium. For Sakusa in particular, it is a disaster. Training means other bodies beside his own, bodies that are dripping sweat that his skin did not create. It all feels particularly unclean and it makes him anxious, makes him itch in a way that feels wrong. Across the net, those golden eyes watch him all practice long, full of some emotion he can't put a name to. The stare prickles at his skin and makes him weak in his knees; he feels vulnerable underneath the weight of it, and he probably looks like an asshole for glaring back at Atsumu all the while. That possibility makes him itch, too.

When training ends that night, he evades the crowd filing out of the gym with careful, practiced precision. Everyone else is heading to dinner but Sakusa has no plans for that. Sakusa wants to shower back at the hotel, wants to avoid the sweat and clutter of the locker room altogether. He won't feel as clean if he showers in there. Sakusa has some protein bars and an energy drink, which will no doubt need to suffice for the night. It isn't that he wants to be alone, per say. It isn't even that he's not hungry. His stomach is empty and begging to be filled after long, hard hours of practice. But the need to pull the day from his sweat caked skin is greater than the growling of his stomach. So, he trudges himself through the hotel lobby and up the stairs, fighting the urge to turn back for a warm meal. The nagging inside of him wins for the night. His brain has decided for him.

He stands underneath the stream for what feels like hours. Sakusa scrubs with vigor, watching as the bad day trickles downdowndown the drain, away with the suds and scalding water. For the first time since sunrise, he feels as though he can breathe properly.

He isn't sure of what leads him to the rooftop after his shower. Maybe the world is getting too heavy, or maybe he feels out of place during practice, smushed against people who find him cold and unkind. But it's easier to be alone, at least for awhile. It's what he knows how to do the best. The gentle breeze of the evening feels good on Sakusa's sun-warmed skin. The sky is changing color, pinks and blues making cotton candy clouds up ahead. It's almost hypnotizing to watch the puffs roll by, illuminated by the soon-to-set sun. Only, a voice off to the side breaks him from his trance.

"Whatcha doin' up here?"

Sakusa turns towards the source of the voice, a voice that has become awfully familiar in such a short time. Atsumu is standing not too far from him, a container in his hands and a nervous grin painting his mouth. Sakusa huffs. "Breathing. Why are you here?"

Atsumu scratches the back of his neck sheepishly. "Well, ya know.. ya just kinda disappeared after practice n'I was wonderin' where ya went. We usually eat together with Komori."

Sakusa frowns at that, feeling only a tad bit guilty for not shooting Atsumu a text before he'd wandered off. Komori, on the other hand, has gotten used to it by now. He understands when Sakusa needs time to himself; Atsumu doesn't. "Sorry." He mumbles quietly, averting his gaze. "You can sit with me, if you want. You already came all the way up here."

'You're already someone I enjoy having around,' is what he doesn't add.

Atsumu does as he's been told. He sits right beside Sakusa on the smooth pavement of the roof, letting his legs dangle freely off of the edge. Sakusa doesn't like it, the way that he could tumble right off, by accident or on purpose.

"The sunset sure is pretty today, hm?" Atsumu mumbles, eyes trained on the sky. When Sakusa doesn't respond, he turns his head to meet his eyes. Sakusa must look half as concerned as he feels, because Atsumu laughs at what he sees. He hands him the container but not before scuffling back a bit, further away from the edge. It settles Sakusa's nerves, quieting those intrusive thoughts. "I'm not gonna fall, ya don't hafta worry yer head 'bout nothin'. Do ya like watermelon? I brought ya some from dinner."

Sakusa takes it with grateful hands. "I do like watermelon. You didn't have to bring me anything, though."

"Shuddup, stop yer feelin' guilty. I did it because I wanted ta do it!"

Sakusa frowns, eyebrows furrowing. "Who said I was feeling guilty?"

Atsumu ignores his question entirely, instead replying with one of his own. "What's yer favorite fruit, Omi?"

"Mango. I also really like lime."

Atsumu's face scrunches up at that. "Ya just eat tha lime straight up?"

"No. I mean, I probably could, but I don't. I just like sour things a lot. I usually squeeze lime juice onto other fruit. It's good like that."

"Seems like a lotta work."

Sakusa scoffs, taking a bite of watermelon. "It's really not, you're just a simpleton. I'm used to cooking for myself when I'm at home, so squeezing a lime isn't exactly difficult. Anyways, what's your favorite fruit?"

Atsumu pouts. "I can squeeze a stupid lime too, ya jerk! I like peaches. Mandarin oranges are good, too. Favorite hobby outside'a volleyball?"

"I read a lot. Sometimes I write, too. Depends on the day."

Atsumu makes a curious sound, reaching for a piece of the watermelon. "Ooh, mysterious! What do ya write about?"

"Not really. Also, that's cheating. You still haven't answered the question for yourself."

"Touché. I like listenin' ta music. Makes me feel all calm. I cook with 'Samu sometimes, too. We make whole days outta it. He's tha better cook but s'nice ta have somethin' besides volleyball ta bond with him over, ya know? Never tell him I said that, though."

Sakusa grins at that, covering his mouth with the palm of his hand. It feels like it should be secretive, smiling so openly this way. It's a little too free, being here.

"Are you and your brother close?"

"Oh, yeah. He's an ass but I love him ta death, ya know? He's my best friend in tha whole wide world. Don't tell him I said that either."

Sakusa scoffs, shaking his head. "You're an ass."

"He's tha bigger asshole, not me!"

"Right."

"Whatever, Omi-kun. Favorite color?" Atsumu asks.

"That's such a basic question."

"Oh, shut yer ungrateful trap n'answer tha question already!"

Sakusa rolls his eyes at Atsumu's jab before pondering. "Blue." He answers easily, and it's a half truth.

His favorite color had always been blue, growing up. It's a calm color, eliciting an emotion that he's always needed more of. It reminds him of clear skies and happier days spent by the ocean with his cousin, Komori. What Sakusa doesn't mention is that he's starting to favor yellow, too. The color reminds him of self-righteous, sunshine bright smiles, and a certain Kansai drawl that makes him swoon. Sakusa might need some more of that, too.

"Blue is 'Samu's favorite color, I think. I can't really remember now but I know that it used ta be fer sure. My favorite color s'red!"

Sakusa hums, picking up another slice of watermelon from the container. "I could see that."

"Yeah? Why?"

"It's a bright color. It's fiery, like you."

Atsumu narrows his eyes. "Are ya sayin' I'm hot-headed or somethin'?"

Sakusa smirks as he takes a bite out of the fruit, chewing carefully. "That's exactly what I'm saying."

"Yer fuckin' rude!"

"I never said it was a bad thing, did I?" He asks this quietly, much softer than his previous retort, and Atsumu's wide-eyed glance is not lost on him. Neither are his reddening cheeks or the small, honest smile ghosting his lips. He might like that smile the best.

"Nah. Ya didn't. I knew ya found me charmin'."

Sakusa scoffs. "Don't get ahead of yourself, Miya. I never said anything about finding you charming."

"Whatever! Ya can try n'hide it all ya want but Atsumu here knows tha truth!" He proclaims, with a cheeky grin plastered onto his mouth. It's cocky but somehow so endearing, all the same. Sakusa hates how much he likes this kind of smile, too.

"Yeah, sure. Whatever helps you sleep at night, Miya."

"Alright, alright. Now, s'time fer a more serious question."

Sakusa frowns, raising a curious eyebrow. "Okay? Sure."

"Why did ya come up here ta be all by yerself tonight? Are ya okay?" Atsumu questions. His tone of voice is gentle, almost tender, an emotion that Sakusa is not expecting from someone like him. Concern is something Sakusa seldom expects or receives from anyone at all.

They barely know each other, is the thing. Yet, here they are together, sharing watermelon while talking on the roof about colors and painted skies. Friendships never come easy to Sakusa. Most things are difficult for him when they're surrounding connection. He's never been taught how to regulate the emotions inside of himself, let alone how to trust someone else with them. So, of course, this question is new . It feels strangely intimate, being asked if he's okay. Maybe it's because he doesn't know if he is; maybe it's because no one has ever cared to check. But his throat feels impossibly tight and he swallows, breaking his eyes from Atsumu's burning gaze. Everything is too real.

Sakusa sighs, scratching at his arm in that same 'one, two, three' pattern, the kind he repeats when he's overwhelmed.

"I don't know. Well, I do know. Obviously. I don't know how to explain it to someone else, though. I've never tried."

Atsumu nods. "Well, I can be patient. Take yer time explainin'."

Sakusa sighs, staring down at his knees. "I've never been good with people, I guess. I know that sounds stupid but it's true. I like my teammates but we're not super close or anything. It's mainly just me and Komori. Not to mention that I'm used to being alone, most of the time. So, being around a bunch of people all day is really draining for me. I get overwhelmed. I'm noise sensitive and when a bunch of people are chattering and sweating and it's stuffy, it just- it's a lot. I needed to get away from everything for a bit."

Atsumu frowns. "It doesn't sound stupid, Omi. I'm sorry, am I upsettin' ya by pressin' ya with all of these questions n'stuff? I didn't mean ta make it any worse or nothin'!"

Sakusa shakes his head. "No. Don't be dumb. I have a mind of my own, I wouldn't let you sit with me up here if I didn't want you to. Besides, you aren't the 'bad' kind of noise. Your company is... adequate." 'It's more

welcome than anything else here.' Atsumu looks pleased and Sakusa feels hopeful, too hopeful. So, he talks.

"Now, it's my turn to ask a question."

Atsumu nods. "Let's hear it, Omi."

"Why did you come looking for me up here?"

Atsumu's cheeks flush a pretty shade of pink; it almost matches the watercolor sky. His lips purse as he seems to wrack his brain for an appropriate answer.

The setter scratches the back of his neck, nervous like before. "Uh- well, fer a couple of reasons, actually. One reason is that ya just- ya looked so upset earlier n'I was worried about ya. I wanted ta check on ya."

Sakusa frowns. "It isn't your job to worry about me, Miya. I'm fine."

"I know that! I just- I know s'not my job, but I still wanted ta make sure that yer okay. And.. ta be honest with ya? I've been meaning ta get ya alone all week. That's the other reason."

"Why? We're literally rooming together, Miya."

"Yeah, but this s'different. We're usually both real tired when we're back in tha room at night, so this seemed like tha perfect time. Sure, we go on our walks in tha mornin' and we eat together, but stuff like this is different somehow. Yer good ta talk to, ya know? I saw an openin' and I didn't want ta miss out."

Sakusa looks down at his feet, discarding the watermelon rind. "I've never heard that I'm good to talk to before. Most people think I'm a jerk, you know."

"Oh yeah? Well, most people are stupid."

Sakusa laughs at that, surprising even himself with the throaty sound. Atsumu looks happy and maybe a bit fond, if Sakusa's eyes aren't deceiving him.

"Nah, but seriously! I can't speak fer other people but I don't think that. Yeah, yer real blunt about stuff, but that doesn't make ya a jerk. If my opinion s'worth anythin'.. I think yer real nice, Omi. And it makes me want ta know about ya. More than just yer favorite colors. Is that alright?"

Sakusa is stunned by the boy before him, and not for the first time. He nods once, clearing his throat to speak. "Yeah. That's alright," he whispers and then adds, softer, "Because I want to know about you, too."

Atsumu laughs, a gleeful sound. He shuffles in closer and Sakusa is not afraid. Everything feels safe. "Good."

The sky has gone dark above them, with crickets chirping songs into the night. They've traded their conversation for a comfortable silence instead. Sakusa watches Atsumu's face with new eyes, almost, as the blonde drinks in the stars above. Both the night sky and Atsumu are objectively beautiful. Sakusa isn't sure what to do about this fact, and the knowledge shakes him down the longer that he stares. But when Atsumu reaches for his hand, those hesitant fingers fumbling for his own in the dark, everything glows. He squeezes Atsumu's hand, silent permission that yes, he is allowed to touch in this way. The shy, grateful grin on Atsumu's lips is prettier than any painted sky, or any twinkling stars. Sakusa can stand being unsure for a while longer, so long as Atsumu holds his hand.

"Hey, Miya?" he whispers, keeping his voice quiet to match the hushhushhush of the night.

Atsumu looks down at their intertwined hands. "Atsumu."

"What?"

"Call me Atsumu."

Sakusa's throat burns with something new; it might even be something good. "Okay. Then, Atsumu?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you for coming to find me up here."

"Yeah. I'd do it again."

The night is a firefly.

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Sakusa is 16 years old when he falls in love.

"What are ya readin' this time, Omi Omi?"

Sakusa blanches at this. "What did you just call me?"

"I called ya 'Omi Omi.' S'cute, right?" Atsumu questions.

It is cute, Sakusa notes. Not objectively, of course, but it's cute because it's coming from him. It's a nickname gifted to him by a ridiculous teenage boy who Sakusa is- for whatever fucking reason- very clearly enamored with. He does not say this out loud, instead tucking the thought away to hide deepdeepdeep . Sakusa clears his throat, his eyes planted on the pages of his book. He can no longer focus on the poem he was reading.

"No. It's stupid. Of course you'd think it's cute, Miya. Wasn't just 'Omi' enough?"

"Oh, don't be sucha stick in tha mud, Omi Omi. I like both! N' stop callin' me 'Miya!' It reminds me of 'Samu.'" Sakusa snorts at that, earning him a half-hearted glare from Atsumu. The blonde huffs, clearly dissatisfied with Sakusa's choice of words. "Whatever, Omi. Tell me what yer readin' already."

"A book." Sakusa deadpans, face blank.

Atsumu sucks his teeth, cheek squishing up against his palm. His face is freckled and tanned from Tokyo's summer sun. He looks handsome this way, all sleepy eyed and honey gold in his Inarizaki t-shirt. Sakusa fights the urge

to reach out and stroke his soft skin, to get sunshine trapped beneath his fingers. "Yeah, no shit. What kinda book?"

"A book with words in it. You sure do ask a lot of questions." Sakusa huffs, tucking a lock of hair behind his ear. He tries to ignore the burning in his cheeks as Atsumu's eyes follow the motion, focused and keen and all over him. He doesn't dare let himself consider what it means.

The blonde hums in thought. "Well, I wouldn't hafta ask lotsa questions if ya would answer em' straight tha first time around."

Sakusa puffs out a sigh, eyes pulling from the pages to regard Atsumu instead. It's coming up on a month of sharing a living space with Atsumu at camp; a month of sharing random facts, morning walks, and watermelon slices under the sun. Atsumu is both everything and nothing like the descriptions he'd been given prior to meeting him. Rumors make Atsumu sound stuck up, loud, and full of himself to a fault.

He is cocky, and he definitely does need to invest in some purple shampoo for his hair. Atsumu is curious and confident, demanding to be seen and remembered. He's a ball of boundless energy, bursting through Sakusa's empty spaces to fill them with noise. And yet, that description doesn't seem to fit right; it's too narrow-minded, too ignorant to all of Atsumu's sparkle and shine. Because the Atsumu next to him is also considerate and sweet. He turns the lights off in their hotel room when Sakusa is too worn down to stand. He meets Sakusa on the rooftop under baby pink skies, talks with him about everything and nothing. Atsumu respects Sakusa's space while

simultaneously worming his way through all the cracks and creases of his soul. Sakusa smiles, forgetting his place in this tiny hotel room. He admits secretly, hesitantly to himself, that he wants to be seen if it's Atsumu who's watching him.

So, Sakusa scoots over and pats the empty space beside him on the bed. Atsumu's jaw goes slack. He stares owlishly up at him, tan face flushing a petal pink. Sakusa swallows thickly but meets his gaze head on, his own cheeks growing warm from their eye contact.

"You can read along with me to find out. You know, if you want to." Sakusa trails off. He tries not to feel hopeful, to feel flattered as Atsumu scrambles up and onto the bed with urgency. Atsumu grins over at him, bright enough to make Sakusa blind. "I knew ya couldn't resist my charms, Omi Omi." he teases. Sakusa tosses him a withering glance. "Shuttin' up now." Atsumu peeps, directing his gaze to the book in Sakusa's hands. "Poetry?" he questions. Sakusa nods in reply, flipping the page once he's sure that Atsumu has finished reading along with him.

Atsumu makes a small noise, one that Sakusa cannot seem to define. "That makes a lotta sense, actually. The fact that ya read poems."

Sakusa turns to him, expression questioning. "How so?"

"Well, I know ya always have a lot on yer mind, ya know? But ya don't always know how ta find tha words ta explain yer feelings yerself, sometimes. Other people can help ya say tha things yer too scared to."

Sakusa's eyes widen a fraction. "That was... surprisingly insightful, coming from you."

Atsumu frowns at him, lips pulling into a pout. "Shuddup, Omi! M'speakin' from experience, ya know." he mumbles.

Sakusa hums, flipping another page. "Yeah? Do you read poetry too, then?"

"Nah, m'not big on readin'. But I like listenin' ta songs with lyrics that I relate to. I'll show ya some songs I like sometime. Why don't ya read some of these poems to me? Ya got a soothin' voice, so s'probably good for stuff like that."

'Sometime' echoes in his head, floating next to the compliment that'd tumbled past Atsumu's lips just moments before. He swallows down the joy that it brings.

"Sure. I can do that."

They sit like that for hours. It is long past sundown but here they are in this hotel bed, Sakusa reading poems aloud with no care for tracking time. A summer shower roars outside the window and Atsumu huddles in closer, yanking the blanket up and over their legs. His head drops to Sakusa's shoulder and the black haired man doesn't flinch. It's a welcome weight, grounding and present; it's admittedly comfortable.

"This poem is by a photographer named Rinko Kawauchi. She pairs her work with haikus quite often— she says it makes her photographs come to life and gives them an even deeper beauty." Sakusa explains, fingers stroking the page absentmindedly. It's unlike him to ramble but Sakusa knows what this poem means to him. Sakusa knows that he's read it a dozen times this week alone, all because of this brassy haired boy. His throat feels tight. Atsumu hums in question when a minute of silence is all that follows his explanation. Sakusa doesn't have to turn his head to know that the blonde's eyes are on him.

"Well? Read it, dummy."

Sakusa bristles at this. Atsumu just laughs. "I was havin' a good time listenin' ta ya, keep goin'!"

Sakusa swallows before his lips part around the first line. "Once in a while, we should look into each other's eyes. Otherwise, we might feel lost. I'm so glad that you are here ." The words float around them in the air, like invisible feathers being carried along by wind. Atsumu nudges him softly, hesitantly, until Sakusa turns to meet his eyes. They are smoldering and hot on his own,

little swimming pools of honey. His breath hitches when Atsumu smiles. "I think I like that poem tha best, Omi Omi." he whispers, eyes never breaking their hold on Sakusa's own. Something is changing between them, unfurling right before Sakusa's eyes like marigolds do at their first taste of spring. "Do ya have any more poems that are like it?" Sakusa nods wordlessly. Atsumu's grin is radiant. Sakusa is the flower and Atsumu is the sun, painting him shades of pink and red.

"Yer so cool, Omi. M' swoonin' over here."

"Shut up, 'Tsumu."

Atsumu gawks at him openly. "'Tsumu? Finally gettin' creative with yer names fer me, Omi? Didn't know ya had it in ya."

"I could go back to calling you Miya." Sakusa murmurs, cocking up an unimpressed brow.

"No!" Atsumu complains, perhaps far too quickly. Sakusa smirks back at him, feeling just a little bit smug.

"Okay, then quiet down."

"Yessir, yessir. Recite yer poem."

So, he does. The poem is by the same photographer as before, and it is no less packed with emotion. "There was a thump. The sound of the moment we fell. The sound that says we can never go back to the moment before. "

Sakusa recites the words slowly and tenderly; with all of the meaning he can muster. 'You are inside of these words.' 'I don't want to go back, if there is no more you.' It's what he doesn't know how to say yet. It's all that he can feel.

Atsumu reaches out to him first. He places calloused fingers on Sakusa's jaw, kissing him soundly when the final syllables are whispered. The kiss is filled with the same fireplace warmth inside of Atsumu's eyes, the same rhythm and dance of the summer shower. It's warm and sweet and daffodil yellow. It feels a little bit like love.

"Be my boyfriend, Kiyomi." Atsumu whispers, lips hovering right above his own.

"Okay." Sakusa replies, chasing his mouth.

Sakusa thinks that Atsumu's lips taste like poetry. And so he kisses them, again and again and again.

It is winter when Sakusa's heart breaks. Their relationship doesn't make it to the new year. The warmth brought by camp and Atsumu's summer visits begins growing cold in autumn. Their shared weekends in Sakusa's garden and the local pastry shop dwindle away. By the end of October, Atsumu only comes to Tokyo here and there. It starts to be all that Sakusa thinks about; he thinks of Atsumu constantly, thinks about the way the blonde is drifting from him in both daylight and his dreams.

He tries to assure himself that they're both busy. They have volleyball practice and exams to keep them occupied, responsibilities that neither of them can ignore. It's only reasonable that Atsumu has less time for him now. Yet, this doesn't dull the ache in his chest, or the worries that follow him to bed. Because they have cell phones and social media right at their fingertips, and yet Atsumu has never been more absent. Sakusa begins pondering how he can mourn the loss of someone who's still there.

Sakusa misses those honeyed lips and the sweet, sure sound of Atsumu's voice in his room. He misses consistency, being held, and feeling hopeful. Their phone calls through the week were once bountiful in the summer months, when Atsumu's words had filled the spaces in Sakusa's days. The shift from their openness to these quiet, hesitant whispers of connection is jarring. It pulls at something deep inside of him; he is a loose thread, unraveling.

In November, Atsumu answers Sakusa's calls even less, and his texts go ignored for days. As the air outside thickens with its lingering chill, Sakusa's desperation only builds. On the days that Atsumu does pick up the phone, his

voice sounds farfarfar away on the other end. It feels as though Atsumu is drowning in some secret ocean, one that Sakusa cannot find. The pining feels pathetic, but he can't help what he craves.

It's easier to lie to himself, is the thing. Sakusa is not stupid. He's inexperienced, blunt, and admittedly hard to love. Still, he knows enough to see that something has changed.

December brings frosted windows and blankets of snow in Tokyo. It brings holiday cheer for the people with happy families, the kinds that come home and care enough to be together. It brings a 'we need to talk' text at 2 am and a shivering, jacket clad Atsumu to his door around 3 pm. They don't lock lips or embrace when he makes his way inside. Sakusa takes his coat wordlessly and washes his hands one, two, three times at the kitchen sink. He brews them cups of green tea and leads Atsumu up to his room, to the same bed where he sucked at Sakusa's neck on August days. The time for playing pretend is up.

Atsumu breaks the silence first. Their cups of tea are resting on Sakusa's desk, untouched and no doubt lukewarm by now. "Omi, ya know this just-this isn't workin' out, is it?" He asks.

The words echo around them. Sakusa swallows thickly, scratching at the back of his hand one, two, three times. He does this when he's nervous and Atsumu knows that. He knows about all of Sakusa's quirks and habits, about what troubles him in the dark. Atsumu has gotten closer to him than anyone

else and yet here he is, on Sakusa's bed, telling him that this 'isn't working out.'

"Oh. Is it.. not working out?" He questions.

Atsumu looks over at him with sad eyes, shaking his head. A lock of hair falls into his face from the motion. Sakusa wants nothing more than to reach out, to brush it back into its rightful place beside his right ear. He can't do that, though; not anymore. The thought makes his throat feel too tight.

"No. It isn't. It was workin' so well before but now, I guess it's not. Look, I hate ta pull that 'it isn't you, it's me' bullshit on ya, but... it's kinda true, ya know? Because it isn't you. It isn't even us that's tha problem, Omi. It's just that- I don't fuckin' know what tha problem is . Words are so hard for me ta find, sometimes. I'm so sorry, Kiyoomi." Atsumu chokes out. The air in the room is heavy.

"Okay." He whispers, like a liar. Nothing about this is okay, because Atsumu has brought the color yellow and sunlight to his days. Atsumu's mouth tastes like peach and those awful Western energy drinks he downs, as though they're good for his health. He smells important, like happiness or being welcomed home; and it's over . Atsumu's brows furrow, his eyes flashing with hurt.

"Okay? Just like that?"

Sakusa huffs, defeated. "Yeah, Atsumu. Okay. What am I supposed to do? Beg? I'm not going to do that. You clearly don't have any second thoughts."

Atsumu laughs at that, but the sound is dry and humorless; his eyes are no longer warm. Sakusa wonders what went wrong between them.

The pair don't speak for a long while after that. They settle on watching one another instead, unmoving. The clock on Sakusa's wall ticks away, and the sun dips down further past the trees. It gets dark out so much earlier now, Sakusa notes. It feels like June was here only yesterday, with its early mornings and long, bright nights. Both of their eyes are glossy and rimmed red. Sakusa watches the slight tremble of Atsumu's bottom lip, and he wonders why the blonde is on the verge of tears. After all, he's the one who's unhappy. He decided that Sakusa is not enough. Sakusa's lips open and close as he searches for the will to speak, the motion repeating what feels like 100 times.

"Atsumu, can you just- before you go, can you-" Sakusa can't choke out the words and yet they're all right there, right on the tip of his tongue. His hands are shaking and his head is so full, too full.

'Tell me what I did wrong.' 'Is what we have not enough?' 'Why aren't I enough?' 'What would be enough to keep you here?' 'Stay. Stay. Stay.'

"What is it, Omi?" Atsumu whispers, placing a hand on his knee. The touch burns, and Sakusa slaps his fingers away. They're far too heavy on his skin, far too kind to match all the hurt that he feels. Atsumu trembles before him, and all Sakusa wants to do is make it better but he can't. Atsumu is bringing this onto himself, onto them both. It's painful. Sakusa will not cry.

"Nevermind, it's nothing. Don't call me that anymore, either."

Atsumu's tears fall first. "Omi, please listen to me for a minute. Ya don't understand why m'doin' this."

"You're breaking up with me, Atsumu. That's fairly straightforward."

Atsumu sniffs. "It's not anything you did. It's hard, Kiyomi. S' complicated."

"So, tell me what's wrong. Talk to me. Explain it to me." Sakusa begs, bringing a hand to Atsumu's cheek. He wipes away the tears with the base of his thumb and Atsumu nuzzles into the touch. His eyes are the saddest that Sakusa has ever seen them.

Atsumu whines. "I can't. I just can't do this with ya anymore. S' not gonna work."

"Why? Did I do something wrong?"

"No, I already told ya-"

"Atsumu, please. You know I'm not good with my feelings. It's.. this is all so new to me, and I know that I have a hard time opening up to you. I know that I'm not the easiest person to talk to about these things, but.. it's you, Atsumu. You are worth it, I will try for you. There is nothing you can't tell me. I can't fix it if you won't even tell me why you're leaving. Is it.. because you don't feel the same way about me anymore?"

Atsumu shakes his head, unflinching. "No, Omi, God no. That's not it."

"Then this makes no sense! I don't understand."

Atsumu sucks in a sharp breath, as though he's losing his patience. It makes Sakusa feel so small. "Because likin' ya ain't enough fer this ta work out! Its just- its too much fer me ta handle right now, a relationship. S'not that I don't want ya, it's that I don't have it in me ta work on building an 'us' with ya when it won't even last, ya know? Yer all tha way over here in Tokyo, n'I have a whole career I gotta build up after high school. I could be goin' anywhere fer volleyball, ya know? Then we'd still barely be able ta see each other, and ya know.. s'just not worth it ta me right now, all tha risk. I'm sorry, Kiyoomi."

Atsumu shuts up after that, and no further comments leave his mouth. He just sits beside Sakusa quietly, with tears tumbling down his cheeks in tiny, rivers. And oh, how he wishes that Atsumu would tell him that he's enough to stick around for; enough to take a chance on. Nothing is guaranteed to work out between them, no. It also isn't destined to fail. Sakusa thinks this but the words never pass his lips. Sakusa swallows his disappointment to keep a grip on his pride.

"Alright. I guess that's that, then." He whispers, and curses when his voice cracks. It's so silly to hide this aching, knowing that Atsumu has already seen so much of him. He'll never be unseen again, even long after Atsumu walks away.

They share a final hug at the door, right before Atsumu is due to leave for his train back home. Sakusa is unsure of how long it lasts, but it isn't a brief embrace; it's desperate. They cling to one another with need, like they're terrified of what's coming next. It could be seconds, minutes, or hours that he spends in Atsumu's arms, silently pleading for a second chance that isn't coming. Atsumu's mind is made up, but letting go feels wrong. They both sob in earnest when he turns out the front door and neither of them speak another word. The tears Sakusa promised not to shed don't make Atsumu stay. Sakusa is not enough.

He showers well past 2 am that night. He uses half a bottle of soap, cries half a tsunami worth of tears. The water is biting, burning, scalding hot and Sakusa can't feel it. The water runs frigid, icy, unkind, and Sakusa stays underneath the spray. Sakusa scrubs himself until he's raw, until his flesh is splotchy and angry. It doesn't help. No amount of scrubbing can take all of the ache away. It has painted him gray. Atsumu is underneath his skin.

## 6 YEARS LATER

Sakusa is 22 years old when he first sees red. Red is what he feels coming face to face with him again, seeing those same firefly eyes and pearly teeth. Red is what he feels when he notices that Atsumu has clearly learned about purple shampoo. His hair has lost its signature brassy sheen and is instead a cool platinum blonde. It's shorter now but it looks no less touchable than before atop his head. Sakusa half wonders if it's soft and half wonders why he's wondering about anything at all. Red is what he tastes when that handsome, cocksure smile is wiped from Atsumu's face, those full lips falling open. He looks stunned truthfully, doing nothing to hide his gawking from across the gym. The stare burns hot on Sakusa's skin, bubbles red and black and green inside his stomach. Atsumu still gets under his skin, after all of these years. He's gotten taller, stronger, more handsome, and Sakusa wants nothing to do with him.

"Everyone, meet Sakusa Kiyomi! He's the newest addition to the team, and he'll be a starter in our lineup. We've got a game coming up, so we'll be practicing hard to sync. He shows lots of promise, guys. I'm sure we'll all get along. Now, I'm going to talk with Foster. Everyone else, hold down the fort and help Sakusa-san warm up until I get back. Then we'll get started. Welcome him!" Meian finishes, before turning back out of the door.

"I'll help you warm up, Sakusa-san!" Bokuto chirps, excitable and loud. Sakusa remembers him from high school. "Me too, me too!" Hinata shouts. He remembers Hinata too, who is bouncing hyper and wild beside Bokuto across the room. There's so much noise, and yet none of it can touch him. All Sakusa sees is him. He remembers Atsumu more than anything else.

A weak, pathetic piece of himself debates following Meian, walking right back out the door from which he came. The stronger fragments of himself muster up the will to stay. If any of Sakusa's new teammates notice their dramatic stare down, they don't mention it. To them, it is harmless; to Sakusa, it is everything. Atsumu is not a stranger. Atsumu is made of memories and Sakusa's first heartbreak. Still, it's been 6 years, all time he's spent moving on and moving forward. Sakusa repeats this like a mantra as he passes through the gym to warm up with Bokuto, chants it in his heart as honey eyes follow his stride. He can do this. The past is the past, and it's time to be professionals; no more, no less. This Atsumu is not the Atsumu he knew.

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After a month of practice, Sakusa's composure cracks. As it turns out, faking professionalism and shoving down his hurt makes being around Atsumu no easier. In fact, it feels like drowning. Atsumu is still louder and larger than life. Some things are so familiar about him, like his nervous habits and the full, bellowing sound of his laughter. These are pieces of the setter that Sakusa believes may never change; they are all of the things he has never once forgotten. But when those familiar eyes fall onto his own across the net, they are full of a deep, profound ache. It is a reminder that this Atsumu- this fox eyed, platinum blonde- has lived 6 years without him. He's lived 6 years

of memories that Sakusa was not a part of, 6 years of trials and tribulations that Sakusa doesn't know about. His eyes look older, more worn.

Atsumu smiles around everybody else, like it's easy. Those private, sorrowful glances are saved for him alone. It is maddening, to have known this stranger. It is maddening, to not know about this Atsumu's life at all. Nothing about being around him is easy and from the looks of it, Atsumu feels the same way. They don't dare to say a word to one another. It hurts, to see how much and how little has changed.

'Why do I still crave to know you?'

They have a hard time syncing up during practice, of course. Sakusa both expected and feared this outcome, the lack of fluidity between their movements. With every failed toss, every weak spike, and every fumbled receive, Sakusa wants to speak with him. He wants to ask about when he changed his hair, about the new songs that he listens to. Sakusa wants to know him, this newer him, and he hates himself for being so easily swayed. He has no reason to want anything from Atsumu at all. Yet, he does. It burns inside of him, undeniable. It makes him snark and bite out retorts, creating something untouchable; a wall that can protect him from getting hurt.

("Your sets are garbage." Sakusa said plainly.

Atsumu's eyes narrowed, challenging. "Shut up, newbie . My sets are fuckin' perfect."

"They clearly aren't, if I can't hit them."

"What are ya? The second comin'a Christ?"

Sakusa sighed, unfazed. "Miya, you're Buddhist . That makes no sense."

Atsumu's frown only deepened. "Shut yer trap, smartass!"

"Stop setting the ball like an amateur and then maybe I won't have anything to say."

Meian sighed, muttering profanities under his breath. "Sakusa! Miya! Focus!"

"He started it !" Sakusa and Atsumu yelled, in unison.)

For the whole month, they bicker back and forth like they are born to do it. They are full of this fire they've never once before directed at each other until now. Yet, their eyes say what their mouths don't; their eyes don't lie. 'Come to me. Talk to me. Want me.'

"Alright, everybody else pack it up! Good work, we're done for the day. Sakusa! Miya! Get over here, we need to have a chat!" Foster shouts,

pinching the bridge of his nose on the sidelines. He seems worried and a tad bit annoyed, if the deep furrow in his brow is any telling. Their teammates watch with curious eyes as they file out of the gym, heading towards the lockers. Sakusa is impossibly tired as he trudges over to their coach, with Atsumu following closely behind.

"Yes? What is it, coach?" Atsumu chirps, his voice fake calm.

Foster sighs, unamused. "You two aren't syncing on the court. We have a game with the Alders coming up in a month. I don't know what the problem is but honestly, I don't care. You two need to get your shit together, and quickly. Bickering like toddlers isn't going to help us win. Is there something I need to know?"

Sakusa and Atsumu freeze side by side. The tension is thick and electric, an undeniable force. It coats them in memories, in bright cherry red. 'Is there something I need to know?' It's a loaded question. There is too much that the team doesn't know, too much history waiting to be unleashed; and none of it is anyone's business. The past isn't something they can fix. Sakusa's mind is reeling, aching, tumbling with thoughts. 'We used to be together.' 'I am still a little bit in love with him.' 'It's been so long. I shouldn't feel anything at all.'

"No, sir. We will keep working hard to sync up." Sakusa says, keeping his voice clean and curt. He will not tremble. Beside him, Atsumu is stone-cold.

"I know you will. From today until the Alder's game, I want the two of you to practice together for an extra hour one-on-one. You can do it in the mornings, or you can do it in the evenings after everyone else has gone home. I don't care how you do it but you will practice together. These conditions start tonight."

This gets a reaction out of Atsumu, whose cheeks are flushed with heat. His right eye twitches, in that way it does when he's on the brink of overflowing. Sakusa feels bitterness, watching him.

"But coach, I don't think that's a—"

Foster is unflinching in front of them, facial expression growing stern. "You either practice together one-on-one for this month, or you're both kicked out of the starting line-up. The players on my team will respect each other, bottom line. You both worked hard to get here, but you each have spots that many players would be happy to fill. Don't throw that away over some childish crap. This is your first and only warning. Have I made myself clear?"

Sakusa nods, defeated. Atsumu looks ready to burst.

"Yes, sir. Crystal."

Coach Foster leaves them there to their own devices. They sit on the bench for a while, keeping far too many thoughts to themselves.

'I'm sorry for being an asshole.' 'I don't even want to fight with you. I'm just tired of missing you.'

It is Atsumu who breaks through the thick, murky silence. For the first time in 6 years, Sakusa is grateful that the blonde is such a chatterbox. "Well," Atsumu starts, refusing to meet his eyes. "Bottom line s'that we've gotta make this work. I practiced hard for this job, n'I'm not gonna lose it over some stupid bickerin'. M'sure ya feel tha same way 'bout it, so that's that. I guess we should hop to it, huh?" Sakusa answers by standing from the bench, tossing him a volleyball.

"Set for me, Miya. Let's get this over with."

"Right."

While they practice, the gym is eerily quiet. The only sounds are from their sneaker clad feet squeaking across the court, from the slap of each spike of the ball. Then, 30 minutes into their practice, they nail it; the timing is just right. They sync beautifully, Sakusa's palm sending the ball crashing down across the net, spinning nasty through the air before landing. It's perfect. Atsumu turns to him, expression unreadable. But his eyes- his eyes look as though they're on fire. It's then that Sakusa is reminded of that objective beauty Atsumu holds, so distant and admirable. He's radiant on the court, full of profound passion. It makes his throat tight.

"Again." He murmurs slowly.

Atsumu nods, wiping sweat from his brow. "Again."

1 hour turns into 2, and then into 3. When they grow too weary, they lay on the cool floor of the gymnasium, panting and gasping for air. Sakusa's limbs have never felt more heavy. The floor is disgusting, caked in sweat that isn't only his own. It makes him shudder, makes him regret practicing to a point where he can't bear to stand. He feels so worn down. Atsumu must see it too, his face scrunching into something half exhausted and half concerned. He speaks, a bit breathless. "Come on, ya can't just lay there. Ya know that ya hate it, bein' all sweaty like this."

Sakusa swallows, eyes sliding shut. "You don't know shit, Miya."

Atsumu sucks his teeth. "Yer bein' ridiculous. I know what ya hate. Ya hate bein' here so late, ya hate feelin' dirty because it makes ya itch, and ya hate me. I get it, yer bein' loud n'clear. Just get up. We'll shower, n'then I'll see ya in the mornin' ta practice." He sounds tired, but it's not from the hours of running they've been doing. It's something else, something sad and deep. Sakusa sighs.

"You're wrong about... one of those things."

There is a pregnant pause. "What?"

"I'm not repeating myself, Miya." He murmurs dryly, peeling himself from the sticky floor with a grimace. "Ew. Disgusting."

Atsumu has the nerve to chuckle beside him, small but audible. "Well, that's one of the things I was right about, huh?" He retorts. It's teasing, in a way. It's warmer than any of their interactions this month. Sakusa could chase it away with something cold, with snowy words or bitter silence. But maybe he's too tired. Maybe he wants a little bit of sunshine. Begrudgingly, Sakusa smirks over at him, eyes sleepy but unguarded. Atsumu blushes, and his little own smile grows wider.

"Yeah. It's on you to figure out the other one."

'I don't really hate you at all.'

It isn't yellow, but it isn't red. It's a start.

—

In the locker room the night before the Alder's game, Sakusa gives in.

Their private practices have been going well. Before long, they've gotten themselves into a steady, smooth rhythm, and they're learning how to talk again. It isn't exactly a surprise but it does happen quickly, almost naturally, the way that they fall together. Their bodies move in sync on the court. It's like they've been doing it for years, this harmonic dance. With the movements comes their talks, small but open; more kind. Their teammates seem pleased by the sudden change in their dynamic.

("Did you guys see that? 'Tsum 'Tsum and Omi just laughed! Together !" Bokuto shouted.

Sakusa rolled his eyes. "Don't call me that. Thanks."

"How come 'Tsum 'Tsum gets to call you 'Omi' but we can't call you that?"

Sakusa had frozen, his face growing warm underneath his mask. 'History. Fox eyes. Because it makes him smile. '

"No reason. Get back to work, Bokuto. Your receiving needs some practice."

"Hey ! No, it doesn't!")

Before they leave for the showers, Coach Foster claps Atsumu on the back and flashes Sakusa a fond, secretive smile. It's almost like he knows. 'You couldn't hate the boy if you tried.'

Sakusa showers first, like he always does. Atsumu doesn't make a fuss about it because he never has. Sakusa takes him time getting dressed, takes his time combing through his damp, inky curls. Atsumu's eyes are hot and all over him when he returns from his own shower, observing as Sakusa works cream through his hair. They get ready that way, far too aware of one another but not quite uncomfortable. Atsumu speaks first, but what he says is unexpected. It's crossing a boundary that Sakusa has drawn in his head.

"Yer cologne hasn't changed."

The silence grows thick around them, like fog passing through forest trees.  
"What?"

Atsumu swallows, averting his gaze. He starts tying and untying his shoelaces on the locker room bench, trying to keep himself distracted. He's always been fidgety like that, Sakusa notes. It only intensifies when he's nervous. Sakusa used to tease him about it relentlessly, if only to watch the color pink rise and settle within him. That same flower petal flush is there now, resting pretty on his cheekbones. It makes him look less cocksure and more honest; more touchable.

It's endearing. Sakusa is tired of wanting to forgive him.

"It's citrusy, tha way that ya smell. Ya still smell tha same as I remember ya smellin' before we.. ya know." he trails off. 'Before we broke up,' Sakusa finishes inside of his own head.

'Before.' Beforebeforebefore . It is a word that has haunted Sakusa's world, one that once followed him to sleep for 2 years strong. It still echoes inside of him sometimes, on the days where he misses sunlight and being loved. It is a word that has wrung him dry, time after time; and Atsumu feels it, too. Atsumu remembers.

"... why are you smelling me, Miya?" he snips, trying to keep his voice level. He can't afford to falter now; not when he's already gotten so close to giving in.

It isn't what Sakusa wants to say; he's gotten too good at hiding what he wants and what he needs. It isn't a reflection of the twisting in his gut or the hot, dull ache stretching in his chest. Because Atsumu remembers the way that he smells. It makes Sakusa wonder what else he remembers. It makes him wonder if the other man lies awake on Sunday nights, reliving toothpaste kisses and tender afternoons. He wonders if the setter chases thoughts of Sakusa's mouth, the same way that he chases Atsumu's smile.

Atsumu laughs but it sounds tired. He scratches at the back of his neck, suddenly giving up on his shoelaces altogether. It's quiet but that thick, heady silence says more than any words could. And when Atsumu flops down onto the bench next to him, Sakusa doesn't slink away. Their thighs are

touching and it's warm. Atsumu has always been abnormally warm, heat radiating from every crevice of his skin. Sakusa hates himself for leaning into it.

If Atsumu notices, he doesn't mention it.

"M'not actively leanin' in ta smell ya or nothin'. But s'not exactly a scent I can just ignore, ya know?"

Sakusa narrows his eyes, calculating. "No, I don't know. Is that supposed to be an insult?"

Atsumu's head whips up, his eyes startled. "No! Where tha hell didya get that from?"

"How else am I supposed to take that?"

"Yer supposed ta take it how I meant it, that's how! N'I meant that I can't ignore it because I've never been able ta forget it in tha first place, ya know?"

Sakusa swallows thickly, daring to meet his eyes. Atsumu looks vulnerable beside him, like he's spilled a secret he was meant to die beside. A part of

Sakusa wants to die too, beside his own little secrets and shameful pride. 'I have loved you.' 'I still do.'

"So, then forget. Try to forget." He says, cool and collected. But he isn't collected, nothing is together.

Atsumu shakes his head. "I can't forget. I don't want ta forget."

"You wanted to forget when you left."

The words sting and Atsumu looks stricken. It's honest, is the thing. They haven't talked about their breakup. They haven't talked about how hard it's been to see one another again, all grown up. They haven't voiced their reasons behind all of the animosity from 2 months ago. They haven't talked about how quickly, how easily it all dissipated, how easy it was to fall back into a rhythm.

"Never. I never wanted ta forget ya."

Sakusa swallows, breaking his gaze. The quiet that follows Atsumu's confession speaks for him. 'I don't believe you.' He can't bring himself to talk about it now.

"Omi," Atsumu starts again, voice trembling. "Omi, why don't we hang out? Like... like old times, ya know? We can start fresh."

It is bad news, starting over. "Why?"

"Because I miss ya, Omi. I miss ya so much."

It is going to drown him. "Oh. I didn't know that."

"Yeah. So, how 'bout it?"

Water is filling his lungs. "Let's focus on winning tomorrow, Miya. Then... we'll see."

'We'll see.' It is a 'yes,' as clear as water. It is a vast, raging ocean. It is a siren's song.

—

They win against the Alder's. The crowd roars like a tiger around them, loud and unrelenting in its energy. As Bokuto and Atsumu deliver the finishing blow, the sound only grows.

Sakusa's teammates bask in, relishing in the praise, but his own body trembles with traces of exhaustion.

Sakusa follows his teammates through the after game motions in a daze, all bowing and pleasantries and avoiding the handshake because he can. Komori chats to him lazily on the sidelines, the pair agreeing to meet for coffee in the morning. His cousin waves goodbye with a small, subdued smile. He knows when Sakusa has had enough.

Before long, he flops onto the locker room bench, freshly showered but no less worn down. Bokuto and Hinata chat animatedly beside him about their victory, right as Sakusa's own eyes start to droop. A repetitive sound shakes him from his trance. Bokuto snaps his fingers in front of Sakusa's face, clearly trying to grab his attention. He then realizes how much of the conversation he has missed; he'd dozed off while sitting up.

"Sakusa, are you okay? We won! Aren't you excited?" Bokuto cheers. He's being far too noisy.

Sakusa sighs, eyes slipping shut once more. He counts 'one, two, three' in his head, a familiar mantra that grounds him. It doesn't seem to be working as well as usual, though.

"Yes. I know, Bokuto. I was there. Please stop snapping in my face." He bites, half tired and half pissy.

If Bokuto is put off by the tone of his voice, he certainly doesn't show it. It gets him to stop snapping, at the very least. "Oh! Sorry. Well, are you coming with us to celebrate? We're going to go to a karaoke bar! Meian already agreed to pay for the first round of drinks!"

"Yeah!" Hinata pitches in, boisterous and far too hyper for someone who played 4 sets in a volleyball match. "It'll be nice to celebrate all together! Bokuto and I are going to sing a duet! What are you going to sing?"

Sakusa frowns, glaring daggers into his own lap. Sakusa is not angry with them. He knows that his two teammates mean well. And he likes his teammates truthfully, no matter how over-the-top they may be. Sometimes, their energy is refreshing and welcome, like a shower of bright stars. Today is different, though. Today, it is a bottomless pit of violent, hammering sound. His brain is saying 'no' to all of the noise. He is teetering close to snapping, to tumbling under the weight of it. That hot, unwelcome panic is spreading inside of his chest, crawling like a hungry little demon. A familiar voice is what breaks through the haze.

"Hey, guys! Lay off a bit, will ya? Omi seems real drained from tha game. Count me out fer tonight too, m'pretty tired myself. I'll take Omi home." Atsumu states this matter-of-factly, walking over to sit between the 3 of them on the bench.

Bokuto and Hinata blink slowly, eyes flicking back-and-forth between Atsumu and Sakusa. "Are you sure, Atsu-san? It was a long game, aren't the two of you hungry?" Hinata asks.

"Nah, s'all good! We'll grab some dinner on tha way home. Not everybody is a stamina demon like yerself, Shou-chan." Atsumu says this teasingly, kindly. It must seem reasonable enough to Hinata and Bokuto, who thankfully back off after Atsumu steps in.

Atsumu turns to him, eyes asking what his mouth doesn't. 'Are you okay?' Sakusa nods softly, a barely there twitch of his head. It's all he can muster for the moment. 'I will be.' Sakusa is relieved.

After a few minutes of gathering his composure, Sakusa grabs his bags and stands from the bench. He bids his teammates a polite farewell and steps out into the hall, ignoring their worried glances. Atsumu follows him closely behind.

Atsumu's hand hovers over Sakusa's shoulder, questioning. When he places it there, he does not brush it away.

"Are ya sure yer gonna be okay? I meant it, ya know. M'drivin' ya home tonight, yer too exhausted. I don't trust ya behind tha wheel. We'll pick up yer car from the garage in the mornin.'"

Sakusa nods. He's too exhausted to be proud. "Yeah. Thanks, Miya."

"And what about dinner?"

Sakusa frowns, eyebrows furrowing. "Miya. I'm exhausted. We've established that already."

"Yeah, but ya still need ta eat, ya know. I only saw ya eat that stupid little protein bar halfway through tha match, and breakfast was hours ago. Let me take ya ta dinner, Omi. Somewhere nice n'quiet, my treat. Ya played real good today."

'Quiet.' It is a key word. It shows that Atsumu always listens, always pays attention, especially when it counts. Sakusa scoffs, fiddling with one of the strings on his hoodie. His resolve is breaking, if it was ever there to begin with. "I always play good, thank you very much."

Atsumu smiles back, no trace of teasing in sight. "Yeah. I know ya do. So... dinner or?"

Sakusa sighs, fake defeated. He was never going to say 'no.' Atsumu doesn't need to know that.

"Yeah, alright. Let's get dinner, Miya. Just this once."

Atsumu's smile is blinding. "Sweet! Get in tha car, take my keys. I'll tell tha team we're headin' out."

Sakusa smiles back at him, shy and a tiny bit grateful. And Atsumu's wide, awestruck expression is worth every second of the vulnerability. "Thanks, Miya."

Atsumu nods his head before turning on his heel. "Don't mention it. I wanted ta get ya alone, anyways. Now, get in tha car! Tha sooner we eat, tha sooner ya can get ta bed. I parked in tha L lot."

Sakusa dozes off in Atsumu's car. When he wakes, it's from Atsumu's warm, patient hands nudging his arm.

Atsumu breaks out a packet of disinfectant wipes wordlessly, handing them to Sakusa with a small grin before they sit at their table. Their dinner is surprisingly void of awkward tension. Panic attack aside, they are both relaxed and sleepy from the long game. Atsumu fills in the spaces with his own chatter, keeping his voice gentle. When he feels that Sakusa has had enough of his words, they finish their food in a comfortable silence. It brings Sakusa back down to Earth, slow and sweet. It is nice, having his boundaries respected and valued. It is nice, being remembered like this.

It all spirals from there. 'Just this once' turns into 2 dinners, and then into 3. Suddenly, they're sharing other things, like their thoughts and lazy weekends. Before long, their late nights and early mornings are mostly spent

together. The intensity of letting Atsumu back into his life is every high and every low he's ever reached, pouring out onto the floor. It is exciting and maddening, and far too easy to be considered fair. They spend days in the park and go for walks at the beach, right when it's early and everything is quiet. It is the time where Sakusa feels the most comfortable, the most daring as he dips his feet into the cool, salty waves.

They watch sunrises together on blankets, burnt orange skies bursting above a sea of blue and green. Atsumu asks him questions with the same enthusiasm that he always has. Sakusa gets to memorize what has changed and what has stayed the same.

They both like different songs and different poetry now, all with words that fit new feelings. They have new hobbies that they've picked up over the years, hobbies that they share together on their days off.

Atsumu likes to bake and Sakusa does yoga.

As it turns out, Sakusa is not a baker. It is too much mess and too much measuring for him to find enjoyment. So, he settles for decorating the cake that "they" bake with fine, patient precision, piping neat and orderly lines of frosting around its edges. They try yoga in a nearby park. Atsumu has as much grace as a baby giraffe, and he flushes pink each time that he stumbles. It is a whirlwind of trying and learning, but they find a new rhythm together. Even with all that is different, they still fit as good as they used to.

Some things will never change, Sakusa thinks. Some things remain the same, like the sun in Atsumu's eyes and the weight of his crooked smile. It is all bright, all yellow, all never ending. Inside of Sakusa's chest, there is still only love.

It is an August night when Sakusa brings Atsumu home. Their long week of practice has been brutal, both on the muscles and on the mind. Between the blistering heat and the hours spent moving, they both desire to be indoors for the rest of the night. Sakusa has AC while Atsumu has a shitty fan, so the only logical explanation is to invite the setter over. The possibility twists inside of his gut, of having Atsumu so close and all alone. Sakusa watches as Atsumu fans himself with his hand on the bench, eyes droopy. He looks cute with his damp, shower ruffled hair and steam flushed cheeks. Sakusa has been bursting at the seams lately, watching and wanting and fearing the chance of getting too close. Something in him breaks today, though.

Something shatters as Atsumu's lips pull around the water bottle that he's grabbed from his bag, slow and unhurried.

"Do you want to come over, Miya?" He asks, with as much passion as though he's talking about stamps. His voice betrays none of his inner turmoil.

Atsumu, on the other hand, looks shell-shocked. Deep down, they both know that this invite means something. It means letting Atsumu back into a sacred place that's only his, a sanctuary he keeps clean and comfortable and safe. By Sakusa's standards, inviting Atsumu home is offering him a new level of trust, no matter how ill advised it might be. Sakusa knows that with Atsumu, nothing has ever been stable. Not back then, and not even now. Yet, he can't help but want to surrender, even if it's only for a little while.

"Yeah. 'Course I want ta come over, Omi. Movie night?" He murmurs. His voice is even but his eyes have that familiar, flame warmed shine.

Sakusa pauses. "I'm picking the movies."

"Why do you get ta pick 'em?"

Sakusa smiles, a bit wistfully underneath his mask. 'You always used to pick. I always let you.'

"Because I said so. Hurry up and get dressed, I'll be waiting outside. I'll drive us since you jogged here this morning." He murmurs, heading towards the door of the locker room.

"Okay, Omi. Be out in a few minutes."

So, they watch funny movies for hours on Sakusa's couch, laughing at all of the right parts. It feels comfortable and dances dangerously into domestic territory. It feels the way that it used to, easy and a little bit like it's meant to be. And when Atsumu slides his arm around Sakusa's shoulders, he doesn't pull away. He lets himself breathe it in.

Sakusa has so many questions about them, about all of the time that they've been spending together. It's so delicate, this space that they've found themselves in; not quite only friends but not quite lovers, either. He knows that he deserves an answer. He knows that it's wise to ask before getting any closer, before moving any further. But the ice in his throat is thick and determined to suffocate. He can't bring himself to ask what it all means. Atsumu gives Sakusa all his weekends and rests on his shoulder when he's tired. It shouldn't be hard, but it never has been easy for Sakusa to say what he needs to say.

Atsumu does half of the dirty work for him. He's always been more daring in his movements, more open with his words. The hours tick by, 6 and then 7 and then 8pm. He's meant to be leaving around 9 pm, hovering in front of Sakusa's apartment door. At 9:30 pm, after chatting in the doorway for far too long, Atsumu shatters the fragile peace.

"What would ya say if I told ya I've been dyin' ta kiss ya all night?" Atsumu whispers.

Sakusa rolls his eyes. He knew this was coming. And he wants it, more than he wants to stay afraid. "Well, first I would tell you that you're a dramatic idiot. But after that.."

"After that?"

He swallows. His throat has gone dry. "Well, after that I'd tell you to kiss me."

"I don't care if ya think I'm dramatic. I really have been dyin' fer it, Omi."

It's a bad idea. It's definitely a bad idea, and it's definitely going to hurt in the morning. It will hurt when Sakusa wakes up alone, in a cold and empty bed. Because Atsumu is everywhere , even when he's gone. He's made himself a home inside of Sakusa's chest, and whether he stays or he goes, that space is his alone to fill. Its been his to fill since the rooftop. Its been his to fill since their first kiss. And its been empty for 6 years, 6 years of crying and moving on but always wondering why . Its been 6 years of bandaging cuts that never fully healed. This will ruin him, over and over.

"You're incorrigible."

"Yeah? Well, yer a brat."

"Shut up."

"Make me."

Sakusa steps closer before he can stop his feet. They move on their own accord and he drinks down the hitch in Atsumu's breath, swallows the warmth of the palm on his neck. They're chest to chest and nose to nose, no space between them and it's good . Atsumu brushes a thumb across his bottom lip, slow and hesitant; it's polite, coming from someone so brash. Atsumu treats him like a porcelain doll. Sakusa trembles like branches on windy afternoons.

Atsumu stares with none of the gentleness that his hands harbor. His eyes are pools of fire, lapping at Sakusa's insides. Both his hands and his eyes are honest, and Sakusa wonders what that means.

"God, Kiyoomi. Yer a brat and ya only get more beautiful every day. Just look atcha, ya stupid pretty boy. I want ya so much." Atsumu rasps. It hurts. It is everything.

"You're insufferable. I want you too."

Atsumu laughs, half breathless and half desperate. "This okay?" he asks.

Sakusa nods in response, unflinching. "Please," he adds. The sound of his voice is breathless and weak to his own ears. Half of him has the mind to be ashamed but he can't care, won't care ; not when Atsumu is watching him like that. In this beautiful, horrible space, he is not too proud to beg. That is all the confirmation Atsumu seems to need before those warm, plush lips are

trapping his own. Atsumu won't be leaving his apartment tonight. Sakusa's body rings.

Their lips move together slowly, like there's no time passing and no future ahead. There is no world, there is no space. All that exists is Atsumu's tongue tracing patterns against his own. All Sakusa wants to know is those calloused hands cupping his jaw with the neediest of fingers. In his doorway, life is being made out of their moans and their mingling breath; it is painted all the colors Sakusa can't see without him. Atsumu is shades of red and yellow and pink. He transforms Sakusa into a warm, tangerine sky. It reminds him of the sunsets they used to watch together, and the memory coils deep inside of his stomach. Needing him is cruel.

Atsumu backs him against the wall and slots a leg between Sakusa's own, those same fingers trailing down to his sweater clad chest. They reach upupup and underneath the fabric, stroking in a way that makes him dizzy. Sakusa moans into his mouth. The sound is subdued but undeniable, and his back arches into the touch. Atsumu groans and curses under his breath when they grind together, a slow dance just for them. Sakusa tries not to feel pleased, to become too fond of such a simple sound. He should know better. He should know better than to kiss Atsumu with such ferocity, to have let this precious earthquake back into his life.

Atsumu breaks their kiss to mouth at the side of Sakusa's temple, wet and tender. It's just right. It's what he's been missing out on for too long. Sakusa hates that it feels just as good as it did 6 years ago. It's even better than he remembers, and he tries not to imagine the reasons why. He tries not to imagine faceless strangers kissing all of Atsumu's favorite spots, sucking lilac blotches into his bronzed skin. Sakusa digs his nails into Atsumu's shoulder

and drags him in closer, chasing away the blues with touch. Atsumu is here with him; he's not with anyone else.

"Fuckin' hell, I've missed ya so much. Ya kiss me so good, Kiyomi. Yer so good fer me."

Sakusa doesn't respond with his words. There is too much to say, too many questions lodged inside of his windpipe. 'Why now?' 'Why can I never stop loving you?' 'Don't leave, never leave me again.' So, he stares and he kisses and he feels instead. He says with his body what his mouth won't let him, stroking with nimble fingers as they make their way to his bedroom. Atsumu works his shirt off with ease, lays him onto the bed too slowly for someone who will leave by daybreak. It is painful but euphoric all at once, setting fire to all of the walls he's built. Atsumu will ruin him, again and again, and Sakusa will let him do it. It is novocaine, it is the rapture.

He wants to feel yellow again.

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It is 3 months later when Sakusa and Atsumu fight. Bokuto's apartment is thrumming with noise. Shitty music plays from a speaker on the cluttered dining room table. Sakusa's teammates are scattered across the living space, some taking shots of tequila while others laugh into the night. The team is celebrating Akaashi and Bokuto's engagement. It has been a long time coming, of course, considering how long the couple have been in love.

In all honesty, Sakusa was originally planning to stay home. He's never been one for parties, a result of his social anxiety and general disdain for crowds. Parties are full of sweaty bodies pressed together, and there's too much room for error. If it weren't for Atsumu's begging and pleading the night before, he would've written the couple a card and went to sleep. Yet, here he is, wine drunk and out of his element.

Alcohol makes a person vulnerable; it makes Sakusa vulnerable, specifically, leaving less room for defensiveness and more room for the truth to slide from his unthinking mouth. Liquor and Sakusa are enemies first and friends second. Liquor soaks up his anxieties and grants him the temporary gift of public vulnerability. That same vulnerability is what has found him here, sitting on this worn down couch with Atsumu in his lap. His plush lips are brushing against Sakusa's temple, leaving fire and sparks in their wake.

Meian and Hinata are seated across from them on the other sofa, chatting animatedly about some mind-numbing television show. Sakusa is too distracted to listen. All Sakusa can feel is warm lips on the side of his face.

Atsumu's fingers tangle into Sakusa's curly locks, petting and pulling soft but audible sighs of contentment from his throat. Atsumu watches his face with careful calculation. His eyes are knowing when they lock on Sakusa's own. "Yer enjoyin' yerself then?" Atsumu coos. His breath tickles Sakusa's ear. He tries ignoring the shivers that travel through him but fails miserably, if Atsumu's cocky grin is any telling.

He scoffs but makes no attempt to move Atsumu from his temporary home in Sakusa's lap. Instead, he nuzzles his face further into the crook of the blonde's neck, breathing in deeply. He smells like lemon shampoo and Kirin Lager. Sakusa wants to drink him down forever, right here in this crowded room.

"So what if I am? Is that a problem?" He questions.

Atsumu merely laughs at him, hands never pausing their rhythm as he speaks. "S'never a problem, Omi. I like ta see ya relaxed like this. Yer usually so uptight, ya know?"

"Watch yourself, Atsumu. I can move you at any time." Sakusa warns.

Atsumu hums. "Yeah, I suppose ya can. But ya won't."

"And why won't I move you?"

"Because yer my cuddly teddy bear. N'I know ya the best." He replies.

Sakusa should retort. He should say something sarcastic, something cold to break the heat of the moment that is transpiring between them. But he doesn't want to . Because there's something about the word "my," something

golden inside wanting to belong to him. More than the wine, more than the touches, it is all of Atsumu's being that makes Sakusa's soul pliable. He wants to lean up and taste Atsumu's mouth, a mouth he knows too well and yet too little. No amount of kisses will ever be enough, if they're coming from him.

He lets his gaze flicker down to the pillow plush skin. Pride swells inside of Sakusa's stomach when Atsumu's breath catches. He's so close and so kissable. Sakusa doesn't think anyone knows about whatever this is that they have "going on" between them now, either. But that's the one part of being drunk that Sakusa loves ; it gives you more faith and less worries; there's less time to think and more time to feel . The room around them is fading away; so are Meian and Hinata's curious eyes.

"Can I kiss you, 'Tsumu?" He whispers. Atsumu's eyes widen a fraction before melting into puddles. He nods earnestly, like he's been waiting for a kiss all night long. Sakusa secretly hopes that he has been.

It's funny though, how quickly a moment can shatter. It makes Sakusa wonder if their fleeting, tender kiss ever happened at all. Because when Sakusa feels the brush of lips against his own, a low whistle is ripping from someone's throat, taking all of the warmth with it. Meian and Hinata are staring at them, cheeky smiles plastered on their liquor flushed faces. Sakusa tightens his grip around Atsumu's waist.

"Enjoying the party?" Meian slurs, laughing when Hinata waggles his eyebrows. Sakusa casts Atsumu a glance. He's gone still inside his lap, no more roaming of his hands or lips.

"Uh- yeah, y'could say that." Atsumu responds.

"So, what are you two up to then?" Hinata asks.

"Up to' ?" Atsumu parrots. Sakusa's eyes narrow at his weak attempt of playing dumb.

Meian snorts. "You don't have to play dumb with us, Miya. It's all cool. When did this start?"

Sakusa stares at him in expectation but Atsumu refuses to meet his eyes, sharp jaw clenching tight. And then, Atsumu is sliding from his lap and onto the cushion beside him. Sakusa's heart sinks into his stomach, and his body feels too cold without the welcome weight of Atsumu atop him. "When did what start?" Atsumu bites. He turns his face when Sakusa tries to catch his eyes.

"Miya. Seriously. It's not a big deal, we support you! We just- you know, we're kind of curious now. When did you start seeing Sakusa? Has this been going on for a while or...?" Meian questions, taking a sip from his glass of whiskey.

"Yeah! I wanna know too, Atsumu-san!" Hinata chirps.

Atsumu swallows. Sakusa watches the bobbing of his Adam's apple, the beads of sweat that are collecting on his forehead. It should be an easy question for Atsumu to answer, realistically. Sure, Atsumu and Sakusa haven't labeled what is "happening" between them. Sure, they haven't discussed telling their teammates, and they definitely haven't developed any plans for their future together. But Atsumu spends most of his nights in Sakusa's bed. Atsumu washes Sakusa's hair in the shower with tender hands, and he holds Sakusa close when he's afraid. They share kisses and they feed each other pancakes on Sunday mornings; they whisper deep secrets inside of the darkness.

So, it shouldn't be so fucking hard for Atsumu to answer Meian's question. Atsumu shouldn't look so panicked, so afraid and confused by Sakusa's side.

Atsumu swallows. "Nah, we're not 'seeing each other.' We're just.. havin' a little fun, that's all." he replies. Sakusa catches the wobble inside of Atsumu's voice, the deep wrinkle in his brow that appears whenever he tells a lie. Sakusa knows that Atsumu doesn't truly mean what he's saying. But that knowledge doesn't erase the betrayal, doesn't dull the throbbing ache caused by those words. His chest feels like it will cave into itself.

Sakusa is a rational person. Anxiety be damned, he's worked hard on learning to question before assuming; on how to think clearly before he feels too much.

Not everyday is a victory, however. Some days, anxiety is a tidal wave, all consuming and suffocating. Anxiety is not polite, and so neither is his mind. Anxiety does not wait to creep up on him; it crawls and it bites, like a spider in the darkness. Right here in this moment— in this too tight, too full room— Sakusa isn't thinking rationally. Instead, he's feelingfeelingfeeling ; rationality is on holiday, sunbathing on some distant island.

He feels like he's 16 again, pining after sun browned skin and brassy blonde locks from too many miles away. He feels like he's 17 again, watching strangers kiss Atsumu's cheek in Snapchat stories and Instagram pictures.

"We're not seeing each other?" Sakusa questions, his tone of voice bitter and a little too raw for the setting. Their teammates look sorry that they ever asked. Atsumu looks like he's been slapped, eyes wide with guilt and something like regret. Sakusa doesn't want to find out what Atsumu is regretting, doesn't want it to be him , so he stands up from the couch instead. Atsumu reaches for his hand but Sakusa yanks it away, glaring at him from over his shoulder.

Meian and Hinata exchange worried looks, turning back to the pair before things begin to spiral. The room around them has gone far too quiet for a party atmosphere.

"Hey, look- I didn't mean to start anything between you guys. It's not even our business, I just- well, we all thought that you had something going on, so.." Meian trails off, frowning as his attempts at mediation go unnoticed.

Sakusa is already out of earshot and Atsumu is scrambling to reach him.  
'Nah, we're not 'seeing each other.' We're just havin' a little fun, s'all.'

"Omi, wait a fuckin' second, will ya?" Atsumu calls, flying off of the sofa on wobbly legs.

Sakusa bites the inside of his cheek and keeps up his steady stride towards the back door of the house. "Miya, I have waited long enough for you. I'm done ."

"Kiyoomi, please—"

"Please what, Miya? Are you fucking serious right now? I give you another chance, after everything you've put me through, and suddenly you're not seeing anyone? All I am is 'a little fun?' You're a dick. "

"Ya got it all wrong, just fucking— do we hafta do this here ? Come tha fuck off it, Omi. This is immature."

Maybe if Sakusa wasn't drunk off of red wine, he would be handling this better. Maybe they would have walked home together, would have let themselves into his apartment. Maybe they would have talked it out on his couch like adults, privately and calmly. Maybe if Sakusa wasn't so hurt, he would have enough heart in him to listen to Atsumu's pleas. But he's hurt.

He's so tired . So, he doesn't listen. His head is spinning in unforgiving circles, his brain too full for anything to make sense.

He breathes in deeply. "Whatever, Miya. I need some air."

Atsumu is on Sakusa's heels the minute he walks out the door, chasing him hot and angry like flames. He can hear Atsumu's can of beer dropping on the porch, can hear him clambering down the steps from behind and out onto the lawn. Sakusa can't bring himself to turn around, to face those same fireplace eyes that are burningburningburning him to pieces. He crosses his arms over his chest instead, willing his breathing to steady itself. It doesn't.

"What the fuck, Omi? Why the fuck didya have'ta blow up like that? In front of Meian and Hinata, too! This isn't their fuckin' business, it's ours. " he bites.

Sakusa's fists tremble at his sides, clenching and unclenching one, two, three times. Ours. The word echoes and hammers inside of his brain; it takes and takes and takes.

"Why did I have to do what ?" He shouts back. "Be honest? Be honest about the fact that you're fucking difficult? Be honest about the fact that I thought I actually meant something to you when I clearly don't?"

Atsumu scoffs. "I'm the one who's difficult? I can't figure out what the fuck is goin' on in yer head half the fuckin' time. What we have is complicated

because yer the one makin' it that way, Omi, so try being honest with yerself for once."

Sakusa frowns at that, looking up at the sky. Stars are dotting the night, twinkling through the blackness and bitterness that's building around them. He thinks quietly, angrily to himself, that he'll never be more torn than he is right now. He thinks about the idiotic fool he's becoming, lovesick and yearning for stability that won't come.

"For once? I've always been honest with you, Atsumu." He murmurs.

Sakusa can hear Atsumu taking steps towards him from behind, the untrimmed grass rustling beneath his feet. Sakusa's eyes are filling with tears. He feels betrayed by his own body, by his own cloudy head.

"Well, yer honesty fucks me up sometimes, Omi. Because one minute yer laughin' on the couch with me, lettin' me play with yer curls, and the next minute I'm being screamed at. Yer all over the place. Just tell me what you want, Kiyoomi. I can't figure it out on my own." he all but begs.

Atsumu clamps his hand down onto Sakusa's shoulder, gentle and tender because he knows that he can. Because he knows that no matter how many years pass, how many rivers Sakusa has cried in showers and dark rooms, he will always come back to blonde hair and honey eyes. Sakusa swallows the lump that's been growing inside of his throat. It's threatening to erase his words and suffocate him, right here in Bokuto's unruly backyard.

"What am I supposed to do with you, Atsumu?" he asks quietly. The question is more for himself than it is for the man behind him.

It is silent for a brief, crippling moment until everything breaks. "What?"

Sakusa spins on his heel, stalking forwards to stab a pointed finger against Atsumu's chest.

"I asked you what the fuck I'm supposed to do. You're asking me what I want, as though what you want has ever been made clear to me, you fucking jackass. You left me, Atsumu, not the other way around. You fucking left me . And now we're back in the same mess, dancing around each other and it's killing me . It's the same shit again, falling and pining and fighting and- I'm just so- fucking hell , Atsu. Why did you have to give up on me when you did?"

Atsumu swallows thickly. His eyes are brimming with tears, with something painful and real. "I didn't-"

"Yes. Yes, you did. You stopped replying, you stopped caring, you stopped answering my calls. I had to- I had to watch you slip away and-"

"I never stopped caring, Kiyomi. You had my heart and we both fuckin' know it. You still have it, don't you pull that shit with me." Atsumu shouts.

"Fuck you. You took my first everything away from me, Atsumu. And now you're back in my life, staring at me like some kicked puppy, like I'm the one who should be sorry and I'm not. Because I never walked away from you. Never. But you left the first chance you could. You haven't even told me what I did wrong, after all this time."

"We were kids, Omi. Kids. I- shit. I never told ya because you didn't do anything -"

"So, then why did you have to fucking go ? I know we were kids. I know it's petty of me to hang onto the past like that, but I can't help it. Because all I ever asked of you- all I ever asked was for you to stay ." Sakusa cries. The words stun both of them to silence the moment they rip from his throat, raw and guttural . Atsumu is pale with shock, his misty eyes blown wide. All Sakusa can do is stare back at him. It is November in Osaka, and the wind kicks up autumn leaves at their feet. The midnight air is cold, nipping at their cheeks and fingertips. They had both run straight out the door without their coats, bodies having been pumped up on adrenaline and something deep, something desperate. But with those words hanging between them, the world comes to a screeching halt. Sakusa's body trembles with traces of exhaustion.

"All I wanted was you, 'Tsumu, all I wanted was to have you." He croaks. Sakusa damns the tears that are pouring from his eyes. It is all too much,

too much of him being seen for one night. His head pounds from the force of his sobs, unrelenting, and he wants to fade away from this space in time. He wants to curl up, to hide his face away until tomorrow comes. Sakusa hopes that by the grace of some distant God, he'll have forgotten all about this explosive conversation in the morning.

Atsumu looks panicked in front of him, his bottom lip trembling in the way it does whenever he's feeling overwhelmed or unsure. They stare at each other for what feels like hours, unblinking before the tension is broken. Atsumu frets for a moment longer and then he's rushing forward to engulf Sakusa in a hug, rocking him back and forth in his arms. Sakusa can feel Atsumu's own tears trickling down and touching the side of his neck, right in the spot where Atsumu is resting his face. He starts to sob harder, puffs of shuddering breath escaping him. Something inside of him wants to flee from Atsumu because he's still so angry, but he doesn't move away. Against all his better judgement- against all of the alarms sounding in his brain, calling him foolish and easy - he sinks into the warmth of Atsumu's grasp, circling his own arms around Atsumu's waist. He squeezes tight, pulls him closerclosercloser.

"I can't stand you, Atsumu. I can't stand how much I fucking love you, you asshole." Sakusa bites, his voice wobbly. He's never said it before, the words 'I love you.' Spitting them out melts all of the ice in his throat.

Atsumu whines before pulling Sakusa impossibly closer, like he's afraid the man will disappear if he lets go. Sakusa lets his eyes slip shut, breathing in the same citrus, stale beer, and the taste of being held. There's no fight left inside of Sakusa for the night.

"Fuck, Omi, m'so sorry. Ya have me, I swear ya always have. I love ya so much that it kills me." Atsumu admits, pressing a kiss to Sakusa's neck. He shudders underneath the touch of lips on his skin.

"Me too. Then why would you say that we aren't talking? Why wouldn't you tell me that you loved me before now ? I just- ugh. You are impossible, Atsumu."

Atsumu huffs. "S' a good set of questions ya got there, Omi. Probably 'cause I'm an idiot or somethin'?" he jokes, but his tone of voice solemn. The answer is more like a question. Maybe Atsumu truly doesn't know. Even so, he sounds so honest, and Sakusa clings to it with hopefulness. He laughs wetly before dissolving into a new puddle of tears, exhaustion finally settling into his bones. Atsumu rubs his hands up and down Sakusa's back in soothing circles.

"I've got ya. We'll talk in the mornin', alright? Shhh, s'okay." Atsumu coos.

Talking in the morning sounds good. It sounds like a promise. And for a fleeting moment, with those tender arms holding him steady, it is okay. It hasn't been okay in so long.

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It is still dark when Sakusa wakes. Only this time, he is wrapped inside a safe, warm canopy of grey sheets and blankets; he's back at home. The fingers carding through his curls indicate that he is not alone. Atsumu had stayed. It feels intimate and easy, as Atsumu plays with his hair. He's always gentle with his fingers, massaging small circles into his scalp. Sakusa shuffles closer, shutting his eyes tight. He doesn't want everything to go away; he doesn't want to lose Atsumu for a second time. When he dares to open his eyes once more, Atsumu is already smiling down at him, small and contemplative.

"Hey. Yer awake."

"Hi. Yeah, I'm awake. What time is it?"

Atsumu glances at his phone, wincing when the light from the screen hits his eyes. "S'too fuckin' bright." He curses unhappily. "S'uh— 4 am."

Sakusa groans as he flops his head back down, this time onto Atsumu's chest. "It's so early. Why am I even awake? This is ridiculous. Why are you awake?"

Atsumu chuckles, tugging him a little closer. "Dunno. We're lucky it's a Sunday, Foster would've kicked our asses fer bein' up. I haven't really slept yet. M'glad that yer awake now, though. I was gettin' kinda bored playin' Sudoku for 3 hours."

Sakusa hums, acknowledging the words. They lie together like that for a while longer, Atsumu scrolling through his phone once again while Sakusa listens to the steady rise and fall of his chest. The guilt is crippling him, as he replays the night through his head. The yelling, the crying, the raw honesty of it all.

"I'm sorry." He whispers before he can stop himself.

Atsumu laughs, like he'd expected the words long before they came. "Nah. Don't be, I deserved it."

Sakusa frowns, staring up at Atsumu just as the blonde turns off his phone, tossing it onto the nightstand beside the bed. "You didn't deserve to be yelled at like that. It was... admittedly out of line. I'm sorry."

Atsumu sighs, a heavy sound. "It wasn't tha ideal place ta talk 'bout it, no. But... if ya had said that ta me, I would've exploded, too. What I said wasn't right. It wasn't even true, ya know? I dunno what made me say it."

Sakusa nods, twisting his body so that he's sitting upright, their legs still intertwined. Atsumu follows suit, his back pressing up against Sakusa's headboard. He looks impossibly weary.

"So, you didn't mean it? That we're just 'messing around' or whatever?" He asks. The words are spoken quickly, as though they are dirty. He doesn't like the way that they taste inside of his mouth.

Atsumu's face scrunches up, dissatisfied. "No, not at all. God, that sounds even worse now that m'sober." He moans, pressing a palm to his face.

Sakusa chuckles in agreement, his body relaxing. "Yeah. It was pretty bad. I blew up on you in front of the team though, so I guess we're even. I should apologize to them later."

"Eh. We'll worry 'bout it later, m'sure they don't mind. We're always puttin' up with Shou-chan and Kageyama's bickerin', anyways. S'payback, ya know?"

"Yeah." There is a pause before the real questions come to light. "Alright. We should talk about us."

"Yeah. S'probably time for that."

Sakusa smiles, small and reassuring, when Atsumu reaches for his hand. It centers them both.

"What are we doing, Atsumu?"

"Ya know, seein' ya again after 6 years made me a mess. S'like, I saw yer name on tha roster n'I knew ya were joinin' tha team, but nothin' coulda prepared me fer when ya walked through that door. I remember I called 'Samu havin' a breakdown about it. Ya looked so good . Yer hair was styled different, ya got even prettier somehow, n'it... it wrecked me. It made my regrets real. Because I was standin' face ta face with tha person I let get away. Yer tha only person I've ever been in love with, is tha thing." Atsumu swallows, blinking back tears.

"Shit, this s'gonna be a lot of feelin's ta let out, gimme a second." He chokes out wetly, rubbing at his eyes with his free hand. Sakusa squeezes Atsumu's other hand tight, urging the blonde to speak; to say what he's been waiting to say for far too long. Sakusa has been longing for these words.

"I've always regretted breakin' up with ya, even after all these years. But I think it's somethin' I needed ta do at the time, ya know? I needed ta grow up n'learn how ta let somebody close ta me in tha right way. I'm not as self-assured as everybody likes ta think I am. And ya were tha only person I let close enough ta see some of that insecurity. So, when we started gettin' close again these past few months, I didn't want ta ask ya what we were because... my insecurity was gettin' real loud. I didn't want ta hear ya say that this matters more ta me than it does ta you. And when Meian asked about us last night, I kinda panicked, ya know? S'not an excuse fer what I said but it's a reason. I think a part of me is always scared that I'm more invested, or that yer gonna leave me fer somebody better. We've never talked 'bout us or said 'I love ya' ta each other. And that's scary fer me because I've always loved ya. I was scared of that back then, too- lovin' ya harder than ya love me. Everythin' with us happened so fast and it started changin' me. Being in love becomes a part of ya. S'all ya think about, s'all ya

want ta talk about. Ya changed my whole life, Kiyoomi. I didn't want ta be tha only one changin'."

Sakusa frowns, tucking a curl behind his ear. "But I would've understood that. I was scared too, you know? It did happen fast, and it was new to both of us. The difference is that I didn't want to leave. If you'd asked me for it, I would've given you space. I would've... I would've done anything I could to make you happy. I still will. You've never been the only one changing. I'm just as invested in this as you."

"Yeah. I know that now. And I know that I should've been honest about it at tha time, but I wasn't. I don't think I knew how ta be, back then. M'sorry."

Sakusa sighs. "I know you are. And it's okay. It's all behind us now, anyways. I'm sorry too, Atsumu. Look, I understand that I'm... difficult to read. So, I probably haven't made this an easy process either. I've never been good at saying what I want to say, and I am certainly not an easy human being to love, but—"

Atsumu sucks his teeth. "Don't say that. Never say that. Yer too easy ta love. I think I knew I loved ya from the moment I saw ya scrollin' on yer phone. All I could think about was yer curls and those big, beautiful eyes of yers. They look like tha nighttime, ya know? They're so deep n'pretty. All of ya is pretty. People say yer mean but ya have never looked at me with anythin' but warmth, even when we were fightin'. Yer blunt and yer ruthless but.. yer also so selfless, Kiyoomi. When ya love somethin' enough, ya give it yer all. And at 17, I didn't know what ta do with all of that love. I wasn't selfless like

ya. It was new and excitin', but it was also too much. 'Cause I knew deep down if ya asked me to, I'd have given ya anythin' ya wanted. And that typa thing freaked me out. The amount of love I had for ya was.. unmeasurable." Atsumu murmurs. Sakusa can barely breathe beside him.

"Ya see, I was kinda used ta bein' a selfish ass." Atsumu admits. This earns a laugh from Sakusa, trembling but audible. "I'm also tha type ta start feelin' nervous when things are goin' too good. Every day with ya was good. Every kiss was perfect, every touch was tha best. And then it wasn't all about me anymore. 'Cause I started thinkin' about tha future, and I wanted ya ta be there. I started wonderin' about where ya wanted ta live after high school, if ya wanted a cat or a dog. I started hopin' fer tha whole domestic package. And then before I knew it, I was at yer door callin' it quits. I'd never loved somebody so hard n'so fast. I didn't know how ta do it. I was used ta pretendin' that I was good at everythin.' Then we met and it knocked me straight offa my pedestal because I didn't have a fuckin' clue as ta what I was doin'."

The words burn inside of Sakusa's head. It burns because it's Atsumu's story, Atsumu's many reasons why. It's the truth. Sakusa swallows it all down, letting it settle in him. "And what about now? Has anything changed?"

"Well, my love for ya is still unmeasurable, so that hasn't changed. And sometimes, I still don't fuckin' know what m'doin', if that hasn't been made clear ta ya already. But.. I'm also not afraid ta love ya anymore. And from tha looks of it, yer still choosin' ta give my stupid ass another chance. I know that I don't deserve ya, but.. I'll do anythin' for ya, Kiyomi. Anythin' ta have ya back."

Sakusa sniffls, wiping at his eyes. His tears are starting to fall once more but he doesn't hide them this time. He's been hiding for too long, crying alone for too many sleepless nights. It's time to let the light in again. It's time for yellow days.

Sakusa flicks the setter's forehead 'one, two, three' times, this time out of sheer exasperation. Atsumu yelps, affronted. "What tha hell, Omi? I pour my heart out ta ya and this is what ya have ta—"

Sakusa sobs brokenly, shaking his head. It startles Atsumu to silence.  
"Kiyoomi? Are ya okay?"

"You're so stupid, 'Tsumu. The biggest moron."

Atsumu huffs, stroking the back of his hand. "Well, now yer just bein' mean."

"You've always been enough for me, Atsumu. I decide what I deserve, do you understand? Not you. I love you. I don't need you to always say the right things. I don't need you to be perfect. All I need is for you to stay. Its been so long but I still want you just as much as I did back then. You've never been in this alone. We're both idiots. We need to communicate. I don't care if it's hard or if it's messy, sometimes. As long as you're with me at the end of the day, everything else can be worked out. Will you stay this time?"

Atsumu nods quickly, his own eyes glossy and frantic as he barrels across the bed, reaching for him. It is the clearest, freshest breath of air Sakusa has taken in years. "Yeah, of course I'm stayin'. Awww, don't cry. C'mere, Kiyoomi. Gosh, I love ya ta pieces, baby."

Sakusa scrambles to meet him halfway, tucking himself into those strong, familiar arms. It's like coming home every single time. Everything is secure. "Me too. Please don't leave me again, Atsumu."

"Never, baby, never. I'd marry ya right here if ya asked, I swear yer it fer me." Atsumu snivels. It's all of the right things all at once; all of the words that Sakusa only dreamed he'd one day hear.

Sakusa whines at that, peppering kisses down the expanse of Atsumu's jaw. His skin is clean and smooth underneath his lips, and he smells like the coconut soap from inside of Sakusa's shower. Fresh tears trickle from his own eyes and he sniffls audibly, pulling back to look at Atsumu's face. His eyes are no less damp with tears, no less full of emotion and such longing. It is open and raw emotion, pouring from the depths of him. There is nothing left to hide away.

"Be mine again, Omi."

"Yeah. I already am."

"God, Kiyoomi. Ya can't just say shit so blunt like that. It drives me crazy."

Sakusa huffs wetly, wiping at his puffy eyes. "Shut up. You're such a dork, 'Tsumu."

Atsumu nods, kissing the beauty marks above Sakusa's brow. His lips linger there for a while, as though he's memorizing the moment. Maybe Sakusa is memorizing it, too.

"Yeah. Only fer ya. Can I spend tha day with ya?"

"Yeah. Stay the night, too. And the night after that."

"Gonna move in with ya. Yer apartment s'nicer, anyways. Ya have a fancy schmancy shower and a clawfoot tub."

Sakusa laughs, the sound sleepy and tender. "Who says you're invited?"

Atsumu scoffs. "Me, who fuckin' else?"

Sakusa pauses, fake pondering the idea. They both know that this is their endgame; togetherness. Its refreshing, being on the same page. "Okay. Let's get a cat."

"And a dog?"

"Mmhmm. A cat first, though. Dogs are more work."

Atsumu hums, fond eyes slipping shut. "Okay. Sounds perfect.. let's nap for a little while, yeah? We've got all tha time ta plan it out."

"Yeah."

Sakusa drifts off as the sun begins to rise, but there's no need to rush out of bed this time. They can take their day slow, basking in the warmth they've created. The first winter Sakusa remembers with Atsumu had broken them apart. But this winter, they're finally getting it right.

## EPILOGUE

Sakusa is 23 when he believes in forever. It's a quiet Sunday morning at home, the kind that makes the whole wide world feel safe. Sakusa and Atsumu's cat, Maru, is purring at their feet. The noise is a soothing, welcome

lull inside of the bedroom. They're not long awake, and everything outside is still; it's peaceful. It's a Sunday routine of theirs, to sleep in late when practice isn't dragging them from the warmth of their covers. It seems that they've awoken early today, though. Outside, the Osaka sunshine has barely brushed past the horizon.

Atsumu is scrolling absently through his Twitter feed beside him, laughing every now and then at funny messages from fans. Normally, Sakusa would join him, making snarky comments of his own where they fit. Something quiet holds him back, however. Today, he wants to watch with tired eyes.

They lie like that for a while longer before Atsumu nudges him gently, his phone now placed atop their nightstand. "Omi? What's up, are ya okay? Yer bein' real quiet this mornin', babe."

Sakusa nods lazily, curling further into Atsumu's side. He relishes in the comfort of those strong, secure arms winding around his waist, tugging him closecloseclose. "Yeah. I'm okay. Still sleepy."

Atsumu's smile is blinding, full of that profound fondness Sakusa never thought he'd be able to cherish; the kind he never believed he deserved. "It's still early, babe. I know ya would be tired even if it wasn't, though. Yer always so sleepy on Sunday's." He coos, ruffling Sakusa's curls. "Ya just wanna nap all day, huh? My lazy teddy bear."

Sakusa pouts. "Shut up. I'm not lazy, you brat."

"Nah. Not always. But yer mine, aren't ya?"

Sakusa smiles at that, small but honest.

"Yeah. I'm yours."

Atsumu glows beside him. He brings Sakusa's hand to his mouth, kisses the silver ring that was placed there last week.

(Sakusa was packing up their beach blanket when Atsumu whipped out the black velvet box. He'd looked determined beside him, his eyes gleaming beneath the setting sun. Sakusa was stunned to silence.

"Now, s'not an engagement ring yet or nothin' like that. But fer now, I want ta promise ya my loyalty forever. Yer it fer me, Omi. I mean it. So, whaddaya say? Will ya let me replace this ring with somethin' flashy?"

Sakusa swallowed back tears. His eyes burned bright. "Not if its too flashy."

Atsumu frowned from his place in the sand. "What? Why not?"

"Because. I'm not a very flashy person."

Atsumu scoffed. "Yer not flashy, but ya sure are fuckin' prissy."

"You're ridiculous."

"Listen, I'm just sayin'! Yer so pretty, ya deserve fancy diamonds n'pearls. Live a little!"

Sakusa whined at that, high in his throat. "Stop talking. Give me my ring, 'Tsumu."

"Okay, okay, lemme just— are ya cryin' ?"

"No. Yes. Shut the fuck up."

"Baby.."

"I love you."

Atsumu's own tears fell then, tenderly and true.

"And I love ya too.")

Sakusa's smile widens at the memory. And maybe, just maybe, Sakusa starts glowing, too.

'I'm yours.' It isn't a lie. In fact, it's more true now than its ever been before. Still, it isn't what Sakusa wants to say. It doesn't dig deep enough to reach all the raw, pent up feelings in his heart. Sakusa wants to whisper, 'you have touched my soul,' wants to kiss 'you are forever' into the crook of the blonde's summer bronzed neck. He has spent too many years shoving down the words inside his head, fearing the discomfort of being seen; sometimes out of necessity, too. This time is different, though. This time, a silence settles in the room and it doesn't suffocate. It's a silence that reminds him of all the time ahead, of how many chances he'll have to say what he feels. He doesn't need to spit it out all at once. But in time, Sakusa will say everything. Again and again, every last pretty word. With Atsumu's lips on his forehead, he doesn't feel yellow; yellow isn't bright enough anymore, isn't a warm enough color for the hands that hold his heart.

Atsumu rubs his nose against Sakusa's own. It's soppy and sugar sweet, but Sakusa doesn't mind; he welcomes it kindly, nuzzling him right back. Openness is easy now, if it's with him.

"Any plans fer today?" Atsumu asks.

Sakusa nods. "We're meeting your brother for lunch while he's still visiting, remember? But that's not until later. We have time."

"So, do ya want ta get up for breakfast? I'll make ya that new jasmine tea ya like." Atsumu murmurs.

Sakusa props open an eye. "And pancakes?"

"And pancakes."

Sakusa hums in thought before closing his eyes once more. "Let's stay like this for a little while longer."

"I can do that."

They fought long and hard to reach this place, a common ground to rest and let go. Nowadays, Atsumu stays, and Sakusa trusts. It's finally forever ahead of them. Forever is watering their plants in the afternoon, when the sun is high and their worries are low. Forever is cooking dinner side by side, sneaking bites before it's ready and kisses because they can. Forever is every hope and wish nestled deep inside of Sakusa's chest, all of them possible. Forever is precious and gilded; it is something that will always remain, no matter how wild the storm.

Atsumu's mouth on his own is made of that same kind of forever. It is every bright and beautiful thing, so sure and sound. It has turned all the rain into gold.

## Notes:

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Hello!! If you have made it to the end of this very (very) long fanfic, I am giving you the biggest "thank you!" that I can muster. This project is very personal to me, and it was a long but welcome journey writing it. First, I want to say a HUGE thank you to my fellow writer (and friend), cabins. I would not have gotten through this fic without your support and consistent encouragement. <3 Please leave me a comment and let me know if you enjoyed reading it! Comments always brighten my day. Thanks so much, guys. Be well, be safe, and know that you are loved. : )

- Bee