

i'm choking on my own heart.

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by [kezemu](#)

Summary

sometimes, your heart can't decide between a bad place and a worse. rhys knows he shouldn't trust katagawa, shouldn't let him into his life, but it's so hard to turn someone down who looks at you like you hung the stars in the sky when everyone else, inevitably, leaves.

Notes

Y'all are either writing fluffy stuff for this ship or rapey so I had to write my own one.

There was something raw about Katagawa, something unfinished, rough around the edges, but in such a way that it seemed to blur upon closer inspection, that seemed to escape any grasp on it, any try to hold it, pin it down, figure out in just what sense it seemed off, in what it appeared much like the hidden teeth of a shark's smile.

Of course, he would know a thing or two about those. Looking at the other man is like having a déjà-vú, is like looking at both a painting he thought he burned down to ashes with nothing but a faint memory of it remaining and a mirror simultaneously. It's disturbing, it's wrong, it's distorted and a mockery — and it hit him square in the face, leaving a feeling of fire on his skin, tingling, setting just beneath the surface. It's not a feeling he expected, not ever. Even less here, actually encountering the man that's been bothering him via mail and ECHO before, bothering to finally meet him in person, for all the things he heard and made up.

(There were stories, alright, and he wouldn't lie to say he isn't majorly flattered by half of them. The other half was actually true.)

He didn't even plan on running into him, but of course, that's just how these corporate meetups go. You cannot avoid everyone, shouldn't, it's bad for business, and even less you can hide. But still he feels like a deer in the headlights, still he feels like the smile he's greeted with — one that surely is meant to be warm and reassuring, a greeting — still feels like prey, still feels like something evaluated, turned around, considered, but not in a way any human being should be.

Looking at the Maliwan exec, it felt like looking at a mix of his own past, and of someone he'd rather forget, but every time he swallowed a bit too hard, the faint scar on his throat hurt just so. Every time he closed his eyes, there's a flicker of blue — only now replaced with orange and teal.

(Bullshit. All of it. You're getting lost in your own head again, Rhys.)

There was nothing to be scared of, of course, and plenty to be, just the same. These things were worse than the actual meetings to discuss — product lines, release schedules, all these issues. They had smiled before (*give Atlas a year, maybe two, and it will die a second time*), and then the smiles had faded to be less patronizing, and more wary. They still underestimated him, of course. To people twice his age, who had run companies for more years than he knew how to walk upright, he was still not too serious a threat. And that was a good thing, it helped slipping things past them.

This, however? Something that was sure to be 'exclusive', was meant as the way of classist enjoyment that made pretend it's attendees were better than anyone outside of it, and he hates every single second, hiding behind his glass of sparkling wine he hadn't touched once.

(A lie. He had taken one sip, decided this stuff that probably costed about the same as his entire college education back on Eidyia tasted worse than the cheapest beer he drank at said education, and then made a serious effort to swallow it and not spit it out on the floor.)

That tactic had worked quite well for the first two hours. He had briefly chatted with the old Jakobs, who seemed even more out of place than he did — at least Rhys had made an effort to dress to the occasion, which Jakobs didn't see the need for. If he was honest, he admired the balls on the older man, and it was genuinely the one person in the whole room he could somewhat stand. (Even if the man was awkwardly touchy — in a patronizing way, sure, not any other, but that made it only slightly less uncomfortable.) It was, coincidentally, also the one person he suspected saw best through his soft and naïve mask.

The folks from Hyperion stared at him coldly occasionally, something he answered with a bright smile and a raise of his glass whenever he caught it. Of course, just because he pulled the Helios from the sky, it didn't mean the company was dead (although it was dying, and they knew it best of all; they lost too much money, and all their best people in one swoop, while not fully refilling a certain void). They couldn't prove that it had been him, after all. There had only been a couple hours between his return and the crash, not enough time to get anything out, and Vaughn didn't let them close enough to extract what they could from the wrack.

It wasn't much. He checked.

But Maliwan — something about the guy just seemed off. It's nothing he could name (aside from the pestering, obviously, he couldn't even explain in how many ways that just gave him wrong signals), but also now, watching him make his way over.

Making his — oh.

Too late to look for an escape now. And that after he did so well avoiding the man — had so for the past two of these 'meetups' (glorified sucking each other's dicks while looking for a place to stab them into, they were), as well as via all the messages left. Unless Zer0 decided to suddenly drop down and share his cloaking technique with him in the next ten seconds, there was not much to be done but put on a smile and, hopefully, appear a little less miserable than he really felt.

Katagawa seemed clearly pleased to meet him — his smile might be that of a predator, sure of victory, but not for nothing. It wasn't fake in the sense that all the others were, and somehow, that was all the more reason to worry.

It would make pretending a whole lot harder.

"Finally!", the Maliwan exec proclaimed, like they had intended to meet up from the start and only had no opportunity to do so beforehand. And who knew? From his perspective, maybe that was what he meant.

Rhys wasn't going to try to get into anyone's head. He was happy enough being alone in his.

"You're a fickle one to hunt down, you know? I almost came to the conclusion you might not even be a real person."

Now, Rhys contemplated, would be a very good moment for Zer0 to rescue him.

Not that that would happen. This wasn't a threat to his life, after all. And it wasn't like he had any idea where the assassin even was.

"Maybe I am." He sounded more confident than he is, something he was thankful for.
"Maybe I am just your imagination."

"Hardly. If you were, I wouldn't finally meet you here, between all these — " The other man leaned in close conspiratorially, uncomfortably close, and Rhys could nearly taste his aftershave on his tongue. It's not as heavy as he imagined it to be, but still too much for his liking.

"These what?", he asked, finally, irritated.

"Mh? Oh, I got distracted. My apologies. I've been aching for a chance to talk to you."

"I've noticed."

It's cold, but not unfriendly — even though he got more and more irritated by the second, and the hairs on the back of his neck stood up, he couldn't afford to be unfriendly. You never knew what future deals would ask, and Atlas, while standing proud and way better on it's own than anyone would have thought just a couple years back, could not afford making enemies. It was bad enough Hyperion only trusted him so far as they could be sure to hit a deadly shot.

Katagawa flashed up a smile, and this was almost genuine — apologetic, and nearly resembling something warm.

Rhys decided that he hated it. And especially hated that he thought it looked nice.

"It's awful in here, don't you agree? Why don't we go and chat outside? I've noticed there's quite a nice garden attached to the building, and it would make it easier to be heard than in here, too."

Bad idea, his instincts told him. Instead of a reply, he watched the room. His gaze stopped at the group in bright yellow suits glaring daggers in his direction, and suddenly, it didn't seem such a bad idea at all.

Raising his glass and swallowing the awful liquor in one go, his own smile answered. Calculated, but also glad for an excuse to escape.

"Sure, why not?"

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