

build a home around you

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build a home around you

by [lavendori](#)

Summary

Atsumu decided long ago that honeymoon phases are a myth. When he loves something, he throws his whole heart in or he doesn't play at all.

Or: Atsumu grapples with his relationship with Shouyou, where their passion for volleyball leads them, and everything in between.

Notes

FINALLY a sequel to 'in gold daylight' :D this started with me listening to 'cornelia street' while thinking about atshn and having intense feelings about how their relationship could progress, be tested, and still withstand everything so i just turned this into a multichap installment.

this whole thing was also prompted by [ErinNovelist](#).

special thanks to the usual suspects, gabi, priya, and boom for helping me with various things along the way throughout this fic :')))) and ana for helping me with portuguese!!! ily all and owe y'all my life

p.s. first lyrics are from the song "marry me" by train

p.p.s. also, LET'S JUST PRETEND COVID DOESN'T EXIST AND THE OLYMPICS WAS IN 2021 JUST BECAUSE IT WAS, SHALL WE

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

eyes like sinking ships

*Forever can never be long enough for me
To feel like I've had long enough with you*

Honeymoon phases are a myth. Atsumu decided this ages ago even before he'd started dating. When he loves something, he throws himself all in or he doesn't play at all. Why would he waste his time with someone with whom a honeymoon phase is just that— a phase? If he can't find new things to be excited about with someone, then what's the point?

Which is why when Samu asks him if he'll ever stop staring dreamily off into the distance after every text he receives from Shouyou, he already knows he's a lost cause.

"Quit askin' me that, will ya?" Atsumu grumbles. "I'm tryna enjoy the food here!"

Samu stares at the tuna onigiri he made for Atsumu just five minutes ago, his face darkening. He probably has half a mind to pull the plate out from under him. *Ha*. Fat chance, Atsumu thinks as he picks the rice ball up in his hands. Atsumu can see right through him. He is prepared.

"Seriously," Samu continues. "It's been nearly five months."

"Your point?"

"It's disgusting, ya sap," Samu says. "I just wiped the counters and you're lettin' your mushy goo-goo eyes drip all over the place."

"Excuse you, I'm brightenin' up your shop with happiness!" Atsumu protests. "You need at least one Miya with a cheerful mug around here."

"Keep it," Samu says. "It's not my brand."

"All I'm hearin' is '*Be less in love, Tsumu,*' " he replies, doing his best impression of a disgruntled Samu for his last sentence.

"And? What of it?"

"Hmph."

Scowling, Atsumu takes a big bite of his onigiri.

"Whatssit toh you anyways?" he mumbles with his mouth full.

Samu gives him a disparaging look, eyes trailing down to the flecks of rice outside of his plate. "Again, Tsumu, I *just* cleaned the counters."

Atsumu swallows. “Whatever. You’re just jealous ‘cos you’ve never been in love.”

Samu’s nose scrunches up in distaste.

“If those symptoms are genetic,” he says, pointing at Atsumu’s face, “then I don’t think I wanna be.”

“If ya hate it so much, then why’d you push me to it?”

“Cos I knew dealing with your depressed state if you kept pinin’ for the rest of yer life woulda been worse.”

Atsumu glares at his twin then stuffs the rest of the rice ball in his mouth. Samu’s jealous and he knows it. He’s got nothing to say to the envious bastard.

Instead, he lets his mind drift back to the text exchange he’d been having with Shouyou under the counter. After swallowing his last bite, he wipes his hands on a napkin and pulls his phone back out to revisit the last message that made him smile.

Aww I like when you use your baby voice though :)

➡ [You loved “Aww I like when you use your baby voice though :)”] ♥ °•

- - - - - New Messages - - - - -

Are you still at Samu-san’s shop?

I just finished showering so I’ll swing by!

Yep I’ll order for u :)

<3

➡ •° ♥ [Shouyou loved “Yep I’ll order for u :)”]

➡ •° ♥ [Shouyou loved “<3”]

“Are you sending heart emojis again?” Samu asks, peering over the counter.

“None of yer business!” Atsumu cries, holding his phone closer to his chest.

Samu rolls his eyes, though he looks amused.

“I’ll go make him a tamagokake-giri,” Samu says automatically, turning away from the counter. “You owe me like a week’s worth of cleaning duties.”

“Yeah yeah,” Atsumu says with a wave of his hand. Samu throws a glare at him over his shoulder before disappearing into the kitchen.

Shouyou shows up ten minutes later with his backpack on and a water bottle in hand. Atsumu never gets tired of it: the way the sun frames his boyfriend’s outline behind the door of the building whenever he walks in to meet him, how even at the tail end of winter, his bright hair illuminates his smile. Atsumu’s lips curl in response. How did he get so damn lucky?

“Hi,” Shouyou says when he reaches him, sounding breathless from his quick jaunt to the restaurant.

“Hey,” Atsumu replies in a low voice. The store is mostly empty as lunch rush hasn’t hit yet, so Atsumu takes this chance to pull Shouyou in for a quick kiss before Samu comes back. “How was your workout?”

“Good,” he says, resting his chin on Atsumu’s shoulder and looking up at him. Atsumu’s heart melts at the sight of it. “Nothing new. Did you eat already?”

“Yeah. Tuna onigiri. Also nothin’ new.” Atsumu grins. “Woulda waited for ya if I knew you’d end up comin’.”

“I don’t mind!” Shouyou laughs. “I was going to heat up some leftovers and catch up on reading since we were already going to see each other later, but then after showering, I brushed my teeth and suddenly thought: Nah, I don’t wanna wait.”

A slight shiver runs up Atsumu’s spine. *Shouyou wanted to see him.* Four and a half months later and he still gets flutters in his belly over every little thing. He thought he could get used to it but he really can’t.

(He doesn’t want to anyway.)

“Good,” he mutters with a goofy smile. “ ‘Cos I feel the same.”

Fixing his gaze on Shouyou’s lips, he leans in and closes his eyes.

“Ahem.”

Atsumu’s eyes snap open just as Shouyou moves away.

“Samu-san!” Shouyou exclaims with no shame, bowing and greeting his twin with an enthusiasm Samu *definitely* doesn’t deserve. “How’s your weekend been?”

“Full of cleaning up this guy’s mess in the shop,” he answers with a jerk of his head towards Atsumu. “One tamago kake onigiri.”

He places the dish on the counter next to Atsumu’s empty plate and Shouyou quickly takes a seat. A bundle of pickled white ginger sits neatly on top of the rice, along with a dipping dish of soy sauce—just the way he likes it.

“Thank you, Samu-san!” Shouyou claps his hands together in prayer. “Itadakimasu!”

Picking up his rice ball, he takes a bite.

“Mmm!” he hums happily as hints of yellow yolk starts to ooze through the cracks between the rice. “Delicious as always.”

“Anything for our cutest customer,” Samu says with a sidelong smirk at Atsumu. Shouyou’s jaw drops with delight and Atsumu scowls. *That fuckin’ drip.*

“How’s everything going so far this year?” Shouyou asks in between his next bite. While Samu rambles on about typical boring business stuff, Atsumu contents himself with watching Shouyou eat. He’s told him this several times before already but his little spiker really does look *adorable* with puffed out cheeks. His eyes shine with awe and interest and he nods every once in a while as Samu keeps yammering. The way Shouyou finds everything fascinating even if they’re coming from someone as stupid as Samu is really inspiring. It always manages to make Atsumu see old things in a new light. Even if it’s something as simple as watching Shouyou eat, being with Shouyou just helps you approach the world with more wonder and curiosity and—

Fuck. He’s so in love.

“... well, then I’ll let ya two get to it, once Tsumu stops gazing at you like a lovesick idiot.”

“What?” Atsumu comes back to and glares at his twin. “S’not my fault you’re so *boring*.”

“Wanna push those cleaning duties to two weeks?” Samu threatens.

Atsumu squawks in disbelief. “I’m family!”

“If you’re bein’ an asshole you’ll be treated like one, family or not.”

Atsumu glares at Samu, who glares at him back. Neither of them move or budge while Shouyou calmly finishes his rice ball beside them completely unfazed.

Finally, with a roll of his eyes, Samu gestures for them to get going. “Just— go n’ be sappy somewhere else. Not you, Shouyou. You’ve never done anythin’ wrong in your life.”

Shouyou beams.

“Okay, *fine*,” Atsumu grumbles, standing up from his seat. He grabs Shouyou by the hand and waits for him to stand up too. “I get the message. Let’s go, Shouyou. Thanks for nothin’, Samu.”

“See you later, Samu-san!” Shouyou says cheerfully.

“Have fun,” Samu says with a smile. Atsumu ignores it. Turning his nose up in the air, he whips around and pulls Shouyou along with him.

Once they’re out of Samu’s shop, he pauses by the entrance so he can interlock their fingers together. Raising their hands to his mouth, Atsumu presses his lips to Shouyou’s knuckles.

Flutters. In his belly. Every single time.

Atsumu grins.

“We still got a couple hours t’kill before the festival. Wanna catch a movie?” he asks.

“Yup.”

And with that, they head towards the bus stop hand in hand, a buoyant spring in their steps.

(And he wouldn't change a thing.)

Being with Shouyou doesn't require a honeymoon period. There is no *before*, *middle*, or *after*. There only exists the first moment Atsumu encountered Shouyou's hunger for the game and the *now*, superimposed on every waking day they spend together, born anew in the mornings.

They fall into an easy routine not long after dating. They have practice when they have practice, they eat when they eat and sleep when they sleep. Occasionally, they work out, go on runs and practice yoga together. Whenever they have the next morning off, they watch a movie or fool around in bed so late that Shouyou often ends up spending the night. (All according to keikaku — not to mention, without fail, Atsumu always experiences a fresh flood of butterflies in his stomach when he wakes up in the morning and sees Shouyou's toothbrush next to his.) Dating Shouyou feels like a waking dream he never wants to fall asleep in. Things are great. This feeling, these moments, this *person*: It's perfect.

“Are you centering your thoughts, Tsumu?”

“Wha—?” Atsumu turns his head to see Shouyou still sitting calmly in a cross-legged, meditative position with one eye cracked open to peer over at him. “Oh! Right.”

Straightening up to face the ocean they're seated in front of, Atsumu takes a deep breath and exhales, holding his hands closer to his chest in prayer. “Yeah... I am.”

“Juuuust checking,” Shouyou says. “Just listen to the environment.”

Atsumu closes his eyes and continues to breathe, allowing his senses to sharpen. The wind blows across his face. He can hear waves crashing on the shore, followed by the distant sigh of seafoam as the water recedes before crescendoing into a loud rumble as the ocean rises once again and slams itself upon the sand. Somewhere above him, seagulls cry out to each other, their wings flapping as they survey the skies.

After another moment, Atsumu feels his attention start to slip again. Cracking open his right eye, he takes a peek at Shouyou. Shouyou's eyes are closed and relaxed, a small smile resting upon his lips.

Now that Shouyou doesn't live a five minute biking distance from the beach anymore, morning yoga by the ocean has become a bit of a rarity for him. During the past two winter months especially, Shouyou had been missing this sacred routine he'd honed during his time in Brazil. It's not everyday they can make the drive out here in the daytime but since they didn't have practice and it hasn't been snowing lately, they decided to bring their usual yoga practice somewhere closer to that habitat. As such, Atsumu doesn't want to ruin it for him. Morning yoga means a lot to Shouyou and offers Atsumu other positive benefits too, like calming his mind and training him to get even more familiar with *the zone*. So, closing his eyes, he mentally shakes himself and tries to refocus once again.

Unlike Brazil, the air is cold and biting in early March, but they've dressed as warmly as they can with the expectation that the whole workout will warm them up even more. Atsumu lets himself feel it all—the grains of sand beneath his feet, the ocean mist across his face, the steady pump of blood through his veins.

There's a certain peace Shouyou exudes in the midst of yoga that bleeds into Atsumu's state of being as well. Although they do regular yoga regularly every week, bringing their practice to the beach is a fairly different experience. The whistling breeze and gentle crashing of waves guides their rhythm and every sun salutation is directed at the main star herself. He follows Shouyou's direction and movements, trying his best to let the energy flow through him.

Center your thoughts. Focus on the present. Send thanks.

At present, he's with Shouyou. Not just physically with him by the shore, but in every way he can think of. This, then — the long stares and twin smiles, wandering hands and press of skin, fingers carding through ginger hair — this is his present.

*

The clouds start to gather in the afternoon. After they finish yoga, they bundle themselves back up in the warmth of Osamu's truck, their water bottles and breakfast of fruits in hand. How lucky they managed to catch the sun during their whole practice, Atsumu thinks. The world certainly has a way of bending to Shouyou, or rather, Shouyou has a way of bending the world towards him. Atsumu, of course, has firsthand experience of that.

Despite the gray skies, Shouyou's mood doesn't seem to dampen. He still has that relaxed and contented expression on his face from yoga.

"You're looking extra happy today," Atsumu comments as he watches Shouyou scarf down a banana in the passenger's seat.

"Of course!" Shouyou says after swallowing his bite. "Yoga on the beach always makes me happy. It's almost like being back in my home away from home."

Atsumu smiles. “If it makes ya that happy we should try to do it more often. ‘Specially now that it’s ‘bout time for spring. It’ll get warmer soon.”

“Yeah...”

Shouyou finishes the last of his banana and stares out at the beach view in front of them. There’s a look of longing and something else in his eyes that Atsumu can’t quite read. *A home away from home*, he thinks. Having lived in Osaka all his life, he wonders what that’s like.

“Didja wanna take a walk along the shore?” Atsumu offers. It isn’t Brazil but it’s the closest thing they have.

“Nah, I’m good,” Shouyou says. “It looks like it might rain any minute. We can’t afford to get sick.”

But Shouyou doesn’t take his eyes off the beach.

“You really miss it, don’t ya?” Atsumu asks.

“Hm?” Shouyou turns to look up at him. “Oh— yeah, but that’s to be expected. And besides, I like it here too! It’s fun being on a team with you and Bokuto-san. And Omi-san too, of course.”

He grins, setting off an echoed sunrise in Atsumu’s chest.

“Wish you could see the beach scene in Rio though,” Shouyou sighs, slumping back into his seat. “It’s something else.”

Atsumu slips his hand into Shouyou’s and intertwines their fingers together.

“Take me someday,” Atsumu says. “I’d love to see it.”

Eyes crinkling at the corners, he squeezes Atsumu’s hand and nods.

“I will!” he promises.

The genuine look on his face makes Atsumu’s chest ache with joy. He wants to kiss him right then and there so he leans in and wraps a hand around Shouyou’s neck.

“Tsumu...” Shouyou chuckles, his breath tickling Atsumu’s nose. “My breath smells right now.”

“Don’t care,” Atsumu replies as he presses his lips to Shouyou’s. “And it doesn’t,” he adds when he pulls back before going in for another kiss.

If anything, there’s just the slightest hint of the banana he’d just eaten, but Atsumu had just had one himself. Kisses don’t always have to be minty to be perfect. This is normal, this is them.

Before Atsumu can make it to a fourth kiss, his phone buzzes in his pocket. He has half a mind to ignore it when it buzzes three more times in succession, as though the sender *knows* he'd need some convincing.

With great effort, Atsumu pulls away from Shouyou with a groan and draws out his phone. There's only one person who'd be that inconsiderate.

In a rush of fury, he swipes open his notifications, ready to fight.

Tsumu it's almost 1 you better be on your way back you promised my truck back by 2

Another text for good measure

'Cos I don't trust you

Hope I'm interrupting something

Send text.

His phone buzzes one final time in his hands with the last message right as he's about to type a response back.

STOP IM ON THE WAY, Atsumu punches out. Then, for good measure, he adds, *IT'S SHOUYOU ATSUMU TOLD ME TO USE ALL CAPS.*

Samu's response buzzes back.

Nice try. Get on the road before I charge you for the next five tuna onigiris

Atsumu lets out a groan of frustration and almost throws his phone before remembering he probably doesn't want to see the aftermath of it colliding with the dashboard.

"It's okay," Shouyou says with a pat on his back. Judging by his tone, it's clear that he's trying not to laugh. "We can always make out later."

"Shouyou," Atsumu whines, draping himself dramatically over his much smaller boyfriend's lap. "I love you, didja know that?"

Shouyou laughs. "Of course."

Then he swoops down and kisses Atsumu on the forehead.

“Love you too.” He grins.

Atsumu sighs, his lips relaxing into a smile. “How did I get so lucky.”

“It’s not luck,” Shouyou says, brushing a loose strand of Atsumu’s hair out of his face. They smile at each other for a few more seconds before Atsumu sighs again.

“We should probably go,” he mutters. “Think Samu’s gotta meet a vendor or somethin’.”

“Yeah,” Shouyou agrees but he doesn’t move. It isn’t fair that he’s putting it all on Atsumu to take action first — he always has a hard time stopping something unless Shouyou makes the first move. Then again, neither of them have the best self-control. Maybe they really *could* let Omi-kun rub off on them a bit more.

“Okay, just one last kiss.”

Reaching up, Atsumu wraps a hand around Shouyou’s neck and pulls him down to meet him. After a brief couple seconds, he musters all the willpower he has, releases Shouyou and sits back up in his car seat. The two of them buckle up and Atsumu starts the engine.

“What’ll it be, DJ?” he asks, tossing the AUX cord to Shouyou, who plugs it into his phone at once. Seconds later, a cheerful, upbeat tune starts to play. Once they pull out of the lot, he drives onto the open road, the faint sun in their eyes and breezy song in their hearts.

After parking the truck in the lot, Atsumu and Shouyou walk into the kitchen from the back door of Samu’s shop. The two assistants Samu’s hired this past month greet them as they enter.

“Took ya long enough,” Samu says the second he sees Atsumu.

Atsumu huffs impatiently and tosses the keys at him.

“I made it in one piece, didn’t I?”

Samu snorts. “If that’s how low you’re setting the bar now...”

“Shut up! I made good time.”

“Ah, is Atsumu back?” a familiar voice says, taking Atsumu by surprise. Atsumu’s ears perk up and he looks around to see Kita-san stepping through the curtained door between the kitchen and cash register.

“Kita-san!” Atsumu exclaims, then wacks Samu on the back. “Oi! Why didn’t ya tell me Kita-san was visiting?!”

“I thought it was implied when I said we were meeting other vendors today,” Samu grumbles, rubbing his back. “He won’t have time to hang out with ya anyway. Our schedule is packed.”

Kita chuckles, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “I’m sure they can join us for dinner.”

“Yes!!” Atsumu yells at the same exact time Samu mumbles, “Such a hassle..”

“Wha—? Why am I a hassle?!”

“Cos we’re gonna be in Naniwa Ward already and you’d be makin’ us drive back for yer ass,” Samu retorts.

“We can meet you there,” Shouyou suggests. “We’ll take a cab!”

Atsumu throws a smug smirk at Samu just as Samu purses his lips. If Shouyou wants to go, he won’t be able to protest outright.

“Sounds good,” Kita agrees. “Just meet us in town ‘round seven. And by the way—”

He turns to Shouyou and stretches out his hand. “I know we’ve met before, but I don’t think we’ve ever been properly introduced. I’m Kita Shinsuke.”

“Hinata Shouyou,” Shouyou replies, eagerly stepping forward to shake Kita’s hand. “It’s so good to finally meet you. I’ve heard so much about you!”

“Likewise,” Kita says with a smile.

“Fine,” Samu sighs. Putting his Onigiri Miya hat on, he grabs a thick jacket and turns to leave. “I’ll text you the address later. Come at seven. Don’t be late. Let’s go, Kita-san.”

“We’ll catch up soon,” Kita assures. “It was good seeing ya.”

With a grin, he waves goodbye then turns to follow Samu out the back door.

“Wow, Kita-san is so cool,” Shouyou says once they’re out of earshot. “He supplies all the rice Samu serves, you said?”

“Yep,” Atsumu answers. “To tell ya the truth, I don’t know if Samu would’ve made it this far this fast without Kita-san. ‘S a good thing we already knew him right out of high school.”

Shouyou giggles. “I heard Kita-san’s the only person who can get you to listen or do anything.”

“What!” Atsumu yelps. “I listen to other people— sometimes.”

When Shouyou continues to laugh instead of respond, Atsumu hooks him by the neck and drags him into his arms.

“I listen to you,” he says in a low voice. “And you’re someone who can get me to do anything.”

Shouyou grins up at him. Atsumu's heart flutters.

"Think I could get you to lose to me at Mario Kart this time?" Shouyou asks. Atsumu's smile shifts into a smirk.

"Only if you've improved."

"You're on!"

After leaving Onigiri Miya, they go back to Atsumu's place to shower and spend the rest of the afternoon racing each other on the Wii. Atsumu, who had always been infuriatingly worse than Samu at most of the video games they'd played growing up, has by now logged an ungodly amount of hours practicing on various consoles throughout the last fifteen years. Shouyou, however, is a mere budding opponent. Apparently, until he roomed with Pedro in Brazil, he'd never played Mario Kart so seriously with anyone other than his little sister. That left Atsumu room to demolish him constantly in nearly every game when they first started playing.

He'd almost felt bad at first, unable to stop himself from laughing whenever Shouyou stares at the screen in shock or throws a pillow at his face. To make matters funnier, this almost always happens whenever Atsumu steals a win from right under his nose with a well-aimed shell. Sometimes, the frustration grips Shouyou hard enough for him to throw himself at Atsumu with threats of beating him up right here right now outside of the game—that feverish thirst for victory glinting in his amber eyes as his hands fists in Atsumu's shirt—only for Atsumu to succumb as he always does to that determined spirit and pulls Shouyou down so he can meet his demanding mouth. Lately, their wins have been balancing out the more Shouyou plays, but they still end up in the bedroom just as often, their controllers and game forgotten on the living room floor.

The best part of all this of course, is that Atsumu *gets* to do this. He *gets* to play video games with Shouyou and be the object of Shouyou's fury and to kiss him afterwards whenever he wants. It's his reality now and he *gets* to have this and keep it. It's the best.

About an hour later, Shouyou finally beats him for the first time in ten rounds.

"Yes!" he exclaims triumphantly, jumping up and punching his arms in the air. "Take that red shell, Tsumu! That's what you get for stabbing me with lightning!"

"If you hadn't knocked me off the course," Atsumu snipes back, "then I wouldn't have gotten that lightning!"

Shouyou laughs and sticks out his tongue at him. Atsumu tries not to smile.

"Alright, alright," he says. "You win fair and square."

Shouyou bares his teeth in a grin. "Soon I'll get good enough to beat Pedro the next time I see him!"

Atsumu grins, reaching up to ruffle Shouyou's hair. "I look forward to it."

“Oh, right!” Shouyou sits back down next to him. “You could be there too. I’m sure Pedro will have a lot of fun playing you!”

“Even if I destroy both yer asses?” Atsumu smirks.

“I dunno,” Shouyou says. “Pedro’s pretty good too.”

“Well, then I *definitely* hafta come to Brazil and establish who’s boss,” Atsumu huffs.

Shouyou laughs. “Pedro won’t take that lying down.”

“What else didja guys do for fun in Brazil?” Atsumu asks, abandoning his controller in favor of conversation. He shifts to lean his elbow on the back of the couch. Shouyou turns to face him.

“Pedro was in school at the time so he had to study or do homework a lot, but occasionally we’d go out to eat!” he explains. “We actually didn’t hang out as much as outside of the flat, but we did play Mario Kart and watch a lot of Dragonball Z in Portuguese at home.”

“Whoaaa, DBZ in Portuguese? That sounds so weird!”

Shouyou laughs. “It *was* kinda funny at first to hear Frieza speak in such a smooth and mature-sounding womanly voice, but then I got used to it. Plus, it helped me a lot with Portuguese!”

“I have to see this someday,” Atsumu says. “Do you have the entire series dubbed?”

“No, they belong to Pedro... but I do have the first season of One Piece in Portuguese!”

“No way, we totally have to watch that!”

“Sure! Maybe next time we’re at my apartment.” Shouyou grins. “I can show you a few videos on Youtube first if you want.”

“Let’s do it.”

*

When the time comes to go to dinner, the two of them clean up the game controllers, get properly dressed, and head out.

They arrive at the barbecue place just a few minutes late. Since the restaurant is located on a busy street near Ebisu Bridge, their cab had to take a few detours to avoid pedestrian traffic. Upon opening the doors and stepping outside though, the tantalizing aroma of grilled meat greets them, causing their mouths to water at once.

Samu and Kita are already halfway through their first round of sake when the hostess shows them to their table. Kita sets down his cup and greets them as Atsumu pulls out the chair beside his old captain.

“How were the meetings?” Atsumu asks.

“Plain old,” Samu replies, shifting a little so Shouyou can squeeze into the seat next to him. “Nothin’ you’d find interesting.”

“Good, ‘cos that was just a courtesy ask,” Atsumu says, grabbing a cup so he can pour some sake for Shouyou and himself. “I don’t really care.”

Kita chuckles. “Don’t tell me you two are still having sibling quarrels over who’s the happier twin?”

Samu crosses his arms with a pout. “I ain’t the one who starts ‘em.”

“C’mon Tsumu,” Shouyou interjects. “Stop lying. I know you want to hear all about it!”

“Ah, it really is just nothin’,” Samu says as Shouyou raises his cup of sake to his lips. “My usual supplier for seafood is starting to raise prices and cut down on some essential fish like mackerel, so I thought about trying to build other connections and see what else we can get. Might be able to expand the menu to include uni or eel, or even branch out to takoyaki. Got lots of options to consider.”

“Ooh, I love uni!” Shouyou beams. “That reminds me, there’s this one place by the beach I played at in Brazil that served the best sea urchin carbonara ever. I wish you could try it, Samu-san!”

“Oh yeah?” he asks with a quick glance and smirk at Atsumu. “Can ya take me next time?”

Atsumu scowls and points an accusatory finger at his twin. “Oi. Yer not crashing me n’ Shouyou’s trip. Go on yer own time!”

“But Shouyou’s invitin’ me, ain’t that right, Shouyou-kun?” Samu smiles. He’s putting on a sweet and innocent look but Atsumu knows better. That bastard. “What would be the point of goin’ without an awesome tour guide like him anyway?”

“Hmph.”

Samu rolls his eyes. “Relax, Tsumu. I’d definitely stay at my own airbnb. Your sappy eyes are already unbearable in public. I’d rather not know what happens behind closed doors.”

Atsumu should be offended, he knows he should, but at Samu’s resignation, he can’t stop the corners of his lips from curling smugly. Shouyou, on the other hand, tries to act casual, but Atsumu can see the tips of his ears turning red.

“Kita-san could come too!” Shouyou suggests, steering the subject elsewhere.

“Oh?” Kita smiles. “Does this mean you already have dates for your trip?”

Shouyou opens his mouth to answer but has to pause as a waitress arrives with the menus.

“Good evening,” she says, handing one to each person. Shouyou opens his up excitedly as she starts listing off the weekend specials.

“Ah... actually—” Samu asserts after she finishes speaking. He flips his copy of the menu over to the first page with all the combo meals. “We’re ready to order.”

Atsumu yawns and sits back, familiar with the ritual. When it comes to barbeque restaurants with combo options, he lets Samu take it away. He already knows what he wants and always orders more than enough.

“...platter of pork belly, the short rib, and... how do you feel about scallops, Kita-san? ... Yeah? Sounds like Shouyou-kun wants some. We’ll get that too then. And let’s add some tuna or else Tsumu will whine for the rest of the night— Ya heard me, Tsumu— sorry ma’am— Yes, we’ll have the salad too... Yeah... mmmm, yeah. Let’s start with that for now, thank you.”

The three of them fold up their menus and hand them back to the waitress. She bows and walks back towards the kitchen. Kita turns back to Shouyou.

“You were saying?”

“Oh! About Brazil,” Shouyou continues. “No, we’ve only just started talking about it actually, so no set dates.”

“I mean,” Atsumu interjects, “I was gonna go to Brazil with ya eventually one way or another. I wanna experience the place that *made* you Ninja Shouyou.”

“Ah, sounds like a pleasant trip, but I wouldn’t wanna impose,” Kita replies.

“Ya wouldn’t be, just by saying that,” Atsumu tells him. “Unlike *someone* .”

He turns to glare at Samu. Samu merely raises an eyebrow, unphased.

Kita chuckles upon looking between the two of them.

“I do appreciate the invite,” he says kindly to Shouyou, “but it would take alotta careful planning if I were to go, at least on my part. I would have to appoint someone to take care of the farm and my grandma in my absence and make sure everything can still run smoothly.”

“But you take breaks sometimes, don’t you, Kita-san?” Shouyou asks. “When was the last time you were on vacation?”

“Of course, breaks are important,” Kita agreed. “Though I haven’t gone on a real vacation in a while.”

He falls silent for a moment, looking deep in thought. As he stares off into space, a gentle, enigmatic smile spreads across his lips.

“I take breaks,” he says, “but I prefer to stay in the area when I do, or at least, in the part of Japan I’m most used to. Goin’ on a trip is nice, and it’s nice when someone can make that part of their routine of life. But for me, I’m content where I am. My routines on the farm, including my visits to the shop and any breaks I take — they really ground me. Maybe someday, I’ll venture out of the country for a brief vacation, but really, what I mean to say is that I very much enjoy the natural ebb and flow of it all.”

Atsumu shifts his gaze over to Shouyou, who looks awed and interested in everything Kita’s saying. It’s adorable. Atsumu can feel himself smile at the sight of it. Propping his elbow on the table, he leans against his hand and continues staring at the misty glimmer in those wide amber eyes.

“Whoa. That was beautiful,” Shouyou breathes. He looks up at the ceiling thoughtfully for a moment, then continues, “I can relate! Although now that I think about it, I didn’t used to like routine. I just wanted to do all the cool flashy stuff on the court and get good at volleyball as fast as possible. Kageyama always yelled at me for it, but I understood it later. He wasn’t just good at volleyball, he also kept up his daily routines. Hearing you say all this now — it reminds me of Brazil. I do have routines here too, but, well...”

Shouyou breaks off with a grin, his eyes crinkling.

“I just miss it, that’s all!”

Atsumu smiles. Seeing Shouyou’s love for Brazil makes him happy. There’s a certain dazzle about him that’s different from the exuberant joy he radiates when he scores a point.

Across the table, Samu’s elbow comes into Atsumu’s line of sight to nudge Shouyou in the arm. Atsumu’s gaze shifts over to his twin and he catches, in the tiniest of milliseconds — *‘cos it’s impossible as each other’s carbon copies not to notice* — a shadow passing in his brief sidelong glance at Atsumu before he turns to Shouyou and says, “I’m sure you’ll get to visit soon.”

Shouyou nods, but before Atsumu can wonder about the expression in Samu’s eyes, he looks directly at Atsumu and proclaims, “Yeah, and I’m definitely taking Tsumu with me!”

Atsumu’s heart skips a beat, all other thoughts forgotten in an instant. To hear Shouyou promise something in their future so earnestly and in front of other witnesses is like music to his ears.

Atsumu beams at him. “And I look forward to it.”

“God, Tsumu,” Samu groans, dragging a hand over his eyes. “This ain’t even my restaurant and you’re makin’ me wanna clean it.”

“What?” Atsumu gawks. “Ya never get mad at Shouyou for the same shit!”

“That’s ‘cos no matter how sappy he gets, he doesn’t look as disgusting as you.”

“I—! *We have the same face!* ”

“That’s exactly what makes it worse. I have *never* looked that sappy in my life.” Samu turns to Kita. “Kita, if ya ever see that embarrassin’ look on my face, please take me out immediately.”

“No promises,” Kita says with a light chuckle. “Though, I think it rather suits Atsumu, don’t you?”

Samu grumbles and mutters something under his breath.

“What was that?” Atsumu calls out, cupping a hand to his ear. “I couldn’t hear ya snivelling over there.”

“I said *‘Nothin’ cute ever suits Atsumu’!*”

“You—”

Kita claps a hand on Atsumu’s shoulder, giving him pause. He lets out a small cough and shakes his head.

Both Samu and Atsumu cross their arms and look away with a shared *Hmph!* at the same time.

“So... is this what you had to deal with in high school?” Shouyou asks, an amused smile playing on his lips as he looks back and forth between the two.

Kita laughs. “Oh, no. It was much worse back then. I hope they don’t give ya too hard of a time with their regular quarrels.”

Shouyou shakes his head. “No way. Witnessing their brotherly love? That’s the good stuff!”

Samu crinkles his nose. “Gross.”

“*YER* gross!” Atsumu retaliates.

“You got siblings, Hinata?” Kita asks Shouyou before Samu can retort.

“Just one little sister,” he replies. “She’s a handful.”

“She’s a lot cuter than Samu, that’s for sure,” Atsumu adds. Samu throws him a dirty look.

Atsumu is saved in that moment by the waitress coming back with a few platters of their combo order. As she sets the pork belly in front of him, Atsumu feels a little tap on his feet. He looks up and sees Shouyou smiling coyly at him.

Lips curling, he returns the smile, then picks up his chopsticks in preparation to eat.

Kita claps his hands together and the rest of them follow suit.

“Itadakimasu!”

With the food here, Samu's attention is fully taken by the meal, leaving Kita, Shouyou, and Atsumu to continue their discussion about life and work balance. Atsumu listens more than contributes to the conversation, content to hear what both of them have to say while he busies himself with cooking and eating meat.

After dinner, they decide to take a stroll through the city to walk off the food. Since Shouyou has only been to the iconic Glico man once, they start heading over there at once.

They're strolling through the outdoor shopping center before the river when Shouyou asks, "Did you guys come here often back in high school?"

"The general area or the Glico man?" Samu replies.

"Both!"

"Ehh, yeah but not as often as ya think," Atsumu says. "We sometimes hung out in the general area but the closer ya get to Glico, the more crowded and annoying it gets."

"It's funny how that works," Kita smiles. "Local attractions tend to be less interesting for those who grew up in the place."

"It's a sight we grew up seeing pretty often," Samu adds. "Often enough, anyway."

"Ohh! Like Kenma and Nekoma with the Tokyo Tower," Shouyou says, his face pinched as though troubled by a memory. The kitty cats must have made fun of him, Atsumu guesses.

"Well, I've never lived in Tokyo and I don't care to see it," Atsumu asserts. "So what if they have a tower? Osaka has towers too. We're way cooler."

"Oi, who was the one who lost their shit when we passed Tokyo Tower the first time we went to Tokyo for a game?" Samu interjects, elbowing Atsumu in the ribs.

"Ow! We were twelve!!" Atsumu shoves Samu's shoulder with his own. "And anyway the main point is that Shouyou doesn't need to feel bad about not growin' up near it!"

"I appreciate you, Tsumu-san!" Shouyou chimes.

Atsumu's chest tingles with delight. Wrapping an arm around Shouyou's neck, he pulls him closer to him as they walk on. *Stupid Samu. What does he know anyway?*

"No worries," Atsumu says, bringing his mouth closer to Shouyou's ear. "I'll show you all the cool spots in Osaka, but through a local's eyes. We've got all the time in the world."

Shouyou grins. "Deal."

"Gimme a sec," Samu suddenly announces. Breaking away from the group, he walks forward towards a Family Mart up ahead, then turns back around. "I wanna grab a drink. Want anything?"

“I’m good, thank you,” Kita says, raising a hand. Shouyou shakes his head. Atsumu blurts out, “Get me a coke.”

Samu gives a lazy wave of his hand in acknowledgment before heading into the shop, leaving the three of them to stand by in wait.

“So what kinda things did you guys do in Osaka when you were growing up?” Shouyou asks.

“Hmm,” Kita ponders for a second. “I can’t speak for the twins but I like taking walks by the river or going to the temple on special days and holidays—”

“Going on runs by the rice paddy fields and eating at the best ramen shop in town at the end of the road,” Atsumu continues. “We’d come to the city sometimes to eat and hang out, too. Plus, granny likes to do her shopping here sometimes.”

“It’s probably a lot less different from your own experiences in Sendai than you’d expect,” Kita adds.

A few minutes later, Samu comes back out with the drinks. He tosses the bottle of coke at Atsumu who catches it, and they move on.

“This was historically a theater district,” Kita tells Shouyou as they emerge from the indoor shopping strip and out into the plaza of neon lights and signs. As always, the giant crab animatronic above Kani Doraku’s restaurant greets them with its moving legs and the glowing pufferfish sign at Zuboraya looms over the crowds. Shouyou looks up at all the sights with wide-eyed wonder, an awed gasp on his lips as Kita continues to speak.

“There were several Kabuki and Bunraku theatres in the area before it was bombed during World War II. When Dontonburi was rebuilt, the main goal was to improve the water quality in the canal. Now, as you can see, it’s grown into a place full of good restaurants and high fashion.”

“Whoaaaaa.” Shouyou turns his head this way and that, trying to take in everything all at once. When they finally reach the Ebisu bridge where large crowds are gathered to take photos of every sign and angle around the canal, Kita starts listing off some facts about the Glico man. Eagerly listening, Shouyou sticks close to Kita as they push their way through the crowd to the front of the bridge.

Not wanting to fight with other people, Atsumu hangs back and smiles, watching Shouyou nodding along to Kita as he continues speaking. It occurs to him then that although he’s been dating Shouyou for a few months now, this is the first time Shouyou has gotten to interact with his life prior to MSBY.

Aside from hanging out with Samu and meeting their gran, Shouyou hasn’t really had a chance to interact with anyone else from their hometown. Now that he’s seeing Shouyou bond with other old school friends like Kita in some of Osaka’s popular hangout spots, Atsumu feels, for the first time, that Shouyou is finally traipsing further into his world. Whatever his life was before Shouyou, before Shouyou joined MSBY, before they started

dating, and after — the threads of their lives are now truly starting to blend. Atsumu looks forward to witnessing the threads continue to intermix even more.

“It’s nice to see them gettin’ along well.”

Atsumu turns and sees Samu, who’s standing next to him with his arms crossed. He flashes Atsumu a quick side glance before staring back ahead at Shouyou and Kita. Samu’s usually trying to ruin these moments, but he’s.. saying something positive?

“Yeah,” Atsumu agrees. “Yeah, it is.”

And then, just when he thinks Samu is being reasonable for once, Samu *sighs*. (What could he possibly have to *sigh* about??)

“What?”

“Just... Don’t get too used to the way things are.”

Atsumu frowns. That was unexpected.

“The hell d’ya mean?”

“I don’t know,” Samu says, as infuriatingly vague and impassive as usual. “It’s just— life.”

“Oi.” Atsumu leans forward and twists his neck to glare at his twin. “Ya can’t just say ominous shit like that and not follow it up with an explanation! Are ya tryin’ta say Shouyou and Kita won’t get along forever??”

“No, ya *drip*.” Samu rolls his eyes. “I just know you.”

“And what’s *that* supposed to mean?”

Samu tilts his head and gives him a pitying look. “Ya’ve got that look on yer face. Ya know, the one that’s all, *I’m on top of the world!*”

“What?” Atsumu squawks. “Get outta here, yer jus’ pullin’ this shit outta yer ass!”

“I’m not,” Samu says calmly. “I’m sayin’ it based on experience.”

Atsumu’s huffs. “What do you know about me n’ Shouyou anyway?? Everything’s perfect. He’s not a traitor like *you*.”

Samu sighs once again. “That’s not what I— never mind.”

He promptly cuts off their conversation when he sees Kita and Shouyou making their way back to them. Atsumu narrows his eyes at Samu but says nothing more.

“Ready to go home?” Atsumu asks Shouyou, stretching an arm out so Shouyou can slot himself into place there.

“Yeah. Is Samu-san giving us a ride?”

“He better,” Atsumu scowls, glaring at his twin.

“Relax,” Samu says. “I ain’t that cold.”

“Shotgun,” Atsumu calls at once. “Twin privileges.”

“How old are ya?” Samu rolls his eyes. “And besides, Kita has visitation rights *and* elder privileges.”

Atsumu lets out a loud groan. “FINE. I’ll just be gross with Shouyou in the backseat.”

“Please don’t.”

“Kidding. ...Or am I?”

“He’s kidding,” Shouyou asserts with a toothy grin. Atsumu feels rough fingers squeezing him at his side. “He’s too scared of Kita-san to— AHHHAHA!”

In that moment Atsumu squeezes Shouyou back right beneath the ribs, causing him to break off with a yelp and a laugh.

“Ya wanna try sayin’ that again?” Atsumu threatens, without real heat. “Huh? Say it again to my face!”

Shouyou continues laughing and tries to break free from his grasp but Atsumu only tightens his arm around his neck, dragging Shouyou into him, and ruffles his hair.

“Jeez, quit makin’ a scene,” Samu drones from behind. Kita merely chuckles.

After a few more half-hearted attempts to escape, Shouyou stops struggling and relaxes against Atsumu. As Atsumu loosens his grip, Shouyou looks up at him, cheeks flushed and pure mirth twinkling in his eyes. It’s a look that never fails to get Atsumu’s heart racing fast, his spirits high—the feeling that anything in the world is possible.

Atsumu’s convinced. There’s no greater feeling.

What the hell does Samu know? he thinks to himself when they get in the car. Enveloped in darkness save for the faint glow of street lights from the dashboard window, Shouyou interlaces their fingers together and rests his head on Atsumu’s shoulder.

Things with Shouyou are perfect. He couldn’t ask for anything better.

*

They arrive back at Atsumu’s apartment just a few minutes before ten. Shouyou blinks and opens his eyes as the dim lights overhead turn on with Atsumu opening the car door.

“We’re here,” Atsumu says, nudging Shouyou’s side.

He yawns and stretches, then undoes his seatbelt.

“You tired already?” Atsumu grins. “It’s only ten.”

“That’s why I wanted to power nap!” Shouyou answers.

“Oh — Are you gonna be okay driving home later, Kita?” Atsumu asks, realizing that for him, the time is probably considered late. “Isn’t it like, almost a two hour drive?”

“I was gonna ask that,” Samu interjects, sounding sullen — though for what, Atsumu has no idea why.

“Big deal, I asked first,” Atsumu scowls. Then with a small smirk, he adds, “Guess I’m just a more considerate friend!”

Samu *hmphs* and looks away. With a light chuckle, Kita holds a courteous hand up and replies, “I’ll be fine. I’ve got nothin’ going on tomorrow. One late night won’t kill me.”

Samu considers this for a moment. “You can always stay over and drive home in the morning if you’d like.”

“Ah, thank you for the offer, but I wouldn’t wanna put any of you out,” Kita tells them.

“It’s no trouble at all!” Atsumu and Samu both speak at once.

Kita laughs. “Atsumu, you should go on up with Hinata; don’t worry ‘bout me. I’ll figure it out.”

“Well, okay, if yer sure,” Atsumu says, sliding out of his seat. Once Shouyou follows him out, he shuts the car door behind him.

Kita rolls down his window. “I’m sure I’ll see you both around the next time I visit.”

“Come as often as ya’d like!” Atsumu waves.

“Ooh, can *we* visit *you* at your farm sometime, Kita-san?” Shouyou asks eagerly, hovering close to his car door.

“Sure,” Kita smiles. “That would be great. You’re certainly more than welcome anytime. Just come on out the next time Osamu drives up.”

“Yeah, Tsumu owes me more than a week’s worth of labor anyway,” Samu calls out from the driver’s seat. “Put him to work in the sun!”

“Shut up!” Atsumu growls. “I said I’d make it up to ya!”

“Ya have to admit, a little farm work would do ya some—”

Samu falls silent at once with a sharp glance from Kita.

“Just come out next time, you two,” Kita says, turning back to Atsumu and Shouyou. “I’ll look forward to seeing you both then.”

“Yosh!!” Shouyou exclaims before bowing and waving goodbye. “Thank you, Kita-san!!”

“See ya later, then,” Atsumu says with a smile.

After a final wave, Kita and Samu drive off. Atsumu turns to unlock the door to his apartment complex.

“It’s still only ten,” Atsumu tells Shouyou as he holds the door open for him. “Didja wanna stay a bit?”

“Course,” Shouyou replies, walking in. They get in the elevator and Atsumu punches the number for their way up.

“Had fun today?” Atsumu asks. Leaning against the elevator wall, he looms over Shouyou and smiles down at him.

“Mhmm!” Shouyou nods. “Kita-san is so cool! It was fun talking to him.”

Atsumu chuckles and lifts a hand to brush his knuckles over Shouyou’s cheek.

“Good. I’m glad.”

Shouyou grins and leans into his touch. It makes Atsumu so happy to see Shouyou so genuinely content like this. If he could take mental pictures, he’d be filling his film rolls to the brim with every one of these moments.

Shouyou seems to sense his thoughts. His eyes lock onto Atsumu’s, holding his gaze. Reaching out, he grabs onto Atsumu’s jacket and wets his lips.

The elevator doors swing open. Shouyou backs out into the hallway, tugging Atsumu forward as he goes. He doesn’t stop until his back touches the door to Atsumu’s apartment, until Atsumu’s elbow is pressed against the wall next to him. The darkening amber of his eyes causes Atsumu’s breath to hitch. The air grows warm and heavy between them. Whatever small amount of sake they had at the restaurant, it certainly pales in comparison to how intoxicated Atsumu feels now.

All other thoughts leave his mind. Cupping Shouyou by the jaw, Atsumu leans in and presses his open mouth to his.

It takes him a while of fumbling with his keys while Shouyou hangs onto his neck before Atsumu finally unlocks his door and pulls Shouyou inside. Much quicker is their route to the bedroom, wherein Atsumu scoops Shouyou up in his arms with ease and clumsily navigates a path through the living room.

Plopping him down on his bed, Atsumu pauses, his nose a few inches away from Shouyou’s.

“No practice tomorrow,” he murmurs. As if to prove his point that they can take their time, he slows his pace and dips down for a deeper but gentler kiss. Shouyou breathes him in and wraps his arms around Atsumu’s shoulders.

“No practice tomorrow,” Shouyou repeats, smiling against Atsumu’s lips as he pulls him closer.

Shouyou is achingly beautiful in every way. It takes everything in Atsumu not to come apart when Shouyou runs a finger down his spine and folds his legs around Atsumu’s hips until they drop and he finds himself up against Shouyou’s matching hardness.

Going slow be damned. Shouyou always has a way of making Atsumu impatient. Before long, clothes are shed and sheets are wrinkled. Shouyou’s grip on him never loosens until the very end. After they are spent, Atsumu rolls onto his back dragging Shouyou with him and wraps them both under his blanket. Together, they fall asleep to the sound of their deep, steady breathing.

The first time Shouyou sleeps over happens by accident.

About a month into their relationship, they had come back from an izakaya after having a few drinks and ended up cuddling in bed while chatting about volleyball and life. Before either of them had realized it, they’d already talked themselves past midnight and were too exhausted to do the whole *Good night, I’ll see you tomorrow* thing. Atsumu had told Shouyou he was free to stay over if he likes, and so he had.

From that day forward, even though Shouyou doesn’t sleep over every single night, or even every single week, there is always a spare toothbrush in Atsumu’s bathroom just for him. Occasionally, a sweater one size too small pops up in his laundry. The kitchen cupboards begin to fill with ingredients and snacks from two people’s diets. Before long, Shouyou more or less starts living here part-time. There’s no conversation or plan to it; it just happens, the same way Shouyou had effortlessly carved his way into Atsumu’s life seven years ago and lingered in his mind ever since.

Presently, Atsumu opens his eyes and is once again treated to a peaceful albeit sideways view of Shouyou sleeping with his cheek pressed up against his pillow. The sight of him as always makes him smile, and he reaches a hand out to brush a lock of ginger hair aside from Shouyou’s forehead.

They’ve been dating for a little over four months now. Shouyou already spends half his time when they’re not doing volleyball stuff here. They spend almost every part of their daily lives together. How soon is too soon?

Atsumu moves his hand and slides his arm down to rest upon Shouyou’s bare shoulders. Shouyou (bless his soul) remains asleep.

Would it be selfish for him to ask? It's not like they've ever followed the same conventions or standards as other couples do, and he's sure neither him and Shouyou could care less about what a 'normal pace' is anyway, but somehow, asking to move in together officially still feels like a big step. He's not sure why.

Shouyou wrinkles his nose, then yawns. He gives a few bleary blink of his eyes before opening them halfway. Atsumu's heart squeezes. It's adorable.

"Mornin,'" Atsumu says in a low voice.

"Hi," Shouyou greets back.

It could be like this every morning, everyday, with no end in sight.

What happened to no honeymoon period, huh? a voice that sounds suspiciously like Samu's suddenly speaks up in his mind.

Atsumu tries not to scowl outwardly, but even as Samu's voice enters his thoughts, his mind becomes suddenly clear.

Yeah, that's exactly it, Samu, he thinks. It's *because* the honeymoon period doesn't exist that he doesn't need to ask Shouyou outright. He and Shouyou love each other, there's no doubt about that. Even after four-plus months, Atsumu is still just as smitten with Shouyou as he was after their first match all those years ago and, if possible, even more now. They'll progress naturally the way they will. There's no need to put start dates or end dates on anything because everyday is like a 'honeymoon phase'. That's the beauty of it all.

And besides, Shouyou's own apartment lease isn't up yet. Atsumu is sure that by then, things will work itself out the way they should. No need to worry about it now.

Something in his face must show despite his efforts to remain impassive because after a moment, Shouyou raises an eyebrow and asks "What're you thinking about?"

Atsumu smiles and pulls him closer. "Nothin'. Just thinkin' about how much I love waking up to you next to me."

Shouyou lets out a cute little chuckle as Atsumu moves forward for a kiss. "You say that every time I sleep over."

"Cause it's true," Atsumu mutters against his lips. Shouyou opens his mouth and rolls over onto Atsumu's chest.

It's a slow and sleepy kiss. Atsumu relaxes his jaw as Shouyou's tongue pushes its way in, taking its sweet time to circle back before doing it again. Atsumu can't get enough of him.

"Whaddya want for breakfast?" Shouyou asks after a minute, pulling back to look down at him.

"You," Atsumu replies without hesitation.

“Tsumu...” Shouyou laughs as Atsumu lifts his head up to try and kiss him again.

“Are you objectin’?”

“Nooo...” Shouyou says, leaning in to oblige him with another kiss. “Just— maybe later.”

Atsumu knows he’s right and it’d be sensible to get up and do something else for the day, but he couldn’t help but tease him anyway.

“Mmkay. What do you want?” Atsumu asks. “Wanna cook or go out?”

Shouyou thinks about it for a second, then: “I’ll make some eggs!”

Untangling himself from Atsumu’s arms, he leaps out of bed and starts putting his clothes on.

“There’s natto and leftover rice in the fridge,” Atsumu tells him. Ingredients he makes certain to have a lot of on hand now that Shouyou stays over so often.

“Got it,” he replies before heading out of the bedroom.

A few moments later, Atsumu hears the bathroom sink running water as Shouyou brushes his teeth. He supposes he ought to get dressed too.

The smell of eggs frying on a pan fills his senses when Atsumu emerges from the bedroom. Walking up to Shouyou from behind, Atsumu wraps an arm around his waist and plants a kiss on the crown of his head.

“Want me to heat up the rice?” Atsumu asks.

“Yeah, could you?”

“On it.”

Quiet mornings like these are the best. It’s nothing more than preparing breakfast together, but as Atsumu scoops out two bowls of rice to microwave, he can’t help but think it’s the greatest feeling in the world to be able to share that with Shouyou.

Once the bowls of rice and natto are ready, Shouyou slides two over-easy eggs onto Atsumu’s bowl, then cracks another raw one over his own and pours in a generous serving of soy sauce to top it off.

“Mmm, ya always know how to cook mine just right,” Atsumu says, ruffling Shouyou’s hair. The two of them take their bowls and go sit down on the couch.

“Itadakimasu!!”

The eggs, though simple, are cooked exactly to his liking. They both chew their food in utter bliss. They’ve got each other’s habits down by heart. He loves when eggs are over-easy and Shouyou’s favorite dish ever is Tamago Kake Gohan, often with natto for good measure. Their preferences, and by extension, the way they fit together, make everything easy.

Shouyou is easy to love; that's all there is to it.

Halfway through their meal, Shouyou's phone rings. Shouyou pauses his eating and cranes his neck around to look at it. His face brightens.

"It's Heitor!" he exclaims, picking his phone up from beside him on the couch. "I wonder what he's up to."

With a quick glance at Atsumu, he swipes to answer the FaceTime call.

"Alô?"

"Alô, Shoyo?!"

"Heitor! Nice!! Como vão as coisas?"

"Vão bem! E ai?"

"Bem, também!"

As they continue to jabber on in Portuguese, Atsumu listens to the exchange in silence, not understanding a word beyond the initial greetings. He slows down his chewing so that he's less disruptive while they talk.

"O que vocês estão fazendo acordados tão tarde?" he hears Shouyou ask.

Heitor replies and continues speaking in rapid Portuguese. Shouyou answers as best as he can, though Atsumu can tell some of the words sound a bit clumsy on his lips. He's probably gotten rustier over the last few months, which makes sense. Atsumu catches a few random words in English here and there, presumably because they know Shouyou's vocabulary might still be limited. From what he can gather based on the tone in their voices and occasional English, it sounds like they are expressing how long it's been since they've last talked or seen each other.

In the middle of one of Nice's sentences however, Shouyou gasps and exclaims with delight, startling Atsumu and causing him to almost drop his bowl of rice.

"Oh, wow!! That's awesome!" he cries out in Japanese, forgetting himself completely in the heat of excitement. "I mean— *Que legal!*"

"Hm?" Atsumu looks over at him and tilts his head in confusion as Shouyou asks a follow up question.

"Oh! Uhh— Wait!" he quickly inserts, turning his phone just enough to catch both him and Atsumu in the frame. "*Este é Atsumu!*"

Caught off guard by this sudden introduction, Atsumu does his best to sit up and rearrange himself, holding up a hand to give them an awkward wave. Inside the screen, two drop-dead gorgeous people are sitting together on a couch in what looks like a fairly colorful room in casual nighttime lighting.

“*Olá!*” they say, waving up at Atsumu.

“*Olá,*” Atsumu tries to echo back, hoping he isn’t butchering such a simple word too badly. His English isn’t the best either but he tries anyway to ask, “ Umm, *how’re you?* ”

“*Good, good!*” they reply. Then turning to Shouyou, they ask, “*Seu amigo?*”

“Ah— heh heh...” Shouyou chuckles sheepishly, rubbing the back of his head. “*Namorado.*”

Nice lets out a sweet gushing noise at this word and beams at both of them. “*Ele é tão bonito quanto você!*”

“*Sim!*” Shouyou laughs. He turns to Atsumu and grins. “Hee. I told them you’re my boyfriend and they said you’re as handsome as me.”

“Oh.” Atsumu’s brain short circuits. *Holy shit holy shit Shouyou just introduced me as the* boyfriend .

Squeezing himself closer against Shouyou’s shoulders, he leans further into the frame and says, “Noooo, Shouyou’s way more handsome!”

Shouyou translates these words in broken Portuguese for their benefit, then adds, “*Não é verdade.*”

Heitor and Nice laugh and make some more jokes, possibly at Atsumu’s expense, or maybe Shouyou’s, but it doesn’t really matter. It’s really neat to be able to meet Shouyou’s partner in Brazil and he couldn’t be more grateful for the opportunity and this moment.

After a few moments, Shouyou changes the subject and asks them a question.

“Oh, right!” he whips around to Atsumu, as though remembering something. “They were just saying earlier that Nice is pregnant again! That’s child number three!”

“Ohhh, wow!” Atsumu nods, now understanding Shouyou’s initial outburst.

“*Congratulations!*” he tells them in English.

“*Thank you, thank you!*”

The three of them continue to converse in Portuguese. Atsumu pulls away and out of the frame to allow them space to talk and catch up. In the meantime, he collects their mostly empty bowls and returns to the kitchen to do the dishes.

Once he’s done, he decides to occupy himself with some Mario Kart while Shouyou is still on call. Taking a seat on the floor, he leans back against Shouyou’s legs and starts up the game.

In the middle of his fourth round, he starts hearing the flow of the conversation dwindle to an end. Based on the random Japanese tics Shouyou includes in his speech as he talks himself into saying the next few phrases properly, Atsumu guesses that he’s expressing how excited

he is to see them again. Then, with a final shared “*Tchau!*” Shouyou hangs up and sinks back into the couch with a happy sigh.

“Had fun?” Atsumu asks with a smile.

“It’s so nice catching up with them,” he responds. Atsumu exits out of his current race and sets the controller on the coffee table.

“They seem really cool,” Atsumu tells him. “And they’re both *super* gorgeous.”

“Aren’t they?” Shouyou grins. “And a third kid! I’m so happy for them! And to think how I was there when they— Oh! Did I ever tell you how they got engaged?”

“I don’t think so, no.”

Ready to hear the tale, Atsumu’s twists around and rests his chin on Shouyou’s knee.

“So when we teamed up for my last tournament in Brazil, Heitor said to me at the beginning of our final game that if we won, he’d propose to Nice!”

“Oh, shit. No pressure.”

“Right? Like playing volleyball with your life on the line!”

“Huh…” Atsumu considers this for a moment. He imagines telling Samu that he’ll ask Shouyou to move in together if they win their last game of the season two weeks from now. The idea fills him with a strange thrill. “Ya know, that’s not a bad idea. It’s like a self-motivator. A way to kick yer own ass whether ya win or lose.”

“I thought he was pretty brave,” Shouyou says in an awed voice, “‘cause I’d never thought of it before! I’m *always* motivated to win.”

Atsumu smiles and pushes himself up so he can give Shouyou a swift kiss on the lips. “I know ya are. And that’s why I love you so much.”

Shouyou grins sheepishly, then continues.

“So then of course, we’re both super fired up and eager to win. Things were looking really good for us at first too, because we started on the wind’s good side of the court and racked up a ton of points! But then, it turns out the guys we were up against had it all planned out. After our first two sets, they decided to *let* us have the good side first so that at the very, very end, they could be the ones starting on the good side. They did all that just to make sure *they’d* have the advantage before the finish line!”

“Whaaaaat. Beach volleyball is *intense* .”

“*Right?*” Shouyou emphasizes, growing more and more excited from his own story.

“But wait, that means ya both lost?” Atsumu asks, confused. “Didn’t you say Heitor promised himself he’d—?”

“Yep! He was definitely a bit disappointed in himself and even apologized to me too... but then! When Nice came up to us, he started apologizing to her too, saying all this stuff about how he promises he’ll work harder and all, but before he could finish, guess what happened? Nice predicted what he was going to say, *and then she proposed to him !*”

Atsumu lets out a low whistle. “Wow. Now that’s a helluva woman.”

Shouyou laughs. “Definitely. And of course, he said yes.”

“No kiddin’,” Atsumu says. “He’d be an idiot not to.”

“Their wedding was beautiful— and it was the first friend-wedding I’ve ever been to,” Shouyou continues with far-off nostalgia in his eyes.

Atsumu watches as Shouyou loses himself in the memory for a moment. Whenever he falls into a spell of reminiscence like this, Shouyou’s face seems to take on this ethereal and transient quality. It’s beautiful and sweet and makes Atsumu himself feel homesick for places he’s never known. Out of nowhere, a strong burning desire to understand, to catch a glimpse of all the other lives Shouyou has lived, to be even closer to him, fires up in his chest. There’s still a lot he doesn’t know about Shouyou.

“That must’ve been special,” Atsumu says softly.

“Yeah... Yeah, it was.” The corner of Shouyou’s lips raise as he absentmindedly slides a hand through Atsumu’s hair. It feels nice and cozy; Atsumu would wag his tail if he had one.

“Anyways!” Shouyou beams, coming back out of his reverie. “I can’t wait to meet their kids!”

“I hope I can meet all of them someday,” Atsumu says.

“Soon,” Shouyou tells him, bringing a hand up to stroke along Atsumu’s jaw. “Maybe this summer, even.”

Atsumu smiles. “Mmkay.”

It sounds like a promise. Atsumu wants to hold onto it.

“Wait... it’s already March. Shouldn’t we start looking into flights?” Atsumu asks.

“Oh! Well, we still have time,” Shouyou assured him. “A lot of flight deals come up about two months beforehand. I can always keep an eye on it though!”

“Sounds good.”

“Yep, I was thinking of looking out for August or September flights, before next season picks up.”

“Shit, yeah, and we have the Olympics to think about too...” Atsumu trails off, frowning as he considers their overall timeline. There isn’t going to be a lot of room for breaks, let alone

vacations.

Shouyou suddenly sits up at the mention of the Olympics, fully alert and serious.

“Speaking of the Olympics, we need to do our daily exercises today!”

“Right, right.”

Atsumu lets out a great exhale and stands up so he can stretch out his arms and torso. He reaches a hand out to Shouyou, who takes it, and pulls him up off the couch.

“Remember, it’s Sunday, so let’s take it easy, ‘kay?” Atsumu says, clapping Shouyou on the back. He can almost feel Kita’s eyes looking on with approval at these words. “Can’t hurt ourselves or get sick before our last few games.”

“I know, I know.” Shouyou walks past him excitedly back towards the bedroom, eager to get dressed and hit the gym. “We’ll work out and practice for a few hours, then have dinner at Samu’s!”

Atsumu follows him, chuckling to himself as Shouyou starts singing into some silly song about beef while he changes (*“Niiku, niku, niku! We gotta eat our niku!”*).

Their final volleyball match ends on a high note. They close out the season in first place, winning championships for the second year in the running. To top it all off, Atsumu receives both the best setter and best server award — (*“To nobody’s surprise!”* says Shouyou), although Samu makes some joke about how *‘it’s probably ‘cos Tobio-kun’s in Italy’*, completely ignoring the fact that Atsumu got the best server award last year too. (*Yeah, who’s the happier twin, huh?*)

Outside, the first hints of spring finally begin to liven up the city. Whatever icy chill that had been clinging to the air melts away, replaced overnight by a warmer breeze. The cherry blossoms are almost in bloom, blue skies full of promise and new beginnings.

Being the volleyball nerds that they are, a couple members on the team celebrate their victory and the nicer weather the only way they know how: by playing even more volleyball. Now that their season is over, Shouyou convinces Bokkun and Omi-kun to incorporate the occasional beach volleyball into their training regime for the Olympics (—not that Bokkun needed any convincing; it was all Sakusa who had to be goaded, mostly by Atsumu’s snide remarks that he was probably too afraid to look like an idiot when he eats the sand).

Inunaki and Adria Tomas, out of curiosity, end up joining their first outing. Shouyou explains some of the beach-specific rules on the car ride there. Atsumu tries his best to listen but is thoroughly distracted by the dri-fit his boyfriend is wearing. It hugs Shouyou’s arms in all the right places and its dark color makes his entire body appear all the more sleeker.

Indeed, when Shouyou had first come out of his apartment that morning, Atsumu's throat dried up fast and his brain short circuited. Beach volleyball is better than indoor volleyball, he decided at once. It's really such a shame that dri-fit isn't needed during their regular practice sessions, though it's probably for the best. It's also a hell a good thing he ain't driving today.

Once they arrive, they head out to one of the nets by the shore and start setting up and applying sunscreen on themselves. Since they have six people present, Shouyou suggests they switch off between rounds of 2-on-2's. Inunaki and Adriaah decide to sit the first one out, leaving Atsumu and Shouyou to team up against Bokkun and Omi-kun. Excited to start, Atsumu gives Shouyou a double handed high five, then sprints across the beach to take his place on the other side of the net.

"Is it fair to let them be a team?" Omi-kun frowns, gazing skeptically at Atsumu and Shouyou while he continues stretching his arms. "They're dating."

"It's okay, Omi-san!!" Shouyou reassures him, taking his place by Atsumu's side. "That's why we're switching off! You can be my partner next!"

"Greeaat. Looking forward to it," he deadpans in response, looking as enthused as a dead fish.

"Oi! Anyone would be lucky to pair up with Shouyou!" Atsumu says, pointing at Sakusa with the volleyball in his hand. "Just wait. I'll be servin' up sand to yer face!"

Omi-kun snorts. "I'd like to see you try."

"You will!" Atsumu shouts before walking up to the boundary line for his serve.

Of course, because the gods always seem to enjoy giving Atsumu a hard time (most likely for testing them so often), Atsumu is the one who eats sand first.

"Ow— *FUCK*," he curses, spitting the unpleasant and grainy mess out from his mouth. He had dived for a ball that Bokuto had sent — and really, after years of playing with Bokkun, Atsumu should've *definitely* seen that feint coming — and found himself falling face-first to the ground. Somewhere along the way, his foot had been absorbed by the sand and sucked in, causing whatever sense of balance he usually has on the court to fly out into the ocean.

"*The sand EATS you!!*" he squawks, horrified as he stares at the ground before him. He can hear the rest of the team laughing around him. "It's like a monster! It just grabbed my ankle!"

"It does that sometimes," Shouyou laughs, reaching a hand out to help him up. "You'll get used to it. Promise."

"You're the *real* monster," Atsumu says in an awed voice as he gazes up at Shouyou. Now that he's experiencing the sand for himself, it's like he's suddenly seeing Shouyou in a new light. This isn't just the little crow from Karasuno who chases the high of volleyball like it's grub. This is truly *Ninja Shouyou*, the beast full of unexpected surprises who was crazy enough to travel all the way to Brazil to train for two years on the beach.

“It’s amazing how incredible you are,” he breathes, taking his hand.

Shouyou merely grins and wraps an arm around his shoulder so he can pull him up.

“I love you, by the way, have I told you that?” Atsumu murmurs. He’s sure everyone can see the expression on his face right now — the kind of soppy and gross expression that would make Samu gag — but he can’t be bothered to hide it. Shouyou is the hottest man ever and he’s dating him. It’s awesome.

“Tsum-Tsum!!” Bokuto calls out, interrupting their moment. (*God, his voice is loud.*) “Give us the ball! It’s our serve!!”

“Yeah, quit dawdling, you lovebirds,” Adria adds.

“Yeah, yeah,” Atsumu grumbles, dusting himself off before grabbing the ball and throwing it over the net towards Bokuto. “I hope all of ya eat dirt!”

Unfortunately for Atsumu, neither Sakusa nor Bokuto ever fall face-first into the sand. Bokuto nearly slips once, but he quickly recovers like the abnormally sure-footed guy he is. Omi-kun, on the other hand, is simply too careful and deliberate with all his movements. Atsumu can see the gears in his head turning as he attempts to calculate the wind driftage before setting the ball to Bokkun. Atsumu himself has a tricky time tossing the ball. The first three tries end in huge frustrating failures, with Shouyou telling him *Don’t mind!* and offering some advice for how to bend to the ways of the wind. Bokkun eats up every word out of Shouyou’s mouth with an awed and excited look on his face while Omi-kun’s scowl simply deepens in thought.

Before any of them can even begin to understand the true nature of the wind, Shouyou tells them it’s time to switch sides.

“Beach volleyball is *super cool!*” Bokuto declares, both of his fists punching the air. “I can’t believe you did this for two years, Hinata!!”

“Oh!!” Shouyou reacts, his eyes becoming large and round as he’s thrilled to be praised by Bokkun at all. “Thank you, Bokuto-san!!”

“I can see now how Brazil has made you as a player,” Bokuto continues. He pauses in his tracks then lights up, an idea hitting him. “Maybe if we all train together on the beach for the whole summer, we’ll also improve at ten times the speed as normal!”

“That’s not how it works,” Sakusa mutters. Bokuto ignores him, or perhaps he couldn’t hear — he and Shouyou are now bouncing up and down on the sand in agreement after all.

Atsumu smirks as he watches them. They’ve been so focused on winning the past season as a team that it’s been a while since he’s felt this exhilarating, competitive spirit among the four of them. It feels good. Invigorating. He can’t wait for the Olympics.

It takes a while for the three of them to adjust to outdoor beach conditions, but after a few more turns, they start to get the hang of things.

With the advantage of Shouyou on his side, he and Atsumu win the first two sets. The two of them high five once again as Inunaki announces their win in a bored voice. When Atsumu turns around to retrieve his water bottle, he finds himself face to face with Sakusa, who's now staring intensely down at Shouyou with a serious expression.

"You said we would pair up next, right?" Omi-kun asks him. "I need to work on my balance. And tossing."

"Whoa, wait a minute," Atsumu interjects, stretching his arms out to block Shouyou's form. "If ya wanna improve on tossin', wouldn't ya ask to partner with me?"

Sakusa spares him one glance of disgust before saying, "No."

"What?!" Atsumu squawks, offended. "Don't forget yer talkin' to the man who won Best Setter of the year!"

"Oh no," Inunaki says, completely ignoring Atsumu. "You got Omi started on something, Hinata. Now he's never gonna quit."

"Ha!" Bokuto jumps in with a laugh. "That makes Hinata sound like a drug!"

Sakusa scowls. "There's nothing addictive about this scenario. And even if there was, Hinata wouldn't be the substance."

"It's okay, you can admit you're addicted to bettering yourself in volleyball," Adria adds.

In the midst of all this, Atsumu's quip about being the best setter to partner with lies forgotten. He sighs audibly and mutters, "I really did take ya for granted, Aran-kun."

Somewhere in Tokyo, he imagines Aran sneezing and chuckles to himself.

"Alright, it's decided then," Inunaki calls out after a few moments. "Adria and I will play with Hinata and Sakusa next. Atsumu, keep score. Bokuto— keep him company."

"Whaa—?"

But before Atsumu can protest, Bokuto pounces on him and hooks an arm around his shoulder.

"Looks like it's you and me again!" he yells cheerfully.

"Whoopee," Atsumu intones in a sullen voice. "Hope Omi-kun eats sand this time."

The two of them take a seat by the side of the court. Now that Atsumu is officially on the spectator side, he realizes it will be a laugh watching Inunaki, a libero, play all different sorts of roles on the beach. Adria serves first. He puts a finger up to the sky, gauging the strength and direction of the wind, before stepping a few paces back for the run-up and going for it.

"Hey, Tsum-Tsum," Bokkun says, looking unusually thoughtful as he watches the game. "Have you ever thought about going abroad?"

“Huh?” Atsumu whips around to look at him. The question seems to have come out of nowhere. “What, like on vacation?”

“When I was young, I thought it would be cool to play volleyball for Poland or Brazil,” Bokuto continues. His fingers are absentmindedly tracing circles around in the sand. The reason for this being on Bokuto’s mind suddenly makes sense to Atsumu. “And Hinata sort of had a taste of that, but lucky Ushiwaka got to go for *real*!”

Atsumu raises a brow. He was under the impression that Bokuto had received at least one call by the end of last season but that he didn’t take them, given that he is clearly still around. “Didn’t ya get scouted?”

Bokuto frowns, though it looks more like a pout. “Not by Poland. But I did just get an offer from France—”

“Whoa, congrats!” Atsumu says. “They’re not doing too bad these days. Are ya gonna go for it?”

Before Bokuto can respond, a voice interrupts them from the net.

“Oi, Miya. Are you paying attention?” comes Omi-kun’s voice.

“Tsumu!! We got the first point!” Shouyou exclaims.

“Huh?” Atsumu turns back to them. “Oh, right. I’ll make note of it!”

He pulls out his phone and quickly types in their two teams and the current score. Bokuto cheers for them and Atsumu watches as Shouyou shakes the sand off the ball and prepares for his serve.

As Shouyou tosses the ball into the air and jumps up to meet it, Bokuto lets out a mild hum beside him.

“Would *you* go?” he asks.

“Wha—?” It takes Atsumu a few seconds to remember what Bokkun is replying to. “Oh — er — to France? It seems nice, but I dunno—”

“Not France, necessarily,” Bokkun amends. “I mean, anywhere.”

“Well...” Atsumu’s eyes trail back to Shouyou. He’s diving for the ball while Omi-kun prepares himself to follow up with a set. In all honesty, it’s a no, though he’d never given much thought to it or anything in the first place. Visiting abroad sounds fantastic, of course, but he’s never actually considered what it would be like to suddenly live in a totally different country long term. Now that he thinks about it, he doesn’t know why it’s always been a no-brainer. “Prob’ly not.”

“Did you get called up, too?” Bokkun asks.

“Yeah,” Atsumu replies. There was the one from Bulgaria last year, and then the U.S. this past year. “Just a few here and there. I said no, obviously.”

“Why ‘obviously’?”

“‘Cause I’m here, aren’t I?”

“No, no, no — what was obvious about it?”

“What?”

A cheer arises from Inunaki and Adria’s side. Atsumu jots down their point.

“What was obvious about saying no,” Bokkun clarifies, raising his eyebrows.

“I didn’t— well—” Atsumu frowns. He really hadn’t meant to say that his choice to stay had been obvious, but now that Bokkun brings it up, he supposes it’s not wholly inaccurate either. Bokkun sure does have a way with carrying nonlinear conversations. “Dunno... I guess I never really thought about leavin’ Japan.”

It isn’t something he needs to think about, nor is it something he’s unsure of either. He’s not particularly *that* patriotic either. Perhaps because he’d grown up being so competitive with Samu, the idea of going pro abroad had just never occurred to him. Not even when he first heard word of Shouyou embarking on his self-development journey to Brazil.

“Huh? Really? Why not?” Bokkun asks. “Is it ‘cos of family?”

Atsumu considers for a moment, then shrugs. He supposes the desire simply never appealed directly to him.

“Dunno.”

“Point!” he hears Shouyou shout. He quickly bumps the number under ‘*Sakusa / Hinata*’ on his phone.

The two of them fall silent as they continue watching the game. Inunaki falls face first in the sand after trying to dive for the ball, most likely attempting one of his usual amazing libero saves, except, as expected, it doesn’t quite translate as well. Omi-kun stares between him and the rest of the court with a concentrated look as though he’s trying to solve a difficult math problem. The look on his face alone gives Atsumu hives. His fingers itch with a sudden need to get back on the court. It ain’t fair. Omi-kun gets extra practice ahead of him with Shouyou. Atsumu refuses to fall behind.

After the point goes to Shouyou and Omi-kun once again, Atsumu suddenly remembers that Bokkun hadn’t finished telling him about France.

“So are ya going or not?” he asks, turning to look at Bokuto. “Ya never said.”

“Oh! Yeah!” Bokkun replies.

“Ya are??”

“Oh! No.”

“Wha—?” Atsumu furrows his brows, confused. “So which is it?”

“I meant: ‘*Oh, yeah! No,*’” Bokkun explains, with feeling. “No... The timing just doesn’t feel right.”

“Timing?” Atsumu laughs. “Is that what yer basin’ these decisions on?”

“Sorta?” Bokuto tilts his head, looking confused himself. “I was going back and forth in my head but so far, everything I’m getting from the universe makes going abroad feel wrong. It could change in the future, of course! Who knows? But right now, it doesn’t feel right. I think, for now... I’m happy where I am.”

“Happy,” Atsumu repeats, turning the word over in his head. “*Happy...*”

His eyes shift back to the game, snapping easily into place onto one particular head of bright orange hair. Atsumu’s lips curl. Yeah, he can understand what Bokkun is saying. He’s happy where he is now. Sure, he can always improve and get better until he’s really one of the best men’s volleyball players ever in Japan, but at this point, what would he have to gain when he already feels like he’s at the top of the world?

Noticing where Atsumu’s attention has gone, Bokkun scrutinizes him thoughtfully and says, “Although I’m sure if you ever *did* want to go abroad, Hinata will understand!”

“What?” Atsumu turns back to him. “Oh— well, yeah, I s’pose he would. I really haven’t even thought about leavin’ though. My gran would prob’ly be the saddest actually.”

Bokuto laughs. “Mine too!”

“*Aaaaaaughh!*” Shouyou’s voice calls out from the net. Atsumu looks up and has to suppress a laugh. He’s bent over with his hands and knees in the sand, apologizing profusely to Omi-kun for fumbling the last toss. Omi-kun doesn’t seem too fussed though, but he seems reluctant to help him up, as that involves touching another human being. Guess that’s a point for *Inunaki / Tomas.*’

Atsumu and Bokkun spend the rest of the game watching and cheering both teams on. In the end, Shouyou and Omi-kun win (— though Atsumu is quick to note that as a team, he and Shouyou scored higher by two points).

Having played two rounds and possessing a greater advantage by default of his experience in Brazil, Shouyou decides to sit out for the next game and sends Atsumu into the fray.

“You’ve been adjusting to the environment really fast!” Shouyou tells him as he starts pushing Atsumu forward into the sandy court. “I was watching you closely during our first round.”

It's a simple compliment but it fills Atsumu with a surge of pleasure. His cheeks flush and he looks away from the rest of the team — he already gives them enough fodder to use against him as it is without becoming a red-faced mess in front of them — and focuses instead of Shouyou.

“R-really?” he stammers. Internally, he cringes at how high his voice sounds.

“Yeah!” Shouyou beams, giving him a thumbs up.

Atsumu can't help himself. Reaching out, he tugs on Shouyou's wrist and pulls him in, just close enough to whisper in his ear, “We'll circle back to this later.”

Shouyou gives him an enigmatic smile when Atsumu loosens his grip and backs away. Omi-kun gives him a disgusted expression as he walks towards the net with a stupid grin on his face. So much for not giving the team more fodder.

Still determined to better himself at beach volleyball, Omi-kun silently refuses to leave the court. The others get the message quick, so Bokuto and Adriaan pair up, leaving Atsumu no choice but to partner with his prickly ole porcupine of a teammate.

“Didn't you say you could teach us a thing or two as the ‘Best Setter in Japan’?” Omi-kun reminds him with a flat tone.

“SHUT UP, OMI-OMI.”

They play game after game for the rest of the afternoon, rotating and mixing teams every round. Indeed, Atsumu does find opportunities to give Omi-kun and Bokkun advice about setting. Atsumu starts to really grow accustomed to the wind and the sand. Coupled with the cry of seagulls and the crashing of waves, he finds himself shifting easily into the calm, meditative state of mind he's developed from all the yoga sessions with Shouyou by the beach. Gratitude, peace, going with the flow, becoming one with nature — all of them are practices that he's built into his very being, the way food converts to muscle converts to subconscious memories. So much of what he's learned now is Shouyou's influence. Atsumu makes a mental note to tell him later.

Exhausted and spent, the six of them finally call it a day before the sun starts to set. Atsumu and Bokuto collapse onto the sand with their arms outstretched, sighing happily. This is an important part of any volleyball activity that Atsumu has learned to love: the rewarding come-down at the end of a hard day's work when their bodies seek relaxation.

“I could go for some barbecue right now,” Bokkun mumbles, sounding dreamy and blissed out from a day of practice under the sun. “Niku-mon... I'm coming for you.”

“I wanna go to an all-you-can-eat buffet myself,” Atsumu drones, his mouth starting to water the second he mentions it. “Everything sounds so good right now.”

Atsumu stares up at the sky. A touch of purple has already begun to tinge its canvas. Out of nowhere, a wisp of orange pops into view— followed by the rest of Shouyou's upside down face.

“Hey, sleepyhead,” Shouoyu grins.

“Shouyou,” Atsumu breathes, a slow smile spreading across his face. “C’mere, beautiful.”

Reaching a hand up, he cups Shouyou’s cheek and pulls him down to meet him. His lips taste chapped and sunkissed — just the way he likes them.

“So tell me,” Atsumu murmurs, loosening his grip on Shouyou’s neck. “What were you sayin’ about watchin’ me earlier?”

“Mmm, just that...” Shouyou flips onto his back and rolls over until he’s pressed up against Atsumu’s chest. “Your skills translate over to beach so well, you’re always aware and thinking about all the moving pieces around you...”

Atsumu turns his head to him with a lazy smile. “Go on.”

“I like how attentive you are, how adaptable you are... the way your tongue sticks out a bit when you set... oh, and you look really good playing volleyball in a tank top and sunglasses.”

Atsumu lets out a quiet chuckle and slides a finger across Shouyou’s jaw. “Ya know... I think I could say the same about you.”

He leans in and is barely touching noses with Shouyou when he’s interrupted by a loud clearing of the throat.

“When you three have finished fooling around, you can help us load Inunaki’s car,” Sakusa’s voice speaks.

Shouyou pulls away and sits up, shouting, “Yes, Omi-san! Will do!” while Bokuto protests, “*Wha—? I wasn’t fooling around!*” from Atsumu’s other side.

Atsumu scowls as both Shouyou and Bokkun scramble up to their feet. If only Omi-kun could have left them alone for just another minute...

“C’mon, let’s help clean up,” Shouyou says, offering a hand to Atsumu. With great reluctance, he takes it and allows Shouyou to pull him up. Before he releases his hand, however, Shouyou squeezes his palm and winks, mouthing, *Later*, setting Atsumu’s indignation to rest.

“*Fine*,” Atsumu huffs, though he returns Shouyou’s smile with a dopey one of his own.

Later, Shouyou’s voice echoes in his mind. With all his earlier compliments about Atsumu replaying continuously like an audio tape through his head, Atsumu holds onto this last word, given in silence. They’re going to have future beach practice and many more opportunities to continue whatever is left unfinished. Shouyou is right; there is always later.

gold rush

Chapter Summary

Shouyou receives a call and contemplates life.

Shouyou looks at him and feels his heart pinch. He looks at him and thinks: *I don't want to lose you.*

Chapter Notes

i have written so much more beach volleyball than i had anticipated. also this fic is starting to develop a mind of its own. it's growing faster than i can control. i hope y'all don't mind the tsukki contents ^^;;

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

*

*

*And baby, I get mystified by how this city screams your name
And baby, I'm so terrified of if you ever walk away*

Waves crash upon the shore, the sand coarse beneath his feet. Focusing his mind on each individual grain, Shouyou breathes in the salty sea air and releases a long, drawn out sigh.

Slowly, his eyes open. The sigh and roar of the ocean fades, as does the bright beating sun. By his next breath, the rest of the beach disappears and his gray, faintly lit room comes into focus.

It had become habit quick when he first returned to Japan. Yoga on the beach, wherever he may be. Before Shouyou left Brazil, Lucio had advised him to make a list of all the parts of his life he wanted to keep and bring back to Sendai, things he'd want to practice even after

his surroundings would soon change. “Getting acquainted with a new country is one thing,” Lucio had said; reacquainting yourself with your homeland is another. It’s something the older man could say from personal experience. *Things do come back*. Now was his chance to stop any undesirable old habits, as well as implement some new regimes. He couldn’t fall back into the exact life he had before. He’s grown too much for that.

And so, when Shouyou returned, he was determined to keep up regular yoga practices, extra gym workouts, and maintain a constant visualization of *being* on the beach. Even though he’s committed the occasional slip out of his routine, he has generally been able to incorporate the most crucial parts of his life in Brazil into his life in Japan. It’s a balance in maintaining.

Presently, Shouyou brings his hands together in prayer and closes his eyes. Despite facing the cloudy light streaming in from his apartment window, his mind is still dwelling with clear skies and a scorching sun. One last breath: breathe in, then out. His eyes open.

Peace washes over him. (*Namaste.*)

His gaze shifts over to his clock. 9:06 AM. He has a little less than an hour before he has to leave. Rolling up his yoga mat, Shouyou stows it away behind his bedroom door and gets ready for a shower.

On his way to the bathroom, his phone, which had been silent during his yoga session, lights up. He glimpses about eight different notifications before it fades to black. Bundling his clothes under one arm, he picks his phone up for a quick scroll through.

Notification Center

Messages now

Tsumu 🦊
morning :)

- - - - -

Messages 8:46 AM

Tsukki~

Karasuno * 🌙 🌑 🏔️ 🌞

Get me a green tea.

Messages 8:30 AM

Yachi Hitoka

Karasuno * 🌙 🌑 🏔️ 🌞

*Oh! And I'll bring some snacks,
don't worry about me!*

Messages 8:30 AM

Yachi Hitoka

Karasuno ✨🌙🌑🏔️☀️

I'll do my best ^ _ ^"

Messages 8:23 AM

Yamaguchi Tadashi

Karasuno ✨🌙🌑🏔️☀️

Ahhh take it easy Yacchan! It's Saturday after all!

Messages 8:23 AM

Yamaguchi Tadashi

Karasuno ✨🌙🌑🏔️☀️

Yamaguchi emphasized "Eep! Sorry for the late response..."

Messages 8:23 AM

Yamaguchi Tadashi

Karasuno ✨🌙🌑🏔️☀️

Hey I'm going to Donki to pick up some drinks for the reunion, anyone else need anything?

Messages 2:41 AM

Yachi Hitoka

Karasuno ✨🌙🌑🏔️☀️

*Eep! Sorry for the late response!!
I'll be there around 4. Have to finish up a few things for work.*

Shouyou smiles as he skims through all of them. He makes a mental note to tell Tsukki off for being rude after his shower then opens Atsumu's message so he can respond to him first.

Morning tsumtsum :)

As far as routine back in Japan, post-MSBY, post-dating-Atsumu goes, Shouyou thinks he's got a pretty good one.

Today is his first real break in routine since ending the season.

Now that the volleyball season is over, Kageyama had apparently flown back from Italy a few nights ago and was staying in Sendai for a few weeks. The second Yamaguchi found out, he demanded a reunion, much to Tsukki's (reported) chagrin. Shouyou figures he ought to pay his family a visit as well and decided it was a good opportunity as any to stay there for a couple of days. He's also eager to see how Natsu has been doing on her team.

Once he's showered and clean, he scolds Tsukki (*'Is Yamaguchi just an errand boy to you???'*) then lets his first-ever teammates know that he'll be arriving at Yamaguchi's residence a little later than Yachi. The flight is only two hours, but on top of security, boarding, deboarding, and dropping his stuff off at his parents' place first, he'll probably be right on time for dinner.

Just when he finishes packing and is ready to go, his phone buzzes.

Messages now

Tsumu 🦊
here

Shouyou replies with a quick *'coming!'* before gathering his belongings, scanning his apartment for a final check, and heading out the door.

When he opens the car door to Osamu's truck, he climbs in to give Atsumu a quick kiss before lifting his suitcase up with him and stowing it in the backseat. After buckling his seatbelt, he turns and finds Atsumu handing him a brown paper bag.

"Samu made ya lunch," he tells him. Shouyou catches a whiff of grilled niku as he receives it gratefully.

"Yum! Tell him thanks!"

"Course. Although he said I owe him another week's worth of cleanin' but—" Atsumu huffs, shifting the gear to drive so he can pull out of the narrow roundabout. "For you? Worth it."

Shouyou's heart swells with appreciation. He knows the twins know what they mean to each other and what Atsumu means when he says he'd do anything for Shouyou. Sharing life with Atsumu and by proxy Osamu has made the past few months some of the happiest he's ever been. Reaching out a hand, he places his palm at Atsumu's neck and slides his fingers into his hair.

"I love you," he says simply. Atsumu shivers beneath his touch.

"O-oi! Ya gotta stop doing that when I'm drivin'!" He sputters, but he clutches onto Shouyou's wrist with a free hand to keep Shouyou's palm there all the same. After another

beat, Atsumu mutters under his breath, "Love you, too."

Shouyou's smile stretches into a wide grin. Atsumu's funny. And cute. And he's dating him. Life is awesome.

Forty minutes later, Atsumu exits the freeway. Shouyou leans an elbow against the window and thinks about his next destination. He hasn't been home for nearly a year. He wonders how much has changed. How much *he's* changed. It's funny how living away from the place he grew up in for a couple of years can really sand down the edges between him and Sendai. Things are always changing, he supposes; people just don't notice until they're away for a while.

His eyes shift back to Atsumu. Last chance to drink him in before his short trip. When Atsumu catches him staring, he smiles and grabs one of Shouyou's hands.

They pull up to the departure drop-off point upon entering the airport's driveway. Once Atsumu reaches the correct terminal, Shouyou unbuckles his seatbelt and turns to his boyfriend for a goodbye hug.

"I'm gonna miss you," Atsumu says, cradling Shouyou's face in his big hands. He plants a kiss on his forehead then wraps his arms around Shouyou in a vice-like grip.

"It's only for a few days," Shouyou smiles, relishing in the warmth beneath the crook of Atsumu's neck. He presses his lips to Atsumu's jawline above and rubs his back soothingly. "I'll be back in no time."

"Hmph. Samu keeps sayin' it'll do me some good to spend time away from you," Atsumu whines. "Says it's good for couples in general. Talkin' as if he's an expert. So stupid."

Shouyou laughs. "Maybe it's because he knows how big of a hug I'll be giving you once I get back."

Atsumu pulls back and ruffles Shouyou's hair. "A big hug, huh? How big are we talkin'?"

Shouyou flashes him a sly smile. "Hmm, definitely bigger than the amount I'll miss you."

Atsumu's expression softens as he stares at Shouyou. Something about it cleaves Shouyou's chest open, makes him want to continue laying himself bare before this man who so willingly places his heart in Shouyou's hands.

Tightening a fist in Atsumu's shirt, Shouyou pushes himself forward towards that open, dumbfounded mouth. It's a quick kiss, but when he pulls away, Atsumu looks breathless all the same.

"I'll see you soon," Shouyou says. Atsumu's heavy-lidded eyes open halfway as he tries to chase Shouyou's lips. "Don't let Bokuto-san and Omi-san slack off while I'm away!"

"Wouldn't dream of it," Atsumu assures. "And I'm sure they wouldn't either."

"Good, 'cos I'm not gonna slack off either," Shouyou grins.

Straightening up, he straps his backpack on and grabs his suitcase from the backseat.

“Text me when ya land, okay?” Atsumu rolls down the window as Shouyou slams the door shut behind him. “And tell Tobio-kun he’s a giant loser, from me.”

“Not if I tell him that from myself first,” Shouyou laughs. “I’ll call you later!”

“See ya, Shouyou.”

With one last wave, he turns and heads into the airport.

*

Just landed!! I finished a Portuguese kid's book on the plane. Tell Samu-san his onigiri was amazing as always. Miss you already <3

good to know!! i am also home myself. no promises on telling samu

miss you too.

*

He takes a taxi home after leaving Sendai airport.

For all his musings on not having visited in a long time, nothing is too entirely different. The weather is always a little chillier in the north, and there are a few buildings he spots on the ride home that he doesn’t recognize, but overall, Sendai is still Sendai.

“Tadaima!”

His mother appears in the hallway and greets him with a hug before Shouyou can step across the threshold of their genkan. Natsu, it turns out, is at practice, (even though she should be on break. Shouyou’s not sure whether to feel proud or indignant.)

His mother follows him to his old room while dropping casual remarks like how he hasn’t grown that much taller, how his haircut looks so much worse than before, and how starved he looks. Although Shouyou flusters and tries to stop her from poking his stomach, his whole heart fills with the comfort of home. Threaded through all these critical observations is his mother’s love and care for his well-being.

As he gets settled in his old bedroom and starts unpacking his luggage, he catches his mom up on the general happenings of life in Osaka, their victorious end of season results,

Atsumu's best setter and server awards, and a few random news pieces about the upcoming Olympics next year. She smiles as she listens, looking simply content that her son is home and sharing his stories with her.

All in all, it's good to be back.

"Hinata's here!"

Yamaguchi announces this to the rest of the house as he leads Shouyou down the hallway. When they enter the living room, Shouyou finds all his old teammates from his year waiting for him. There, by the TV, Kageyama is attempting to beat Tsukishima at Super Smash but failing pretty badly while Yachi watches them from the couch. Upon hearing them arrive, Tsukki, without looking away from the screen, speaks first.

"Great, time to leave."

"Ha, ha. Very funny, Tsukki," Yamaguchi chides, though he's trying not to laugh.

With a mischievous grin, Shouyou rushes up behind him, footsteps loud enough to startle Tsukki into pausing their current game and whipping around in anticipation of an attack.

"Not before I beat *you* at Smash!" Shouyou shouts.

Tsukki recoils and scrunches his nose. "Get in line. I'm about to demolish the King first."

"Hey!"

Tsukki turns to Kageyama with a pitying look. "This isn't even a debatable fact — you literally only have one life left."

Yep, Shouyou beams. *Not much has changed.*

Being back in Miyagi with old friends warms his heart: it is as though no time has passed.

They end up spending a good hour or so playing video games, during which Shouyou fails to beat Tsukki (except the one time, right before they stop for dinner). While they eat, they catch

each other up on a myriad of things — Sendai Frogs rising up the ranks towards Division 1, making fun of Kageyama for barely knowing any Italian, the way Yachi is constantly dogpiled under a heap of design work, how Yamaguchi's been exploring new skills at his current job — among many others. When Shouyou mentions that he's been playing beach volleyball with some of the MSBY guys as part of their training regime for the Olympics, Kageyama perks up.

"How long are you here for again?" he asks Shouyou.

"Until Friday. Why?" Shouyou replies with a sly smile. "Wanna play beach?"

Kageyama's game face says it all. "Yes. You're on."

"Monsters," Yamaguchi sighs, shaking his head. With a small frown, he adds, "But wait — Don't you need at least four people to play beach volleyball?"

"You do!" Shouyou affirms. As though by instinct, both him and Kageyama whip around to face Tsukki at the exact same time. Tsukki, who is mid-sip with his glass of kahlúa and milk held up to his lips, looks up in alarm and grimaces.

"Don't look at me," he says, avoiding their gazes. "I never signed up to spend extra time with you two."

By now, after three years of Tsukki downplaying every single thing he can possibly downplay, Shouyou knows this tactic well enough. If Tsukki truly believed and lived by everything that came out of his mouth, he would never have gone pro in the first place.

Leaning forward and setting his elbow on the table, Shouyou smirks and tells him: "You can say you're afraid of the sand, Tsukki, it's okay."

Tsukki still doesn't look at either of them, electing to take another sip of his drink instead.

"Why would I say something that wasn't true?"

"Cos you are!" Shouyou beams at him. "Afraid, I mean."

A vein throbs in Tsukki's temple. It's a good sign that Shouyou has hit the mark. Atsumu's goading smirk and narrowed eyes suddenly pop into his mind. Even now as Shouyou watches Tsukki struggle to find words to counter, his lips curl into a goading smirk of his own. He really does learn from the best.

"What," Tsukki forces out, his voice totally calm, "is so scary about little specks of dirt? — *Stop smiling at me like that!* "

But Shouyou can't help it. He'd love to see Tsukki try to play beach volleyball with him. Even Kageyama is sporting his creepy, serial killer grin.

"Come on," Shouyou urges. "I know you secretly love extra practice. And plus, you need to get to Division 1 so we can play together again someday!"

“No thanks,” Tsukki mumbles, though he looks a little less obstinate.

“Hey,” Shouyou continues. “Maybe you’ll get lucky and see Kageyama fall in the sand.”

“That only happened *once!*” Kageyama barks, indignant.

“Hmm, are you sure?” Shouyou asks, even though he knows Kageyama isn’t lying. The truth is, Kageyama had adjusted so quickly to beach it made him *mad*. No one should be allowed to be that good at anything. “I could’ve sworn it was at least a *couple* of times...”

“Once,” Kageyama reiterates.

Tsukki snorts. “You think you can coax me into playing with the possibility of seeing Kageyama struggle at volleyball for a change?”

Shouyou smiles sheepishly. “Well...”

“I’m in.”

“If you really— wait. What?”

“Tsukki says he’s in!” Yamaguchi repeats for him. Shouyou barely catches the familiar muttered “*Shut up, Yamaguchi*” before he leaps out of his chair with his arms up.

“Yay!!”

Kageyama merely grunts his approval.

“That’s three down,” Shouyou says. Turning to Yamaguchi, he asks, “Wanna be our fourth?”

Alarmed at the sudden request, Yamaguchi holds up his hands and shakes them, his eyes full of apprehension. “Oh no. Oh no, no, no, no, no. I am way out of practice. It wouldn’t be a fair game.”

“But Kunimi was out of practice too and he still came with us last time!”

“Sorry, Hinata...” Yamaguchi says. “I also have to work all week.”

“Hmm.” Shouyou frowns. He looks at Tsukki and an idea hits him. “Hey, if we invite Koganegawa and Kindaichi, it’ll be like our first training camp, Tsukki!”

“Great...”

“Except Kageyama will be there this time.”

“So, even worse.”

“*What?!*”

While Kageyama growls back at a smirking Tsukki, Shouyou receives a sudden, dull ache in his chest. *Atsumu was at that training camp with Kageyama too* he thinks, and he has an

unprompted urge to tell him about this conversation — not over text, but in person. Anything to see him laugh, smile, or react. If he were here with them, Atsumu would probably spread his arm over the back of his chair and gloatingly say that *Tobio-kun and I are improvin' this practice!* Shouyou can't help the small smile that spreads across his face and wonders what Atsumu is doing tonight, either alone in his apartment or having dinner with Osamu. Maybe he can quickly check his phone real quick...

"Hinata?" he hears Yamaguchi ask.

"Hm?" Shouyou looks at him, coming out of his daze. "What did you say? Sorry."

"We were wondering what day you wanted," Tsukki explains, looking displeased about having to repeat the question for the group.

"Oh! For beach?"

"Obviously."

"How about Wednesday?" he suggests. "Or Tuesday? Whichever day all of us can do."

"I vote Wednesday," Tsukki says at once. "It's my one day off from the museum so it's Wednesday or nothing from me"

"Sheesh," Shouyou whistles. "And to think you didn't even wanna come in the first place..."

"Shut up," Tsukki replies, looking away, his cheeks pink.

"It sounds like it'll be a fun time," Yachi says brightly from Tsukki's side, ever the voice of positivity.

"More beach volleyball!" Shouyou shouts, lifting his hands into the air again. But even in his excitement, he can't help wishing Atsumu could be there to play with them and perhaps tease Kageyama along with the rest of them. Shouyou wonders if Atsumu and Tsukki would get along. Given how disagreeable the two of them are individually, probably not. But who knows? Both have a knack of surprising Shouyou when he least expects it.

As his friends continue to talk and banter about volleyball and life, Shouyou listens while slipping in and out of thinking about Atsumu. Even though Atsumu has been such a big part of his life in recent years, it hits Shouyou in a way that hasn't before that his world is still so big and Atsumu hasn't had a chance to get to know all of it yet. But maybe all people like that: despite living in Osaka the last year and a half, Shouyou is only just starting to experience more of Atsumu's world too. There's so much of each other's life left to explore, both backwards from the past and forwards into the future. Shouyou really hopes they can continue to be part of each other's together for a long time.

After dinner, the five of them play a few more games and talk about their lives for a little longer. By ten o'clock, Tsukki and Yachi start yawning and getting sleepy. Now that they're adults, all of them agree that it's late enough to call it a night. Shouyou bids them all good night and tells Kageyama and Tsukki that he'll see them Wednesday.

When he arrives home, Natsu is already in bed. Despite wanting to check in on how her volleyball year has been, Shouyou feels a swell of pride that she's taking her health so seriously. *(Good for her!)*

That leaves Shouyou with nothing else to do but to shower and get ready for bed. Once he's finally under the sheets, he checks his phone and realizes he's missed about ten messages from Atsumu.

Notification Center

Messages 20 min ago

Tsumu 🦊
u still awake?

- - - - -

Messages 10:36 PM

Tsumu 🦊
*hmm guess ur still out with friends,
i'll wait a bit*

Messages 10:02 PM

Tsumu 🦊
hey just showered, u good to talk?

Messages 4:23 PM

Tsumu 🦊
*hope u have a good time tho :)
talk to u later <3*

Messages 4:23 PM

Tsumu 🦊
*abt to make dinner. for 1. it's
lonely without u :(*

Before Shouyou finishes scrolling through, he unlocks his phone and hits Facetime at once. After a single ring, Atsumu picks up.

"Hey," he says, his face filling up Shouyou's screen. Atsumu appears horizontal, bleary-eyed and lying on his pillow in the dark. Shouyou rolls onto his side and rests his head down to mirror him.

"Hi." He smiles. The slight pang of missing Atsumu returns in full force, even as seeing his face feels like a balm at the same time. "Sorry for calling so late."

“‘S fine. I'd rather see you before going to sleep.”

“Me too.”

They grin at each other lazily.

“How’s bein’ back? Didja have fun today?”

“Mmhmm, lots. It’s really good to see everyone.”

“Tha’s good.” A small yawn. “I’m sure they all missed you too.”

“They better! I haven’t gotten to talk to Natsu yet though... she was at practice when I stopped by at home and fell asleep before I came back.”

“Aw, that’s too bad. Guess you’ll see her in the mornin’.”

“Yeah. I’m playing beach volleyball with Kageyama and some Sendai friends this Wednesday though! I even got Tsukki to join!”

“That your tall glasses teammate? ‘Freak quick killer?’”

“Mmhmm.”

“Niiice. All I can really r’member about him is that Suna had fun playing him and Bokkun seems to like him a lot.”

“Heh heh... Tsukki would deny it until his death but I’m sure he feels the same way about both of them too.”

“Ya mentioned once that his team’s coming up on Div 1, huh?”

“Yeah, hopefully soon! I can’t wait to play him in a real game!”

“Same. I wanna see if he can kill *our* freak quick combo.”

“Ahh, don’t jinx it! He’ll really do it! He will!”

Atsumu laughs. The sound is like music to Shouyou’s ears. His chest aches with want; on any other regular day, Shouyou would be lying in those big arms, the two of them chatting as they fell asleep. He feels a different sort of home now on the phone, one that he hasn’t felt since he stepped out of Osamu’s truck. It’s weird. Sendai feels like home and he enjoys being back in it, but Atsumu feels like home too and he can’t wait to go back there either. Can home be two places at once?

Shouyou rolls over onto his other side and rests his cheek against the pillow.

“Tsumu?” he murmurs.

“Yeah?”

Shouyou yawns. “Come home with me to meet my friends in Sendai next time.”

Atsumu smiles.

“Sure. I’d love to.”

Shouyou grins and closes his eyes.

“Good. Can’t wait.”

“Looks like you’re about to knock out,” Atsumu says after a moment. “Should we call it a night?”

“No...” Shouyou mumbles. “I miss you.”

He hears the soft tinker of Atsumu’s chuckle. “Miss you too, Shou. Want me to stay on ‘til ya fall asleep?”

Shouyou nods without opening his eyes. “Yeah. You can talk about anything, if you want.”

“Mmkay,” Atsumu says. “Good night, then. Hmm, I could tell you about my day. Where should I start? — Oh, right. After you left, I drove home from the airport...”

Shouyou half-listens as Atsumu recounts the details of the afternoon. He’s not sure when he loses consciousness or whether Atsumu’s the one who ends the call, but after a long and tiring day of travel and hanging out with friends, Shouyou feels content drifting off with the deep timbre of Atsumu’s voice rambling away at his ear, as close as if he were lying there, breathing and falling asleep beside him.

Shouyou wakes bright and early on Wednesday morning. It’s a little too quiet and peaceful here without the whizz of cars driving by or the faint sounds of a neighbor cooking breakfast through thin apartment walls. The silence feels foreign to him now despite having grown up in this room for more than half of his life. He doesn’t think he can ever quite get used to it again.

Raising his arms above his head, Shouyou stretches his entire body out until his feet reach the edge of his mattress. He stares up at the ceiling, a wide grin spreading across his face.

Beach day, beach day, beach day~

He sends a text out to Atsumu asking if he’s awake. Five minutes pass. No response.

Guess not.

After hopping out of bed and getting ready for the day, Shouyou grabs his mat and steps outside for some yoga.

It's weird doing yoga outside without Atsumu next to him but he manages (he has to). Once Shouyou takes a seat and closes his eyes, he takes a deep breath and focuses in on his heart-center, shedding the rest of his thoughts with the practice.

The mountain air feels different here at his house in Sendai. Less accustomed to it now, Shouyou slows his breathing to accommodate his limits, filling his lungs all the way down to his stomach before releasing everything with a forceful exhale. Placing his hands in prayer mode, he sends out a small thanks and moves into the vinyasa.

It's about half past 7 when he finishes yoga and wraps up his mat. Shouyou checks his phone, but Atsumu still hasn't texted back. Instead, he sees a few texts from both Kageyama and Tsukki.

Tsukki~~~~~

@Hinata: *get here in thirty or I'm leaving you behind*

@Kageyama: *be ready in thirty or I'm leaving you behind*

Kageyama ☹️

??? *If Hinata has to get there first don't I get more time?*

Tsukki~~~~~

No.

Shouyou suppresses a laugh and types out a quick response.

I can be there in TWENTY!!

Before he sets down his phone, Shouyou switches back to Atsumu's messages. He's probably still asleep, which means Shouyou will have to wait until after volleyball to talk to him. Which kinda sucks because he had hoped for a brief chat with Atsumu on his bike ride down the mountain to the Tsukishima residence.

With a small pout, he writes: *Going to the beach now. Call me later?*

Once he hears the low *whoop* of the outgoing text, Shouyou changes clothes, gathers his belongings and heads out the door.

It's a nice ride through memory lane as he zips down the freeway past the trees and scenic view. It's both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. New growth has happened and the texture of the foliage has changed a bit, but it's still the same route he's spent and tarried throughout all his highs and lows, victories and losses. Every breezy downhill slide comes with a tough uphill climb, but Shouyou couldn't be more grateful for it all.

Tsukki greets him, as always, with an uninterested and patronizing expression on his face.

"You're early," he remarks when Shouyou hops off his bike.

"Why do you sound so disappointed?" Shouyou protests, walking inside the gates and leaning his bike against the inner walls. "I'm always early!"

"Why do you think I said thirty minutes?" Tsukki rolls his eyes. "C'mon. I told the King thirty too and he's never late."

"Okay!"

"Keep your voice down, the neighbors are still asleep," Tsukki says, covering one of his ears.

Shouyou pouts and elbows Tsukki in the ribs.

"Ow! What was that for?"

"Keep your voice down, the neighbors are still asleep," Shouyou mimics in a quieter voice.

"You are insufferable," Tsukki tells him, wrinkling his nose. "And since when did you get so sassy? Brazil has changed you."

Shouyou beams at him. "Probably a combination of that and dating Miya Atsumu."

"Ugh. I knew something was off about you."

"Whaa—? What d'you mean?"

Tsukki spares him a cool, apathetic glance before opening the door to his house and letting Shouyou walk through.

"I'll go grab my stuff," he says instead of responding. "Wait here." Then he disappears upstairs.

He returns two minutes later with a duffel bag slung around his shoulder and car keys in his hand.

"Kindaichi said he can't make it by the way," he tells Shouyou when he reaches the bottom of the steps. "We're picking Koganegawa up instead after we fetch the King."

"Aww that's too bad," Shouyou replies. "But yay! We'll still have two setters!"

Tsukki eyes him suspiciously, as if he's worried Shouyou is plotting something.

“What?” Shouyou asks.

Tsukki sighs and ruffles Shouyou’s hair as he walks past him.

“You’ve been growing too fast.”

“Hah?” Shouyou shakes his head and scowls at him. He knows when Tsukki says this it probably means he misses him, but the way he says it also makes it sound like...

“Oi! I’m older than you!”

He chases Tsukki out the door and to the car. It’s kind of ironic, really, that Tsukki would pick up on his excitement at being able to observe two setters at once. Tsukki being annoyingly good at setting despite not being a setter is part of what inspired Shouyou in the first place. He wonders if maybe there’s a part of his old teammate that knows and is trying to downplay the competitiveness between them, because although Tsukki tries to hide his face, Shouyou still catches a glimpse of his furtive smile before he ducks his head behind the vehicle on the driver’s side. Some things really never change.

Once they’re seated and buckled up, Shouyou turns to him and tries to ask the question again.

“So what did you mean when you said something was off about me?”

Tsukki shrugs.

“It seemed like your mind was elsewhere on Saturday, sometimes. Sort of. More than usual.”

Shouyou raises an eyebrow. “Isn’t that the type of stuff you always say about me anyway?”

Tsukki’s lips curve into an amused smile.

“It is,” he agrees. “But you also kept making incoherent leaps whenever you were sharing — not that *that* wasn’t normal either— but it sounded like you kept talking around something.”

“Oh.” Shouyou looks down at his lap. It’s not that he’s trying to hide the fact that he’s dating his teammate or anything, it just hasn’t really come up, and he thought it felt weird and would’ve been a little bit rude if he’d just stated it explicitly in the middle of conversation back on Saturday. Even so, he’s both impressed and rather touched that Tsukki noticed anything at all. For all of Tsukki’s insistence that he doesn’t give a damn about the rest of them, he really is quite perceptive.

“Ugh, this confirms that I’ve spent way too much time with you guys over the years,” Tsukki adds. “Really though. It isn’t that surprising.”

“It’s not?” Shouyou wonders.

“It’d be more surprising if you dated someone who *wasn’t* into volleyball,” Tsukki replies, sounding disturbed. “How else are you supposed to incorporate volleyball into every aspect of your life?”

“Does that mean you *don't* want to date someone that plays volleyball?”

“Why is this suddenly about me? We’re talking about *your* dating life.”

“I can tell you lots more about my dating life if you really prefer,” Shouyou threatens, a mischievous smile on his face. “Like how Bokuto-san started calling him Tsumtsum first, and then later I adopted it, only it feels like it has a way different meaning when I say it—”

“Spare me,” Tsukki pleads, sounding nauseated. He has his nose scrunched up and an uncomfortable frown on his face, like he’s already starting to lowkey regret allowing this conversation to start and hopes to escape it soon before it continues further. “Anyway, I don’t care if you’ve dated the whole V.League; nothing you do really surprises me anymore.”

“Ha! That’s a lie,” Shouyou laughs. He can easily recall the reluctant grimace on Tsukki’s face after his debut match on MSBY last year when he told Shouyou he played ‘*okay*,’ which Shouyou knows is probably code for *You’ve gotten really good and I’m pretty mad about it* in Tsukki-speak. Not that Shouyou has any desire to gloat, but it is genuinely funny when Tsukki pretends not to care.

“Whatever,” Tsukki mutters. “As long as you’re happy with your life, I don’t care.”

“Aww, so you’d care if I wasn’t happy?”

“Shut up.” In the next second, Tsukki slows the car and pulls over to the curb in front of Kageyama’s house. “Conversation over. Tell the King to come out of his castle.”

Shouyou flashes him a toothy grin before texting *COME OUTSIDE* to Kageyama.

The weather out on the beach is not too cold or too hot, though the wind is rough and fairly aggressive today. Shouyou breathes it all in, letting the salty ocean air fill his lungs. Very unlike the time when Kunimi came, Koganegawa’s eyes widen with excitement as they approach the volleyball nets, his entire body bursting with an energy equal only to Shouyou’s. Tsukki, on the other hand, wears an apathetic expression that borders on apprehension. Shouyou can tell he’s probably a little cold, but he has prepared for it by wearing a long-sleeved dri-fit underneath his clothes.

“I wanna team up with you first, Kogane!” Shouyou tells the overeager setter when they get to one of the courts. “You’re the only one here who’s tosses I’ve never hit before!”

“Ohhh, yes! Wait — *same!*” Koganegawa replies, looking rather surprised himself.

Shouyou grins as Kageyama and Tsukki exchange mutual scowls with each other, having no choice but to start this morning on the same side of the net. This is going to be *so* fun.

Shouyou spends the first fifteen minutes of their beach excursion going over some of the different rules between beach and indoor volleyball, as well as some helpful tips, especially given how windy it is. Tsukki falls quiet during all this, looking deep in thought. Once Shouyou runs out of advice and explanations to give, they break into their respective sides of the court and prepare for battle.

Each time Shouyou plays beach with a different set of people, he learns something new. Today is no exception. Koganegawa is a great setter — different, of course, from Kageyama or Atsumu — but he's come even more into his own since the last time Shouyou has played him. He and Tsukki have their own adjustment curves like everyone does when they first try beach, but after a few warm-ups and tossing rounds, Koganegawa is able to move pretty fluidly with the wind.

He's so flexible with his tosses, Shouyou thinks after slamming one of Koganegawa's sets beyond Tsukki's reach. Kogane is excitable but so mild-mannered and considerate towards his teammates at the same time.

"That was awesome!" Shouyou exclaims, running across the sand to give him a high five.

"Uwaaa!" Koganegawa echoes the sentiment. "You jump so fast, it makes it even more awesome!"

"Oh!!" Shouyou yells, his eyes growing big. "Thank you! You too!!"

The two of them jump up and down in the sand in mutual excitement while Tsukki sighs audibly on the other side of the net, looking exasperated.

"Oi," Shouyou hears Kageyama mutter to Tsukki. "You could have set the ball to me earlier but you changed it into a freeball instead. You better not be trying to run away."

Tsukki groans. "Ugh, shut up. It was the better choice. The wind would've messed it up."

"You don't know that," Kageyama points out.

"There was a very good chance," Tsukki says through gritted teeth.

Kageyama narrows his eyes at Tsukki and frowns.

"*'Don't go running away,'* right?"

Tsukki twists his lips, cornered. Koganegawa stifles a laugh.

"Does anyone on Sendai Frogs give him a hard time like we do?" Shouyou asks him.

"A few, here and there," Koganegawa replies. "But it's definitely not the same."

Shouyou grins. "Good."

The game continues. Shouyou enjoys hitting Kogane's sets and although he's not quite as freakishly accurate the way Kageyama is, nor as omnipotent as Oikawa or deeply attentive as

Atsumu, all of his moves pack a good punch, especially when he's going directly against their opponents. There are several instances where, with the help of his height, Kogane ends up slamming the ball down while at the front of the net instead of tossing it to Shouyou, much to Kageyama's surprise. Kageyama continues to push Tsukki's limits but unlike their high school selves, Tsukki actually rises up to the challenge without complaint. Shouyou's chest fills with glee at being able to play with them again in this new context after years of pursuing their own separate paths apart. Eventually, Tsukki starts getting a bit more comfortable with setting on the beach, and as he slowly adjusts to the wind and the sand, Shouyou even comes up a few times against that familiar and frustratingly tall, tall wall at the net, complete with the sharp glint of Tsukki's glasses and a small, sly smirk.

At some point near the end of their final set, Shouyou catches a furtive exchange of a glance between Tsukki and Kageyama and he knows this means danger: as much as the two of them run up against each other the wrong way constantly, Shouyou knows from experience that they can be a deadly duo when their teamwork aligns right.

Sure enough, in the next few rallies, Kageyama and Tsukki start racking up more points. Knowing them, they've implicitly figured out a system together and Shouyou needs to crack it before they switch to the good side of the wind.

Soon, they gain another point over Shouyou and Kogane, placing them in the lead for the first time that match (Kageyama had performed an *infuriatingly* amazing cross shot). The ball had just nearly grazed the net without actually touching it as it whizzed past Kogane's face and slipped out of Shouyou's reach. As Shouyou's elbows hit the sand, he thinks he understands.

Tsukki is having them both pull the shots progressively away from the middle.

Of course. Shouyou can't believe he didn't pick up on it earlier. It's exactly like their play styles to make small adjustments throughout the game that are barely visible. Well, with that in mind...

Shouyou rises to the challenge. He tells Kogane to watch out for their gradual shifts in spike points. He also tries to bait them into hitting the ball into perfectly open spots on the court, although Kageyama and Tsukki are too familiar with him to fall for it.

In the end, Kageyama and Tsukki take the win. Shouyou and Kogane share a high five. They break for water.

"I always knew you were crazy," Tsukki mumbles as he sits down beside Shouyou, a giant water bottle in hand. He takes a long gulp as Shouyou frowns, waiting for him to finish.

"But?" Shouyou prompts. Tsukki lowers his bottle and wipes his mouth with his sleeve.

"But nothing," he replies. "That was it. Now that I've tried playing beach, nothing has changed. You're still crazy."

Shouyou laughs. "Coming from you, it's a compliment!"

"Ugh."

Shouyou grins at him with a knowing look. “Soooo, does this mean you wanna be my partner for the next round?”

Tsukki shrugs and looks away. “Whatever.”

Shouyou’s grin widens, revealing more teeth. He knows that’s a yes.

Upon overhearing that he’d be teamed up with Kageyama, Koganegawa immediately leaps up and plops himself back down next to his new teammate so he can bombard Kageyama with questions and exchange notes about setting. Kageyama appears surprised and alarmed to be at the receiving end of such an onslaught of inquiries, which causes Shouyou to chuckle to himself.

Shouyou relaxes into the sand as he takes a generous swig of water, listening intently to their volleyball talk. It’s nice.

When the four of them feel satisfied with their break, they stand up and stretch, ready to step back into the court.

The moment Shouyou’s foot touches the boundary line, a loud ringtone pierces the air.

They whip around towards their duffel bags for the source of the noise. Recognizing it at once as his own, Shouyou calls out, “Sorry! Forgot to silence my phone!”

Tsukki raises an eyebrow as he hurries over to his bag and kneels beside it. *Maybe it’s Tsumu*, Shouyou thinks as he rummages through his stuff, eager to at least hear his voice and allow everyone else to greet him on Facetime for a few minutes.

Shouyou quickly pulls his phone out. His smile falters when he sees it’s not Atsumu, but an unknown number.

Ah well. Maybe he’s busy today.

He’s about to silence the call when the first two digits of the number gives him pause. He doesn’t recognize the country code at first.

And then, it dawns on him.

+55. His heart starts beating faster. +55. *That’s the dialing code for—*

“Sorry, I have to take this,” Shouyou tells everyone before hitting *Accept* and holding the phone to his ear.

“Hello?” he answers. He can feel every grain of sand press deep into his skin as he sinks into a seated position on his knees.

“Good morning, is this Shouyou Hinata speaking?” a cool female voice says in heavily accented English.

“Y-Yes!” Shouyou responds, switching to his slightly broken English himself. “Speaking!”

“Hello, Shouyou, my name is Adriana and I’m an Athletic Recruiter with Asas, I hope this is a good time?”

“Asas? Wow! Um — Yes!” Shouyou flusters. A splash of bright red fills his vision, rippling cloth gleaming before his eyes. *THE Asas?! “Yes, it’s a good time!”*

“That’s good to hear,” she replies. “We were hoping to reach you at a reasonable hour despite the time difference.”

“Yep, super reasonable!”

The woman lets out a small tinkering laugh.

“Glad to hear it. Well, Shouyou, we’ve been following you closely this season and were really impressed with your performance, especially the way you closed out that final win at your last game.”

“Ah, thank you! Although I couldn’t have done it alone. It definitely helps to have great teammates!”

“Of course,” Adriana says. “And that’s another quality we admire about you, Shouyou. From what we’ve gathered about you, you are flexible and can work with almost any team. We’ve also seen some footage from your days in Rio. The name *Ninja Shouyou* still rings a bell for many players on the beach volleyball scene.”

Shouyou chuckles nervously. “Oh— Is that so?”

“Yes,” she continues. “All this is to say: We’d like to offer you a spot on our team—”

Shouyou sucks in his breath, his mind racing a million miles a minute. A hundred thoughts and feelings assail his entire being — an onslaught of excited exclamations and apprehensive worries all vying for his attention one over another so that he misses the next few words she says.

“...send over if you’d like. You don’t need to give us an answer now, but take your time, think about it, and get back to us when you can. How does that sound?”

“*Hnh!* Yes, great!” Shouyou says, his voice nearly cracking. “That sounds great! Feel free to send all the— I mean, yes! Please send everything over.”

“And again, Shouyou, don’t feel like you need to give an answer right away. Orientation and finalizations for next season don’t start until early August. You have all summer to think about it.”

“Okay, yeah, sure— I mean, yes, I will definitely think very hard! I’ve admired Asas for a long time!”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Adriana laughs. “And thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. If you have any questions about the information I’ll be sending — any at all — don’t hesitate to reach out. We look forward to hearing back from you.”

“No, thank *you* so much! And of course! I will!”

“Alright, then. Have a good day, Shouyou. Until next time.”

“You too. Have a good night!”

The line clicks as she hangs up. Shouyou lowers his phone, his blood still pounding loudly in his ears.

He got a call from Asas. From Asas of all teams! He can't believe it!

Shouyou inhales deeply and looks up at the sky with a smile. An international team wants him. And not just any international team. Brazil!

He needs to tell Atsumu right away. Looking down at his phone, he unlocks it again and finds that he's missed a text from him during their practice match.

Messages 9:42 AM

Tsumu 🦊

hey sorry babe, samu called me in last minute to help him out with some restaurant stuff >:(haven't had time to breathe all morning. i'll call you later ok? have fun at the beach ♥

Shouyou feels his lungs constrict. He has so much to say all at once he can't even begin to fit it all in a single text. Maybe he'll wait until later when they can chat on Facetime.

Before he can type a quick response back, a loud “*Oi!*” jolts him back to his surroundings.

Shouyou whips around— Kageyama's voice.

“Who was that?” Kageyama asks, eyeing him shrewdly. “Was it... America?”

“Speak properly, King. How can an entire country give Hinata a phone call?”

“I meant — *from* —”

“I know what you meant; it still doesn't excuse your poor grammar.” Turning to Shouyou, Tsukki asks, “So? Were they American?”

Shouyou shakes his head. He needs a moment before he can speak. Saying it out loud will make it more real. Even just for a short second, he wants to keep the knowledge of this offer just to himself.

With a long exhale, he stands up to his feet and faces them.

“It was from São Paulo,” he says, his voice a lot calmer and more level than how he feels on the inside. “Asas— they said they noticed— I mean—”

He falls silent, too overcome to speak further. His throat opens and closes with the multitude of emotions he's feeling. Exhilaration bleeds into restlessness and blends into deep hunger in his gut, so palpable he can almost taste it.

Tsukki, of course, is the first to break the ice.

"Oh, great. So we get to be rid of you soon again?"

Shouyou takes another inhale. *Deep breaths*. He's grateful for the joke, though he can hear a slight strain in Tsukki's voice, which suggests he's having conflicting thoughts while gauging Shouyou's reaction.

"That— that depends," Shouyou stammers. He glances around at all of them. Kageyama has his brow furrowed, trying to assess the situation, a little slower than Tsukki on the uptake. Koganegawa, on the other hand, brightens with genuine joy.

"Whoaaa, Asas? Congratulations! That's a good team!" he remarks. "Do you think you'll say yes?"

Kageyama, now comprehending Shouyou's position, lifts his gaze up to him, his eyes alight with fire. Slowly, one corner of his lips stretches into a knowing smirk.

He has to, Kageyama's expression seems to say. And Shouyou agrees — it's an amazing opportunity. But...

Thoughts of Atsumu fill his mind. Shouyou can imagine his face so clearly — that cocksure smile and heavy-lidded eyes, the attentiveness of his gaze before setting to Shouyou and before kissing, (how there's no difference between the two). That soft pitch in his voice when he tells him he loves him. The familiar warmth and safety Shouyou feels when Atsumu envelops him in his arms.

It's immediately followed by a tug of guilt at the pit of his stomach.

"Um... I..." Shouyou swallows, a lump forming in his throat. "I *do* want to, of course, I just need to... need to...to think..."

His eyes skip around, taking in Koganegawa's curious expression, the fanatical glow on Kageyama's face, then landing on Tsukki, who's staring at him intently. With a sigh, Tsukki steps in to save him from answering.

"It's a big decision for a pea-sized brain," he says. "As much as your impulsive idiocy has a habit of taking the wheel and driving full steam ahead, even a wild beast like you would probably do better to weigh your options rather than jump into a decision right away."

Kogane chuckles and shakes his head. "That's our Tsukki! Mean-but-keen as always."

"I made a decision right away," Kageyama grumbles under his breath.

Tsukki turns to give Kageyama a pitying look. "You do know that that response is in the opposite direction from '*larger-than-pea-sized*' brain, right? That's why some decisions are

called ‘no-brainers.’”

Kageyama scowls at him. “Shut up.”

With the help of Tsukki’s humorous interlude, Shouyou shakes out of his worrying state and reassembles himself into his usual eager excitement.

“Right! I just need to sleep on it!” he declares. “Even if I don’t decide today or this week, of course I’m pumped! It *is* an amazing opportunity!”

Turning to Kageyama, he points a finger at him.

“And I’m still going to beat you!” Shouyou adds. “No matter what team we’re on!”

Kageyama’s lips quirk into a smile. “Good.”

Shouyou runs back and picks up the volleyball by Tsukki’s feet.

“Sorry for making you all wait,” he says, throwing the ball to Kageyama. “Let’s start.”

Tsukki smirks. “Now there’s the hot-blooded wild beast we all know and love.”

With a matching smirk of his own, Kageyama walks over to the spot behind the boundary line and faces the net, ready to serve.

The rest of their beach day goes by without a hitch. They take a lunch break after the next round before picking back up with one more match. It’s different from playing with the MSBY team, but a good kind of different. Shouyou focuses all his energies on the game, trying his best to stay in the moment despite the nagging thoughts at the back of his mind. *He’ll get to it later when they talk on the phone* he tells himself.

At some point around noon, they feel satisfied enough to call it a day. Out of habit, Shouyou claps his palms together and thanks them all for the game. Koganegawa returns the action with great enthusiasm, much to Tsukki’s dismay. While gathering their belongings, Shouyou argues with Kageyama about how many wins he now has under his belt after today. The debate continues all the way back to the car until, exasperated out of his mind, Tsukki bans all talk of their ‘*trifling competitions*’ and, as the driver, threatens to dump them both on the highway if either one of them so much as breaks the rule. Knowing Tsukki would never actually do this, Shouyou asks Kogane instead about how Tsukki is faring on Sendai Frogs, and the two of them exchange a couple funny stories and laughs at his expense. Not five minutes into the drive, Kageyama knocks out in the backseat.

Somehow, the ride back feels shorter than the ride there. Before Shouyou knows it, they’re dropping Koganegawa off at his home, then Kageyama, who awakes with a start as Tsukki applies a sharp break when they stop in front of his house (“*Rise and shine, Your Highness,*”

he croons with a smirk). Kageyama hops out of the car with a grumpy huff and slams the door shut.

“Oi, careful!” Tsukki yells. “This is my brother’s car!”

“Oops. Sorry,” he says, looking mildly regretful.

Shouyou rolls down his window to say a proper goodbye.

“Might not see you again until the Olympics so just so you know: you better not slack off!”

“Speak for yourself,” Kageyama retorts. With a determined smile, he adds, “You better catch up.”

Shouyou furrows his brow, his jaw set. He knows the challenge Kageyama is giving him right now and he wants — desperately, from deep down within his gut — to rise up to it. To the world stage and beyond. He wants to see it all, win it all.

Ignoring all the other nagging thoughts in his head, he fixes Kageyama with a hard stare and tells him: “I will.”

The rest can fall into place later.

“See you both,” Kageyama says with a lazy wave of his hand. With that, he turns around and walks towards his house.

Now alone with Tsukki, Shouyou starts humming absentmindedly as they pull away from Kageyama’s house and start driving back. They sit in silence for a few minutes when out of nowhere, Tsukki speaks up.

“So you’re actually torn up about this, aren’t you?” he asks.

Shouyou looks at him, confused by the suddenness of the question. “Huh?”

Tsukki purses his lips, annoyed about having to spell it out. “About Asas.”

“Oh.” Shouyou looks down at his lap. “A little...”

Tsukki doesn’t respond right away, letting Shouyou’s uncertainty sit uncomfortably in the car for a good minute as he thinks of his next question.

“Would you hesitate if you weren’t dating anyone right now?”

Shouyou doesn’t even need to consider this.

“Not at all! But—” he falters. A slight pang throbs in his chest. *A scenario where he wasn’t dating Atsumu...* The mere thought by itself hurts too much to bear.

Tsukki sighs. “I’ve never known you to be indecisive. When was the last time you let anything get in the way of you and volleyball? Certainly *not* during our first training camp at

Shiratorizawa.”

Shouyou laughs in spite of himself. That was definitely a Time.

“Never,” Shouyou agrees. “But...” he bites his lip. “This time, I think... it’s not that something else is getting in the way of volleyball. If you really think about it, it’s more like *volleyball* is getting in the way of *volleyball*. Both are volleyball!”

“God, I cannot believe I actually understand what you are saying right now,” Tsukki remarks, rubbing the spot between his eyebrows. “But knowing you, if that’s the case, can you really go wrong?”

“Maybe not...” Shouyou frowns. *Volleyball is getting in the way of volleyball*, he had said, except there’s also livelihoods and countries and other people to think about. He likes his life in Japan, being on MSBY Black Jackal, and hanging out with Atsumu and Osamu, but he also liked his life in Rio, biking along the coast, and the open friendliness of the Brazilian people there. Both are volleyball, yes, and both add to his general quality of life, but maybe this time, volleyball is getting in the way of everything else.

“You look like you’re about to blow a fuse. Stop thinking so hard.”

“Oi, what’re you looking at me for? Keep your eyes on the road!”

“They *are* on the road. It only took one glance.”

“Hmph.” Shouyou rests an elbow against the window. “I *do* want to go though.”

“Then go.”

“But if I do, I could be there for a couple years, or more!”

“Then don’t.”

“It’s not that simple!”

Tsukki shrugs. “I have no horse in this race.”

They arrive back at the Tsukishima residence before Shouyou can think of a proper response. Tsukki parks the car into their small garage and the two of them exit the vehicle. Tsukki walks with him to where he parked his bike, leaning casually against the wall as Shouyou secures his duffel bag and prepares to mount his bike.

“You should know though,” Tsukki starts, “that in the end, it’s your decision and no one else’s.”

Shouyou furrows his brow. “I *do* know that.”

“Then maybe you should let that part of you take the wheel.”

“Wow, coming from you?”

Tsukki shrugs. "It's never led you the wrong way before."

Shouyou's eyes widen. He hadn't really thought of it that way but now that Tsukki mentions it, the opportunities he's seized over the last few years, while sometimes a little questionable, have not only become stepping stones to get to where he is now, but were essential to how his path was carved.

Turning away, Shouyou throws a leg over his bike, resting his foot on the pedal.

"Thanks, Tsukki," he says. "For the, uh, talk. Really. I'll see you around."

"You'll figure it out."

Shouyou swallows around the lump growing in his throat and nods. Kicking off from the ground, he sets off down the path outside of Tsukki's house.

The familiar uphill climb feels steeper than usual. Gravel road rolls beneath him as he pedals against the wind, his mind churning with the whirl of his wheels.

We'd like to offer you a spot on our team...

Various fragments of the phone conversation with Adriana replay in his head. Asas. *THE* Asas has a spot for him. He could go to Brazil again, return to his second home, build his career further out over there. *This is his time.* It's a huge moment. He doesn't want to miss it.

But what about Atsumu?

His life in Japan, split between Sendai and Osaka, is home in different ways. He grew up here; Sendai will always feel like home. But when he was in Brazil, that became home too. And now that he's dating Atsumu, he's built a new life in Osaka too. Can home be three places at once? He has certainly felt homesick for all of them at different times. How would Atsumu feel if he knew? If he tells Atsumu, would he try to convince him to stay? Would they have to break up?

In the end, it's your decision and no one else's.

Tsukki's words hit him like a punch to the gut. He pedals harder.

It's his decision, but he has to involve Atsumu, he has to. Atsumu might cheer him on because they love each other. Or he could decide it's more fair to them both to end what they currently have. *Or*, he could cheer him on and they could try or make it work long distance but utterly fail. And how long would long distance have to be? How long would Shouyou be gone? Ideally for a long time, but, '*ideally*' for who? For Shouyou? For both of them? For his volleyball career but not Atsumu? Sure he'd miss Atsumu like hell but if he missed the opportunity to play for Brazil, he knows he'd regret it forever. The more Shouyou pedals, the more he doesn't know what will happen. As the wind whistles through the trees and blows past his ears, all he knows is what he wants the most: to play volleyball, internationally, in Brazil.

Shouyou spends the whole ride home on autopilot, lost in his thoughts. He's barely present to his surroundings when he arrives home, hops off his bike, and walks it into his backyard. Upon entering the house, he calls out *'Tadaima!'* out of habit and heads to his room.

The thoughts continue to plague him in the shower. Shouyou stands there as hot water rolls over him, staring without really seeing as the soapy liquid flows down him and into the drain. Can he incorporate Atsumu without throwing their entire relationship out of balance?

The tantalizing aroma of curry graces his nose when he emerges from the bathroom. His mother's cooking: another symbol of home. After a whole morning of volleyball on the beach, Shouyou hungers for lunch.

(And besides, it might take his mind off difficult things for a tiny bit...)

Before Shouyou can make his way towards the kitchen however, his phone rings from his bedroom.

Atsumu? Or maybe Adriana again?

Circling back to his room, he approaches his bed and stares down at his phone.

[**Tsumu** 🦊 would like to Facetime...]

Shouyou grabs his phone and plops stomach-first onto his mattress. After taking a deep breath, he hits *Accept*.

"Shouyouuuuuu," Atsumu greets at once when the call connects.

Shouyou grins, relieved to see his boyfriend's face smiling back at him.

"Hi, Tsumtsum."

"Save me," Atsumu says. "Samu has only just given me my first real break since 7 A-M. He knew ya'd be gone and swooped on me for work the first opportunity he could get. Never leave me again, Shouyou."

Shouyou laughs through the twinge of guilt gripping his stomach. "Aww, sorry, Tsumu..."

"I'm kiddin', I'm kiddin'," he reassures. "I really am exhausted though. Samu shows no mercy when yer not around."

Shouyou plasters a convincing grin on his face. Meanwhile, apprehension bubbles in his gut.

"Tell him to go easy on you for my sake," Shouyou jokes. "I need you to be in one piece when I get back."

“Aww,” Atsumu gushes before turning his head to look at something off-camera. “YA HEAR THAT SAMU? SHOUYOU SAYS TO GO EASY ON ME!”

“I already am!” Shouyou hears Osamu call back. *“Normally I’d be way harsher on ya!”*

“Unbelievable!” Atsumu yells, turning back to the camera. “Are ya hearin’ this guy?”

Shouyou lets out a small giggle. “It’s okay, Tsumu.. it builds character, I hear!”

“I can’t believe this,” he replies, his eyes taking on that funny deadened look he gets whenever he finds himself unable to escape being the butt of the joke. “Just leave me here to die.”

“Stop being dramatic, ya sap,” comes Osamu’s voice from off-screen.

Atsumu rolls his eyes. “Anyway, as you can see, I can’t talk long. So. How was beach today?”

“Good!” Shouyou responds. “It was fun! Stupid Kageyama didn’t fall a single time though. Neither did Tsukki. It’s so unfair! But with everyone who was there today, we had pretty evenly balanced games, so that was nice. And also, there’s something else—”

Shouyou bites his lip. Atsumu stares at him curiously, his expression full of genuine interest, the way it always is when he’s giving attention to Shouyou. Shouyou ought to tell him, he really should, but when he opens his mouth to try again, seeing Atsumu’s face stops him in his tracks. Shouyou looks at him and feels his heart pinch. He looks at him and thinks: *I don’t want to lose you.*

At least... not yet.

Atsumu’s expression shifts into mild concern. “You okay? What else happened?”

Shouyou shakes his head. If he really thinks about it, Atsumu is already feeling tired today so telling him while they’re still physically apart through the phone might not be the best idea, especially considering the massive weight of the bomb Shouyou is about to drop. He thinks back to his conversation with Tsukki. *It is a big deal.* He can’t mess this up— any of it up.

“No, no, everything went great, I just—”

“Tsumu! You have two minutes left!”

“Fuck you! I know!” Atsumu snaps back, though Shouyou is quite sure he didn’t actually know. He sighs as he looks back at Shouyou. “Sorry, I should probably finish my food and get back to work. Just text me what you were gonna say, yeah?”

“Yeah, probably not a good idea to keep Samu waiting,” Shouyou says with a grin. “And I will!”

“I’ll call ya later tonight, okay?” Then, checking, probably, to make sure Osamu isn’t looking his way, Atsumu leans closer to the front-camera and blows a quick casual kiss for Shouyou.

“Love you.”

Shouyou feels his heart skip a beat as he murmurs in a low voice that only Atsumu can hear:
“Love you too, Tsumtsum.”

The Facetime screen shrinks away as the call ends.

Okay. *Okay.* So he didn’t get a chance to tell him just now. That’s okay. There are other opportunities and this is all still so fresh and huge. It would throw everything they both know into a loop and he doesn’t want to throw Atsumu off so cruelly like that without warning.
Yeah. We wouldn’t want that at all.

A growing tide of foreboding rises in Shouyou’s chest. He feels like he’s standing on the edge of a cliff overlooking a vast and beautiful ocean already prepared to jump no matter what comes after, but then, but then—

“Shouyou! Lunch is ready!”

Shouyou sucks in his breath and sits up straight. “Coming, mom!” he calls back.

Setting down his phone, Shouyou picks himself off his bed and heads towards the kitchen.

As much as he knows he wants to go to Brazil, nothing is set in stone yet. Perhaps it’s like what Tsukki said, he needs to make the decision himself first. Until things *are* set in stone, he doesn’t have to ruin this good thing he has with Atsumu just yet. He can spare his boyfriend and their relationship just a little bit longer.

And besides, Adriana says he has until June or July, so he has time.

... Right?

Chapter End Notes

thanks for sticking with me and my slow-pace of writing so far!! i will definitely not abandon this fic no matter what happens so even if it's been 6 months (god forbid), pls do not worry :D

forever is in your eyes

Chapter Summary

Atsumu is as selfless with love as Shouyou is selfish with it.

Chapter Notes

I got so emotional seeing all the MSBY art without Hinata that it pumped life into me and gave me wings to write a new chapter. Thanks again Furudate for the pain and love.

*I'd give you my sunshine, give you my best
But the rain is always gonna come if you're standing with me*

Would it be enough if I could never give you peace?

*

*

*

Shouyou flies home later that week with extra carry-on baggage on his heart. When he lands, it doesn't get lighter.

The night is dark and chilly by the time he steps out of the airport. Once he reaches the arrivals pick-up curb, he spots Osamu's truck right away beneath the sign over his terminal.

"Hi," Shouyou greets through the car window. Osamu and his hat lean out towards him.

"Yo, Shouyou-kun. Had fun?"

"Yup! How has he been?"

Osamu chuckles. "Gloomy as hell. But he was excited when he left the shop tonight. Can't wait for the look on his face once ya show up at his apartment."

“Hm?” Shouyou tilts his head. “Are you gonna come up with me so you can see him too?”

“I’m not,” Osamu confirms. “But I already know what face he’s gonna make.”

Shouyou laughs and starts loading his luggage onto the car. Once he’s settled and buckled into his seat, Osamu drives off.

“So how was seein’ friends and family?” he asks Shouyou.

“Good! Natsu is doing great in her club and I even roped a few of my old teammates into playing beach volleyball.”

“Yeah? That’s awesome.”

“Yeah...” Shouyou falls silent. He can’t tell Osamu about Asas before talking to Atsumu, and luckily, Osamu doesn’t ask. To take his own mind away from it, he fishes around for another subject.

“Tsumu says you’ve been working him hard.”

“He’s bein’ dramatic, as usual.”

Shouyou giggles. “I figured.”

“Although let’s just say he’s probably an expert now at juliennin’ carrots after this week.”

“Ooh! I wanna learn how to do that too! Teach me next time, Samu-san!”

Osamu shakes his head. “Only you two would be the type to beg for more work. What would ya even need to learn that for?”

“I dunno,” Shouyou shrugs. “It never hurts to pick up new skills!”

“Exactly my point,” Osamu notes. “Monsters, the both of ya.”

“At least it sounds like Atsumu did a lot of useful stuff while I was gone.”

“Yeah, you should tell him I did him a favor,” Osamu smirks. “I kept him from mopin’ around and bein’ miserable all alone like a sap, which he no doubt would’ve done if he’d been left to himself.”

Shouyou laughs because he’s sure Osamu is joking, but down at the pit of his stomach, that guilty feeling from earlier this week resurges.

“He’s Atsumu though, so he’d recover fast, right?” Shouyou remarks.

“Normally, I’d say yep,” Osamu replies. “But when it comes to you, who knows?”

“Heh heh...”

Osamu glances over at Shouyou, then turns back to the road.

“Sorry, force of habit,” Osamu says. “Makin’ fun of Tsumu, I mean. I’m not tryin’ to single you out in any bad way. My brother’s dramatic an’ I make fun of him for bein’ a sap, but in all seriousness, you don’t hafta worry.”

“Worry,” Shouyou repeats. Should he not be worried?

“Yeah,” Osamu affirms. “And besides, it’s not like you’ll be makin’ long trips to Sendai that often in the big scheme of things anyway, right?”

“Yeah,” Shouyou says a little too quickly. He follows it up with another laugh. “Yeah, that’s true.”

Shouyou spends the remainder of the ride regaling Osamu with stories from his visit and listening to Osamu talk about how his shop is doing in turn. Despite the levity of their conversation, Shouyou’s stomach keeps twisting itself into knots of excitement and dread as they travel closer and closer to Atsumu’s apartment.

Upon arriving, Osamu pulls over to the side of the road and turns to Shouyou as Shouyou unbuckles his seatbelt.

“Hey, by the way,” Osamu says. “B’fore I forget, I’m goin’ up to visit Kita in a couple of weeks to take care of some business and you mentioned wanting to come the next time we go. If you’re free that weekend, Kita says you ‘n Tsumu are welcome to join.”

For a moment, Shouyou forgets his dread.

“Ooh, I’d love to!” he exclaims. “That sounds fun! Is this like a day thing or are we staying over too?”

“Dunno,” Osamu replies. “I’ll ask. Either way, you’re invited.”

“Awesome!” Shouyou beams. “I’m in!”

“I’ll send ya details when the date gets closer,” Osamu says, grinning back. Pointing towards the trunk, he adds, “Need any help with the luggage?”

“Nope, I think I’m good! Thank you!”

“Alright,” Osamu nods. “See ya later, then. Better not keep the mopin’ sap waiting.”

Shouyou laughs and gives him a thumbs up. “Thanks for the ride, Samu-san!”

“Any time.”

Shouyou stays outside and waves as Osamu drives away. When his truck turns the corner and out of sight, Shouyou lets out a sigh and turns to face Atsumu’s building. The squirming and twisting is back in his stomach; Shouyou takes a deep breath and tries to quell it.

“It’s fine,” he tells himself out loud. “This changes nothing. Nothing is going to change. We’ll be fine.”

With that, he picks up his luggage, gears himself up, and walks through the front door.

The elevator going up seems to take ages. Shouyou feels heavy listening to the chains whirring behind the walls. He fights against the sinking worry in his chest and focuses extra hard on the rising anticipation of seeing Atsumu again. In just mere seconds, he'll be in his arms.

The ding of the lift reaching Atsumu's floor rings loud and clear. Shouyou steps off when the elevator doors swing open and walks the familiar few steps down the small narrow hallway towards the man he loves so much. Before he can think too hard about it, Shouyou walks up, jabs the doorbell, and waits with bated breath.

"Comin', comin'," he hears Atsumu repeat lazily from inside. The deadbolt retracts with a loud click and the door swings open, revealing Atsumu standing in its frame, dressed in baggy sweatpants and a light tee. Shouyou can hear his boyfriend's breath hitch when his eyes land on him. His jaw drops. Osamu is right: the surprised look on his face is worth everything and more.

"Surprise?" Shouyou grins cheekily, appreciating the way Atsumu's eyebrows threaten to disappear beyond his forehead. All thoughts of dread and oncoming doom flee Shouyou's mind at once. Atsumu is adorable when he's caught off guard.

"Shouyou!" In one swift movement, Atsumu scoops him up by the torso and squeezes him tight, not bothering to stop even when his backpack and luggage slips off and drops onto the floor. He buries his nose in Shouyou's neck and breathes out a warm sigh that sends tingles down Shouyou's spine. "You said ya weren't comin' back until tomorrow!"

"I know," Shouyou laughs, wrapping his arms around Atsumu and squeezing him back. "Just wanted to surprise you."

"Well it's the best surprise ever," Atsumu says, turning his face so he can give Shouyou a wet kiss on the cheek. He pauses and pulls back so he can look Shouyou in the eyes. "You're always the best surprise I've ever had— and keep having— ever."

Shouyou grins and tips his toes so he can give Atsumu a proper kiss on the mouth. Atsumu slides an arm up Shouyou's back so he can pull him in even closer, fingers curling and fisting in Shouyou's hair. Between kissing and letting Atsumu pull back simply to look at his face again and again, it takes a while for them to make it back inside the apartment with Shouyou's luggage on the right side of the closed door.

"You have to tell me all about it," Atsumu says when they finally end up on the couch with Shouyou nesting comfortably at his side. The TV screen is paused on a Super Smash Brother's game and a couple of used kitchenware occupies the coffee table. The sight sets Shouyou's heart more at ease: this, too, feels like home. "Even though ya kinda told me a lot already on the phone, but, it's different like this, ya know?"

Like this, his voice echoes in Shouyou's ears. *This*, meaning Atsumu's arm wrapped around Shouyou's smaller frame. *This*, meaning Shouyou's legs draped casually across Atsumu's

thighs. *This* , meaning the two of them cozily sprawled on the couch, doing nothing more than enjoying each other's company and passing the time together.

Shouyou smiles. "I know. Although there's not really much else left to tell."

Upon hearing his own words, a pinch of guilt tugs once again at his chest. He still needs to tell Atsumu. He *should* tell him soon. He should maybe—

"Oh! Shit—" Atsumu sits up, looking startled. After glancing at the clock on the wall (9:12 PM), he turns to Shouyou. "Didja eat dinner yet? I should'a asked right away. If I'd known you were coming home now, I would've made somethin' extra earlier or— or maybe Samu could've—"

"It's okay," Shouyou assures. "I ate before the flight. Samu-san picked me up."

Atsumu's mouth drops open, looking utterly betrayed. " *Samu* went and got you? Samu knew this whole time?! That *bastard* —"

"Sorry," Shouyou laughs. "I think it's fine if we've both already eaten."

"But—"

Shouyou presses a finger to Atsumu's lips and shifts onto his knees. "Leaves time for other things."

"Other—?"

Atsumu cuts off with a quiet gulp when he sees the look in Shouyou's eyes. The guilty voice that had resurfaced in Shouyou's head threatens to grow louder. Shouyou clamps down on it and fights to chase other feelings harder. Like the comfortable warmth in his chest from snuggling with Atsumu on his couch or the blazing excitement spreading to his toes as Shouyou slowly crawls over Atsumu and straddles his hips. Better yet, Shouyou focuses on the pool of heat rising in his belly as Atsumu stares up at him with half-lidded eyes and bites his bottom lip. Atsumu had looked so happy when he realized they would be back together in one place a day early. He looks so pliant and eager now, pinned beneath Shouyou's weight, waiting for him to make the next move. Whatever is happening outside of them, before or after, Shouyou has no space to think about it. The only thing that exists in this moment is *Atsumu*, how much he loves him, how he'd do anything to keep him happy, and how badly he *wants*.

Shouyou knows this about himself: he's someone who always wants, and is always left wanting. But right now in this moment, hovering over Atsumu with their matching hardness pressed up against one another, there's only one thing he really *needs*.

Leaning down, Shouyou rests his cheek against Atsumu's jaw and breathes in his ear.

"Remember when I said I'd show you how much I missed you when I got back?" He can feel Atsumu's grip tighten around his thighs.

"Yeah?" comes Atsumu's stifled reply.

Lowering his voice to an even huskier murmur, Shouyou whispers, “Time to make good on that promise.”

And with that, he moves to kiss Atsumu, hard. Atsumu matches his pace easily, opening his mouth to Shouyou’s tongue and pushing back with his own, hungry for more. A hand comes up to wrap around Shouyou’s neck and steady the both of them. The jacket Shouyou is wearing starts to grow hot around his neck so he zips it down and lets Atsumu help push the sleeves off of him.

Hands. Shouyou’s hands are everywhere. He can’t keep his hands off of Atsumu. His fingers reach down to scrabble at Atsumu’s shirt with vague thoughts of removing it immediately, but all Shouyou can succeed at is pushing it up just enough so he can get his hands on those abs and all over that chest.

“Eager today, are we?” Atsumu chuckles between kisses. He moves down to suck on a spot below Shouyou’s jaw, his own hands roaming along Shouyou’s back beneath his shirt.

“Tsumu...” Shouyou whines. His hands roam over Atsumu’s chest and he circles a thumb around one of his nipples.

Atsumu sucks in his breath and freezes his movements for a second. “Fuck. Okay, I wasn’t ready for that.”

Shouyou presses his forehead against Atsumu’s and slides his other hand down Atsumu’s stomach.

“I told you I missed you a lot, didn’t I?” Shouyou asks.

“Well, if we wanna get technical,” Atsumu murmurs. “You said ya’d *show* me how much—didn’t you?”

“Oh, right...” Shouyou’s hand brushes Atsumu’s pants line and he continues down that path, applying more pressure as he reaches the intended destination. “My bad.”

Without mercy, Shouyou starts palming the front of Atsumu’s sweats, rubbing his bulge hard through the fabric. Atsumu lets out a choked groan and drops his head back against the couch. His chest is heaving up and down — still measured — but growing less and less regular. Beads of sweat begin forming on Atsumu’s exposed neck. He looks beautiful like this, and Shouyou can feel his own hardness starting to grow more uncomfortable with every shaky moan that escapes Atsumu’s lips.

“Tsumu...” Shouyou whispers, leaning forward to nibble at his ear. “I *really* missed you... I missed you so *bad*...”

Shouyou rolls his hips down and Atsumu lets out a sound somewhere between a hiss and a moan in his ear.

“You fucking *tease*,” Atsumu moans. Large hands snake their way around Shouyou, pushing his shirt up. Atsumu’s shirt is already halfway up his chest, his abs sleek with sweat. They

pause for a second to shed both their tees, and then Shouyou dives back in to claim Atsumu's mouth.

Shouyou really has missed him, missed this. He's gotten used to being able to see or touch or kiss Atsumu any time he wants. It's only been a few months of this but it already feels like home. Another kinda home. A home away from Sendai-home.

A home away from all his other homes...

Yes, Shouyou has missed this. He *will* miss this. But— he's not ready to miss this... Not yet. Maybe not ever.

A wave of longing wells up in Shouyou's chest, so sharp he feels his lungs tighten and threaten to cave in. Shouyou breaks away panting for air. He leans his head against Atsumu's shoulder, trying to remember how to breathe as his closed eyes prickle with tears.

"Hey," comes Atsumu's low voice at once. Of course, with Atsumu being attentive as always, nothing slips past his notice. He brings his hands up and cradles Shouyou's face, holding him close. "Hey, you okay?"

Shouyou doesn't look up. Instead he bites down on Atsumu's shoulder as he tries to stem the tears.

"Yeah," Shouyou says shakily. "Just gimme a minute..."

Stop. Now is not the time for these feelings. Just leave it.

One of Atsumu's thumb strokes Shouyou's cheek, then trails up to push his hair back so Atsumu can press his lips to Shouyou's forehead. The act is small but carries so much comfort. It makes Shouyou's heart swell with overwhelming affection. When he's sure the sudden threat of tears has passed, Shouyou finally looks up and grins.

"Sorry, I guess it's just been a long time," he laughs. It sounds convincing, even to himself. And anyway, Atsumu looks slightly relieved, Shouyou thinks. It's hard to tell because maybe Atsumu is just torn between desire and concern. Better help cast both their worries aside, then. "Like I said..."

He leans back in to kiss Atsumu, slow and full on the mouth.

"I really, *really* missed you."

With that, Shouyou slips his hand under Atsumu's boxers and pulls him out with a particularly heady squeeze.

Atsumu groans, his jaw going slack under Shouyou's lips as his arms tighten around Shouyou's shoulders.

"I missed you so much too," Atsumu says breathlessly against his neck. He slides a hand down to grip Shouyou's thigh and with the other one fumbles with his jeans' buttons. "Goddamnit, why aren't you in sweatpants?"

Shouyou snorts and takes a moment to help them both shed the rest of their clothes, laughing when Atsumu continues to struggle with the jeans.

Once they're both freed, Shouyou wraps a hand around both of them and starts to thumb at Atsumu's tip, eliciting a moan from Atsumu that tapers off into a whimper. The hand on Shouyou's thigh tightens as Shouyou strokes further along his length, holding them firmly in place as Atsumu starts bucking up on instinct.

"Shouyou..."

"I'm here," he murmurs. Shouyou doesn't know why he says it but it feels important in this moment to reassure Atsumu of the fact. "I'm right here, Tsumu."

Atsumu's other hand comes up to wrap around his, dwarfing Shouyou's hand and adding extra pressure and heat between them. Shouyou takes this as a sign that it's time to quicken the pace.

Every moan Atsumu makes urges Shouyou to go faster. The sight of Atsumu with his head rolled back, eyes closed, slack-jawed, and hair mussed makes Shouyou's chest ache. Hunching over, Shouyou dips down to murmur it in his ear.

"You're so beautiful, Tsumu."

Atsumu opens his eyes, gazing, unfocused, back at him.

"Speak for yourself," he pants, voice thick with desire. "God — *hn* — I love you."

The heat pooling in Shouyou's lower abdomen intensifies with each pump of their hands. Shouyou moves until he can't focus on anything else but that. That, and the growing desperation on Atsumu's face — all that confidence and smug assuredness — coming apart under Shouyou's fingers. Right now he wants more of Atsumu, he wants as much of him as he can possibly take. So he throws himself into each movement until he starts to see stars.

Atsumu is getting close, he can tell. It's like reading an opposing spiker based solely on the strong feeling in Shouyou's gut. Giving a particularly drawn out thrust, Shouyou leans over Atsumu's ear and breathes, "I love you, too."

Grip tightening once more on Shouyou's thigh, Atsumu comes with a strangled moan and sinks back into the couch. Shouyou gives them both a few more pumps, then buries his face in Atsumu's shoulder as he finishes too.

Tired and spent, he slumps over Atsumu, a vague thought about cleaning the mess between them later, and rests his head in the crook of Atsumu's neck.

They have a good thing going on. A really good thing. Why ruin it prematurely by making Atsumu miserable? He should enjoy what they have now while he still can, right?

And besides... he thinks, closing his eyes, feeling too blissed out to continue the worrying thought, *There's still time.*

*

As it turns out, time really isn't an issue. Shouyou has a lot of time.

It is autumn in Brazil. March passes slowly into April. It's been three weeks since Adriana called and he has until roughly July to sign with Asas, yet still, Shouyou hasn't sent them a confirmation despite already knowing his answer.

Likewise, he still hasn't found a way to break the news to Atsumu.

It's clear and crisp outside today. Around him, pink petals float down from rows of branches sprouting blossoms, swirling about as Shouyou speeds along the road on his bike.

He's always admired the beauty of Japan in the spring, and while he was in Brazil, stuck at the scorching tail end of summer, he'd almost forgotten how sweet and delicate this air of new beginnings is. It's much warmer here in Osaka compared to Sendai, but Shouyou is enjoying it just as much as he had growing up back home. It seems like only yesterday that he had started his final year of high school, cycling through a path of cherry blossoms raining down on him on the first day of April, not fully appreciating at the time that it would be his penultimate spring in Sendai for a long while.

At the next stoplight, Shouyou shakes his head to clear his thoughts. *Stop it. If this is your last spring in Japan once again, then you just have to enjoy it, right? No room for nostalgia just yet!*

It's not like he's never going to experience spring in Japan ever again. Japan will be here whenever he wants to come back. And of course, Shouyou will eagerly look forward to it.

Perhaps the problem isn't *not enough* time; it's having *too much* time. If Shouyou could— if there was a button he could press or a screw he could turn — he would flashforward a year from now to that exciting future when he's already playing for Brazil and still happily dating Atsumu because by then, they'd have already resolved everything. Then Shouyou can skip the part where he has to break the news to Atsumu and watch his face fall, probably in a mixture of both pride and sadness, and every other miserable feeling that might follow after.

Shouyou sighs and hops off his bike, having arrived at his destination: the local grocery store. After parking his bike by the building, he grabs his shopping bags and enters.

The smell of fresh fruit greets him first. Following his nose, Shouyou heads towards the produce section.

“Mango, mango, mangoooo,” he hums to himself under his breath.

The fruits are much smaller here in Japan, but the size difference is especially pronounced in mangoes. Each one he picks up fits in his hand. Ripe, but not quite as pliant as the large ones

in Rio. He wishes he could bring fresh fruit from Brazil to share with his friends, but until Atsumu comes to visit him there, these will have to do.

Oh. Shouyou stares, unseeing, at the mangoes in his hands as a soft pinch grips his chest. *When Atsumu visits.* Because that's what it's going to have to be after this year. How often will they get to see each other, he wonders, and will they get to play each other a lot? What if Atsumu goes international too, and they both have to spend half the year in totally different countries from Japan? Maybe it wouldn't be so bad, being long distance, because Shouyou would most definitely swear to make the most of it no matter how much they miss each other and—

“Excuse me,” a woman says politely behind him, drawing his attention back to the present. He's still standing in front of the mangoes holding several of them between his fingers, taking up space.

“Ah! Sorry, miss!” he hurries to apologize, turning around to give the lady three heads bows while he's at it. Shouyou quickly bags the mangoes and moves along the aisle towards the meat section.

Although the dish he plans to bring to Kita's place is common in many parts of the world, there are a few different and unique elements in Brazilian beef stroganoff that Shouyou wants to introduce to the crew. It isn't too crazy or out there, and he hopes they will appreciate it.

Shouyou sighs. Even when he does sign with Asas, he's not going to be permanently living there until after the Olympics are over. In actuality, there really is a lot of time to tell Atsumu, to figure out what to do. The sand is flowing in multitudes, steady as always. The problem is discovering translucent walls encasing the sand, that there's a limit and an end to this hourglass. Even though their relationship has only just started to ripen.

The more time Shouyou has, the more he feels like it's running out.

When Shouyou is finished buying the ingredients he needs, he returns home so he can pack his stuff and get ready for their visit to Kita's farm tomorrow. He plans to prepare a pot of beef stroganoff early in the morning and stow it in a small insulated bag so it can be more of a reveal when they arrive. He can't wait to share it with them.

After putting the produce away in the fridge for later, he checks his phone for any messages from Atsumu.

His heart stops at the first notification. It's not a text from Atsumu, but an email. From Adriana. *But it's not July yet!* Shouyou thinks, blood pressure rising as he opens the email.

Bom dia, Shouyou!

I know July is still quite a ways away, but I just wanted to send along some information about housing options and benefits as you start considering your plans to...

Shouyou lets out a large sigh of relief and stops reading. He's eager to look through the attachments but he'll have to do it later when he has the time and space to think about it.

Marking the email as unread, he moves on to check the next notification on his phone.

Missed call from Natsu, 3:43 PM.

Huh. Wonder what that could be about. Surely, everything is okay at home?

Settling down on his couch, Shouyou swipes to call back. He doesn't have to wait very long to find out what's up. The moment Natsu picks up, Shouyou receives a full blast of her shrill shriek in his ears.

"NII-CHAN!"

He flinches, holding his phone an arm's distance away as she continues to talk.

"Why didn't you pick up earlier! I was trying to call on my water break but you weren't there so I had no one to complain to until practice was over! Asuka-chan is one of my best friends but she just doesn't quite *get* volleyball, you know?"

"Uwaah??" Shouyou sputters, putting his phone back to his ear. "Slow down, slow down. Did you say complain? Complain about what?"

"Well, not really complain," Natsu amends with a loud sigh. "More just bummed and kinda worried."

"Why? What's up?"

Natsu lets out a dissatisfied hum. "Promise you won't laugh?"

"Promise I won't—? What kinda intro is that?! Why would I laugh?! You're the one who called me!"

"Okay, okay! It's just— ugh. It sounds stupid now that I'm about to say it out loud to you."

"Say it, say it, say it, say it, say it—"

"Okay! Shut up!" Natsu pauses. Shouyou can practically hear her pouting. She sighs again. "So, um. Well. I'm sure you've heard of my one teammate— you know, the one that's been on all the volleyball magazines—"

“Ohhh, Kumagi Rieko?” Shouyou asks with interest. “Yeah, I remember seeing her featured recently in *Volleyball Monthly* !”

“Not helping, Nii-chan,” Natsu says through gritted teeth.

“Huh?” Shouyou frowns, but then he thinks about it a little more and realizes what would make the most sense: Kumagi must be one of Natsu’s rivals. “Ah... so it’s like that, huh?”

“ *Tch*. Don’t ‘*so-it’s-like-that*’ me! You pick fights with more teammates and opponents than you can even remember!”

“Yeesh!” Shouyou recoils. Since when did Natsu get this sassy? He supposes he shouldn’t be surprised... “Kettle call the black pot! Wait— or is it black call the pot kettle?” (*Damn it. Where’s Tsukishima when he needs someone to correct him?*)

“I don’t know!” Natsu shouts back. “But I don’t think you’re the one who’s supposed to say that line! If anyone, it’s me!”

“Gah, okay, fine! I get it!” Shouyou concedes. Sometimes being an older brother means being the bigger person. He can do that for Natsu every once in a while. “So what happened?”

His little sister gives a little *hmpf* of annoyance, then continues, clearly eager to get to the tea.

“Sensei told us at the beginning of practice that a representative from U-19 contacted him about Kumagi yesterday,” she mutters, sounding defeated.

“Whoa, that’s cool!” Shouyou says, forgetting himself for a moment in light of the exciting news. “I mean— Oh, er— that’s *sooooo* unfair.”

“It is,” Natsu deadpans, making it known by her tone that she has not missed Shouyou’s slip-up at all. “So. Guess she’s getting scouted.”

“But didn’t you also get to go to the prospective U-19 training camp last year?” Shouyou asks.

“That’s not the point,” Natsu whines. “They *actually* reached out to her. Nobody has reached out to me.”

Shouyou smiles, trying not to let his laugh come through. When he was her age, he would’ve given anything to have the opportunities she’s already been having throughout her grade school career so far. He was never picky about who he would play for, as long as they were ranked high enough and wanted him. MSBY is the first team that’s ever *chosen* him. Before that, he’d spent the first half of his life fighting for his choices and fighting to be chosen.

“Aww, U-19 is overrated anyway,” he tells her encouragingly, grinning to himself.

“Says you,” Natsu snipes back.

“Hey! Be nice to your elders!” Shouyou chastises. “You’re talking to a future Olympian! *Who was never in U-19 by the way!* So it’s not like your chances are shot. And plus, there’s gonna be so many options out there for you once you graduate, I promise. You’ve still got Nationals coming up this year to show the world what you’ve got!”

“But maybe the world’s not gonna be watching me,” she wails.

Shouyou rolls his eyes. “They will.”

“What if they don’t?”

“Then I guess you’ll just have to *make* them notice then.”

Natsu goes silent on the other side. Shouyou smirks. It’s a sign she’s collecting herself for battle.

“It runs in the family, doesn’t it?” she asks with a quiet laugh. “Making them notice.”

“I know you can do it. You’ve already been doing it. You’re gonna be great.”

“... Thanks, Nii-chan.”

Shouyou smiles. “Now stop moping and keep up the good work!”

“I wasn’t moping!” Natsu protests. “It was only for a hot second!”

“I dunno, we’ve been talking for at least five minutes now—”

“Oh my god I’m hanging up on you.”

Shouyou laughs. Looks like he had never had to worry about her in the first place. “Bye, Natsu.”

“Oh, wait—” Natsu stops him. “Before you go, I forgot to ask! Did you accept the offer from Asas yet?”

“Ah...” Shouyou feels his heart sink a little. “Not yet.”

“What? Why not!” Natsu demands. “I thought you really wanted to play for them! They’re a highly ranked team!”

“I know, I do!” Shouyou says earnestly. “It’s just— I dunno, it’s still early and I have until July, so I haven’t got around to it yet!”

“Well hurry up, ‘cause I’ve been dying to brag to my friends about it!”

“I’ll do it soon, I promise.”

“What do you mean by ‘soon’? Asas is a really good team and you’ve always wanted to go international! *And* you’ve been missing Brazil so I would’ve thought you’d said yes right away after you got back to Osaka. This isn’t like you.”

Shouyou sighs. “It’s complicated.”

“Typing ‘yes’ in an email is complicated?”

“It’s just...” Shouyou trails off. Does he really want to get into all of this with his little sister?

“Tell me,” she insists. It’s not a request. Shouyou can imagine Natsu with her arms crossed, glaring at him expectantly with those defiant eyes.

“Okay, fine!” he concedes. Sighing, he tells her. “It’s Atsumu. I haven’t figured out how to tell him yet.”

“Oh.” Her tone sounds offhanded, a little surprised. “Wait—” she pauses, probably doing some quick analysis in her head. “You haven’t told him after all this time? It’s been like three weeks!”

“I know! I know...”

“What are you waiting for?” Natsu asks.

Good question, Shouyou thinks. For the most part, Shouyou has been actively trying *not* to think about it. It makes him anxious and he doesn’t want to make Atsumu miserable. Sometimes it’s as simple as that.

He sighs. “I don’t know. We have a really good thing going on right now and— I — I don’t know. I can’t explain it. I’ve just got a bad feeling about it.”

“What? Like you’ll end up breaking up over it or something?”

Shouyou receives a sharp sting to his heart. He had been deliberately avoiding considering that possibility. It hurts to even hear it said out loud.

Natsu takes his silence as an answer. “If you sign with Asas, you’re not planning to come back for a long time, are you?”

Shouyou swallows. They both already know the answer to this.

Natsu sighs as well. “I see.”

Shouyou nods, even though she can’t see him. Things really have been super good with Atsumu, and it feels like if Shouyou were to suddenly drop this bomb, it would change everything about their remaining time together. Now that there’s an expiration date on his time in Japan— without any plans for return— Shouyou *really* doesn’t want either of them to spend it being miserable about this. He just wants to... he just *wants*...

“We can’t have everything, huh?” Natsu says.

Shouyou scowls. He doesn’t like where this conversation is going. He’s already trying his best to take care of things without any casualties and they’ve been training for the Olympics

and having a grand time being *together* and— and what would Natsu understand about adult relationships anyway?

“Whatever. I’ll figure it out,” he tells her firmly. “So don’t worry about it. I’ll send my confirmation to Asas soon. I promise.”

“Yeah, okay,” Natsu replies. “But what about Atsumu-san?”

“I told you, I’ll figure it out! I just...” he falters, “—just need to think of how to best bring it up to him.”

“Uh huh, okay, sure,” she repeats skeptically. “And how much longer is that gonna take?”

Another wave of annoyance bubbles up in Shouyou.

“Oi, it’s not like I haven’t tried!” he asserts. “I’ve *been* trying! It’s just, every time I get really close to bringing it up, we end up having— *ULP*. ”

Shouyou clamps his mouth down just as Natsu lets out a horrified squawk.

“Never mind!” he finishes, face heating up with embarrassment as Natsu cries, “Oh my god, I’m going to pretend I did *not* just hear you say that.”

“Never mind! I’m sorry!” Shouyou shouts while Natsu continues to squeal.

“Now I’m really hanging up!”

“I said never mind! Ugh, fine! Bye then!”

“Talk to you after I’ve wiped my memory clean of this forever.”

Shouyou lets out a frustrated groan. “It’s *way* worse on my end, you know!”

“That’s your issue!”

“Well, you asked!”

“*Hanging up now!*”

“You called me first!”

“*Bye, Nii-chan!*”

“Okay, bye!”

The dial tone of her ending the call beeps twice in his ear halfway through his last words. Shouyou drops his phone on the couch and covers his face in his hands. *God*. Top ten most embarrassing moments of his life. He doesn’t know if he can face the light of day again.

As if right on cue, his phone buzzes again. This time, a text from Atsumu.

wanna get dinner soon?

Shouyou stares at the text, trying to recover from the embarrassment and to shake it off. In spite of it all, upon seeing these four simple words from Atsumu, he smiles.

Sure

Packing for tomorrow, so pick me up in 30?

Okay 😊

:) Love you

Love you too ❤️

Shouyou sets his phone down, feeling warm and fuzzy, before jumping off the couch so he can pack his stuff at top speed.

If he can hold onto this feeling, this sacred happiness, this glass-shaped pearl of love, he will save everything he can — every last drop.

*

“What’s in the bag?” Atsumu asks when Shouyou gets into the backseat of the truck. “It smells delicious.”

Shouyou beams. “Surprise.”

From the driver’s seat, Osamu turns his head to sniff out the object in question. One corner of his mouth quirks, an expression Shouyou has come to associate as Osamu-san’s lowkey way of showing excitement.

Atsumu, on the other hand, pouts. “Aw, not even gonna give me a hint?”

“Nope!” Shouyou says. “You don’t wanna leave Kita-san out of it, do you?”

“Goddamn it,” Atsumu turns back to the front and crosses his arms. “We shouldn’ta introduced Shouyou to Kita-san. Now he knows our weakness.”

“Weakness?” Osamu snorts. “More like Kita’s the only person who can get ya to properly behave.”

“Pfft, whatever,” Atsumu rolls his eyes. “S’not like he doesn’t do the same t’ *you* .”

“Difference is I can act respectable even when he’s not around,” Osamu counters. Shouyou bites back a laugh. He’s not sure if it’s just his imagination, but Osamu’s ears are suddenly bright red.

“Oh *please* ,” Atsumu says scathingly. “You, respectable my ass. As if ya didn’t try to eat Shouyou’s birthday cake last year when you saw it in my fridge.”

“I thought it was yours!”

“That doesn’t make it okay!”

“Says the brother who always ate my portion growin’ up! I always had to pretend it was mom’s!”

Shouyou sits and stares as Atsumu starts to bare his teeth out of anger. His boyfriend is so cute. So cute and silly.

The twins continue to bicker for the next ten minutes down the freeway, bringing up progressively pettier and pettier details about their past offenses toward each other. Eventually, as usual, they reach some sort of impasse where both become bored of the argument and fall silent, with Atsumu glaring sharply out the window. With a small smile, Shouyou leans forward behind Atsumu’s seat and slides his fingers along Atsumu’s neck and into his hair. Atsumu shivers at once.

“O-oi!” he calls out, his voice cracked. “I told you to stop doin’ that when we drive!”

“You’re not driving,” Shouyou states, blinking his innocent wide-eyed stare.

“Still,” Atsumu croaks under his breath.

Osamu scrunches his face in disgust. “Please don’t.”

“Oh, shut up!” Atsumu snipes. “It’s none of yer business!”

“It’s my car and I’m drivin’!”

“ *Our* car!”

“I bought it!”

“Ugh. Fine. Whatever. Nothin’s happenin’ anyway, okay?”

Atsumu turns away from Osamu and leans against the window.

Leaning forward, Shouyou whispers in Atsumu’s ear: “Why’re you so sensitive?”

Atsumu sucks in his breath.

“Shouyou, I swear to god—” then he pulls out his phone and starts typing on it.

A second later, Shouyou gets a text.

You know why.

Grinning, Shouyou types back.

Haha my bad. You just seemed a bit wound up so I wanted to help :D

Trust me, if we were any place else I would've let ya

I can wait.

You have no idea how much I wish we were alone right now

I think I have a little bit of an idea ;)

Shouyouuuuuu 🍷🍷🍷

Osamu glances over at them for a split second then directs his attention back onto the road. With a sigh, he rolls his eyes and says, “Don’t make me regret inviting you two.”

Shouyou stifles his laugh and leans back in his seat. He pockets his phone so he can resist the temptation to keep texting Atsumu out of respect for Osamu. Atsumu lifts his head and looks over his shoulder at Shouyou with a small pout. Bringing a finger to his lips, Shouyou makes the *shushing* gesture and grins. Atsumu smiles back and slips an arm through the space between the edge of the seat and the car door, reaching for Shouyou. Shouyou takes his hand and squeezes.

The freeway soon leads them out of the main part of downtown. The number of offices and tall buildings begins to decrease and Shouyou finds them driving past long stretches of residential neighborhoods instead. They talk about recent team stats and about Osamu’s shop. They are both excited for Shouyou to see Kita’s farm, and Shouyou is excited too. To think of all the onigiri he’s eaten in the last year and how he finally gets to visit the source of all that rice, while also sharing with them a Brazilian dish. It’s extremely exciting; he can’t wait.

About twenty minutes later, the scenery shifts again. After exiting the freeway, Osamu had taken a left onto a muddy path leading off the main road. Since then, their surroundings have become mostly trees, dirt, grass, and patches of farmland stretching into the sunny horizon.

While Shouyou enjoys the hustle and bustle of the city's center, as he takes in the boundless rows of open lands, a wave of calm washes over him like rain. One could run out into the middle of the field to jump or dance and find themselves liberated by all the space they can claim for themselves. It occurs to him then that Kita isn't the type to jump or dance (— though Shouyou entertains himself with the thought for a brief second), which makes him feel a little surprised. Perhaps deep beneath that disciplined exterior is a free and wandering soul longing to be one with the earth and the skies.

They arrive about forty five minutes later. As the truck approaches the main farmhouse, Shouyou appreciates the view of the rice paddy fields on either side of the road. Pulling into the side of the dirt tracks right outside the gates, Osamu parks the car. A pleasant jingle of wind chimes greets him when he opens the car door and steps out into the mild sunshine. Looking towards the source of the sound, he finds one tied above the window by the front door.

The sky is a deep blue canopy over the farm. The windows have been thrown open to coax the light breeze indoors. Shouyou follows the twins up to the house and as they draw near, Shouyou catches a waft of fresh grilled fish, making his mouth water.

Osamu lifts a hand to ring the doorbell, but before he can do so, a voice calls them from behind.

“Hello. Glad you all made it.”

They turn around and see Kita walking up to them, presumably on his way back from the fields, looking sunkissed and sprightly. He's wearing a blue outfit and is in the middle of taking his gardening gloves off, and Shouyou can't help but admire the way the sun highlights the gold-white specks in his hair. Regardless of who you are, Shouyou thinks as Kita wipes the sweat off his brow and beams at everyone, Kita-san is a handsome man. There's just something about him that is so calming, genuine, and kind. You can't help but find him pretty in some way.

“Glad to see you, too,” Osamu returns with a wave, just as Atsumu says, “Hi!”

Shouyou bows his head in greeting and adds, “Good afternoon, Kita-san!”

Kita comes to a stop before them and gestures towards the door.

“Please, come in.”

The three of them follow Kita's lead. He unlocks the door and lets them into the genkan. The aroma of grilled fish intensifies upon entering. Shouyou can hear the sizzle of fire and scrape of spatula on a pan. The sensations lift his spirits greatly. Both he and Atsumu tilt their heads up and take in a deep whiff with content smiles on their faces.

“Mmmm, everything smells *so* good!” Shouyou remarks.

“That would be Kita's obaasan cooking lunch,” Osamu says. “Yer gonna be in for a treat.”

“Ooooooh!” Shouyou beams. “Can’t wait. Oh! And I brought something too!”

He holds the bag containing the stroganoff in his hands up to Kita.

“Yeah,” Atsumu interjects, rushing forward. “And we’ve been dyin’ to know what it is.”

“Stop bein’ rude, Tsumu!” Osamu hisses, pulling on the back of his shirt to hold him back from pouncing on the bag.

Atsumu huffs. “S’not like you weren’t curious yerself.”

“I’ll give one hint for now,” Shouyou says. “It’s a dish I ate a lot of in Brazil!”

Kita chuckles and takes the bag from Shouyou as Atsumu gasps at the exchange. “Thank you, Hinata-kun. I’ll be sure we make room for it alongside our traditional Japanese lunch set.”

“Obrigado!” Shouyou claps his hand in prayer and bows his head again.

Kita grins. “I’ll take this to the kitchen. Please, come in.”

The three of them take their shoes off and step over the threshold. Sunlight streams in from the open side doors, illuminating the spring green walls of the interior with a bright glow. Setting the rest of their stuff down in the foyer for the time being, they make their way into the living room where a teapot and set of tea cups sit on a low coffee table, awaiting their arrival. The twins take a seat on either side; Shouyou follows and sinks down into the cushion next to Atsumu.

“How was the drive?” Kita asks, taking the seat next to Osamu. “Traffic not too bad?”

“It was smooth as ever,” Osamu affirms. “Thanks for letting us stay over.”

“Yeah!” Shouyou chimes in. “Thank you very much!”

“Not a problem,” Kita smiles. “It’s nice to have guests every once in a while. Helps keep our daily routine more fresh.”

“Oooh,” Shouyou and Atsumu both nod. *That sounds super cool!*

“I think lunch should be ready soon,” Kita informs them. “I’ll go check on obaachan.”

As he starts getting up to his feet, Osamu moves to stand as well.

“I’ll help,” he offers, taking his cap off and setting it down on the table.

The two of them head into the kitchen, leaving Shouyou and Atsumu alone.

Shouyou turns to him and beams. Atsumu, however, has pursed lips and looks deep in thought.

“What’s up?” Shouyou asks.

For a moment, Atsumu says nothing. Then: “Is it just me, or is Samu bein’ weird?”

Shouyou tilts his head, considering the matter. So far, he hasn’t noticed anything off, but then again, he’s not his twin.

“Weird, how?”

Atsumu grumbles. “I dunno... I can’t put my finger on it.”

“Hmm...” Shouyou reflects back thoughtfully. Osamu seemed pretty normal on the drive here, and he had just offered to help out in the kitchen, where he obviously thrives best. Nothing weird with that, right? “I’m not sure... but if it’s just you, then I think you’re probably onto something.”

Atsumu scowls, his nose scrunching up in that adorable way when he’s annoyed and trying to think really hard. “Ugh. It’s gonna bug me all weekend.”

Shouyou stifles a laugh.

“Aw, really?” he asks, sidling closer and bumping shoulders with Atsumu. Lowering his voice, he mutters, “I thought you couldn’t wait to be alone.”

The furrow in Atsumu’s brow relaxes. Turning to Shouyou, he smiles.

“Ah, you’re right. Forget Samu,” Atsumu shrugs off. He leans in until their noses are only a couple millimeters away. “Sick of that guy getting between us. Right now, there’s only me n’ you.”

Shouyou’s eyes flutter down to Atsumu’s lips as he starts to close the gap...

“Oi, lunch is ready!” Osamu’s voice calls out from the kitchen. Shouyou flinches back just as the other twin appears a second later, holding a tray of dishes as he enters the living room. Osamu takes one look at them and shakes his head with a sigh. “Knew I was right to give ya both warning. We’re at the Kita-san residence; please restrain yerselves.”

Shouyou sits up straight in his cushion with his hands on his knees, feeling his cheeks burn. Atsumu looks less composed and his ears are red but he bares his teeth at his brother, muttering, “*Speak of the devil*” under his breath.

A moment later, Kita walks out of the kitchen as well, followed by his grandmother who, Shouyou now sees, looks just as calm and healthy as her grandson. Kita takes one look at Atsumu, and Shouyou swears he sees the decision form in their former captain’s eyes to ignore the awkward air between them. Shouyou lets out a soft exhale of relief.

The three of them begin to set the trays and food down on the table. Shouyou’s eyes widen and his mouth waters at the dishes before them. The plates of grilled fish and salad, bowls of rice and miso soup, are all arranged together in a nice set. Osamu circles back a second round to the kitchen and brings out the pot Shouyou had brought, which now looks to have been heated up and is currently giving off an amazing smell. As Osamu places it on the side, Atsumu brightens and leans forward to inspect it.

“What is it?” he asks eagerly. Osamu removes the lid and steam rises from inside, revealing a light-reddish stew of beef, mushroom, and spices.

“Stroganoff!” Shouyou answers. “It’s a little different from how other countries do it, so I wanted to make some and share it. And there’s one more thing!”

He draws out a ziplock bag of condiments he’d been keeping in his pocket and holds it up to everyone. “You have to sprinkle these thin potato chips on top! I don’t think I fried this as well as they do in Brazil but...”

“It looks delicious!” Atsumu exclaims, grabbing an empty bowl and reaching for the giant serving spoon that Kita’s grandmother has just set next to the pot. “I can’t wait to try it!”

Osamu clears his throat loudly and Atsumu pauses. Atsumu glances over at Kita-san and immediately sets everything back down on the table. Shouyou gingerly places the bag of chips next to the pot as well. Atsumu gives a polite bow of his head to Kita’s grandmother and says, “Sorry.”

Kita’s grandmother simply chuckles.

“Obaachan,” Kita speaks up, then gestures to Shouyou. “This is Hinata Shouyou. He’s one of Atsumu’s teammates, and has since become a dear friend to us too.”

Shouyou feels a shiver of excitement bubble up in his chest at these words. Kita and Osamu accepting him as a *‘dear friend’*? He couldn't feel happier about it.

“And Hinata-kun,” Kita says, turning towards him. “This is my obaachan. Yumie-obaachan.”

“I-it’s an honor to meet you!” Shouyou stammers, dropping his whole head down in a deep bow. “And thank you for letting us stay over!”

“Of course, Shouyou-chan,” she smiles. “We hope you enjoy it.”

“Well,” Kita says. “Let’s dig in.”

“Itadakimasu!”

*

To Shouyou’s delight, everyone enjoys the stroganoff he had brought. Osamu admits he hasn’t tried much of anything from South America before and is therefore humbled by how much more he has yet to learn about food.

Later, when the plates are empty and their stomachs full, Kita takes them on Shouyou’s first tour around the farm. From what Shouyou can see, unlike the bustling city and concrete

suburbs, the ecosystem feels very sacred here. From the birds to the cows to the grass to the skies, Kita's family gives so much care and attention to each facet of this environment.

As they walk along the paddy fields, Shouyou listens with great interest as Kita describes the rice harvesting process, gaining new appreciation for how, in every step of the way, so much labor and heart goes into the process of bringing the main staple item they all consume and enjoy at Onigiri Miya from farm to table. The twins, who have already been here at least once (—or well, only once in Atsumu's case), follow along in the back, loudly admiring the onset of spring blooming around them.

After about an hour of walking around the premises, when the sun starts to reach the hottest peak of the day, the four of them take a break beneath a willow tree by a small lake, about six patches of fields down from the main farmhouse. Kita lays out a large blanket for them to sit on while Osamu pulls out a couple of ice cold refreshments from a grocery bag. By the edge of the lake, a few meters away, a line of ducklings follows a mother duck into the water. Shouyou watches them waddle down the bank, feeling content in his heart.

"Do you sit around here during breaks everyday?" Shouyou asks as the ducks paddle past them in a row.

"Not everyday," Kita answers, his enigmatic smile spreading across his face. "But most days, yes."

"Wow," Shouyou breathes, awed. He leans his bottle of ramune against his leg, chilled glass and condensation cooling his skin. From where they sit, he can see the landscape spanning across the horizon beyond the lake: a golden sea of wheat kernels rippling with the breeze, buffeted by green grass and paddy fields, with periwinkle silhouettes of mountains serving as the backdrop. It's a beautiful sight and Shouyou can only imagine what it'd be like to have this as a backyard everyday.

"It's so peaceful here," Shouyou says with a soft sigh, even though somewhere to the left of them, the twins are bickering over something or other. "It feels so... so open. Free."

"Mm," Kita nods. "*'The world is your oyster.'* That's how I feel 'bout the farm sometimes."

"Ohh, I've heard that before!" Shouyou says excitedly. Memories of hot days in stifling school uniforms come to mind, with him and Kageyama competing to see who can finish their homework faster while Tsukishima and Yachi give their honest efforts to try and teach them English. "So what you're saying is... the farm is an open place?"

"Yes. And that you can make what ya want out of it."

"Hmm." Shouyou hugs his knees to his chest and stares at the view, pondering the thought. For Kita-san, the farm is the world he chooses to live in. For Shouyou, it's volleyball. But it's also Sendai. And Brazil. Japan in general. Osaka. Atsumu. Can he make what he wants out of all of them put together?

"So whaddya do with the oyster, then?" Shouyou asks.

“The oysters?” Kita laughs. He shakes his head. “It doesn’t matter what I do with the oysters. What matters is that I make what I can of this world, and *from* this world. By doing everything I need to do the proper way and doing it everyday.”

“Ohh, I see!” Shouyou nods. His mind suddenly flashes back to deep blue skies and ocean waves, the scorching heat on his neck and hot sand beneath his feet. Lights, music, and noise beneath a crescent moon — the night of his first misstep and face plant, arms buried even as he comes up coughing up dirt. Being extricated from his original home, along with everything he’d ever known, and thrown into a new and foreign yet exciting place. A disruption of routine, but also a reinstating of old rhythms. Always starting over. Relearning it the proper way. Doing it everyday. And what’s more, Shouyou could do it again. He could do it soon.

“Shouyou. Shouyou. *Shouyou!* ”

“Huh?”

“Want an orange?” Atsumu asks, holding a peeled tangerine out to him. “I peeled it for ya.”

Osamu mimes vomiting behind him. If anything it makes Shouyou grin wider.

“Thanks, Tsumu,” he says, taking the fruit from him. He pops a slice in his mouth and relishes in the tangy juice bursting against his teeth. “Mm, it’s so sweet!”

“It’s ‘cos I picked ‘em out,” Osamu interjects. Atsumu shoves a hand in his face and pushes him away. Osamu scratches at his arm and the twins are back to their usual roughhousing routine again.

Kita laughs along with Shouyou. The knowing look in Kita’s eyes tells Shouyou that they both have an unspoken understanding that the twins are likely doing this for their entertainment.

The world is your oyster.

Right now, this is his world. Shouyou smiles as he continues to watch Atsumu bicker, snarling at Osamu with a mix of genuine anger but also love in his eyes. He has such a big heart for everything and everyone in his life and he doesn’t mind wearing it on his sleeve; it’s impossible not to fall in love with that. But at the same time... at the same time...

Shouyou’s fist tightens around his soda bottle. Atsumu is as selfless with love as Shouyou is selfish with it. Sitting here by the lake on Kita’s farm with this view and laughing together with the three of them — these are the small moments Shouyou wants to hold onto. Even if it’s only for a little bit longer, he’ll hold onto it tight.

He’ll hold onto it for as long as he can.

When the four of them return to Kita's house, it is almost five and the sun is low into the west. Osamu and Kita apparently have some business and paperwork they had meant to go over, so while they take up space to discuss matters over the living room table, Shouyou and Atsumu decide to help Kita's obaasan in the kitchen. There, Shouyou learns even more about farm life and what it's like to labor for your own food and livelihood.

"If you've ever had the umeboshi onigiri at Osamu-chan's place," his grandma says, showing Shouyou her set of pickled jars, "now you know that he gets it from *me*."

"Ooh!!" Shouyou perks up, taking a closer look at the line of black jars along the walls of the kitchen counter. "No wonder it's so yummy! It's one of the most popular onigiri at his shop! I can attest to that!"

His obaasan chuckles. "You are sweet, Shouyou-chan. Of course, I already knew it was popular, but your word means a lot all the same."

Shouyou nods sagely. "Kita-san isn't there all the time, so only *we* can actually tell you just how many customers you've made smile with your food, and how big those smiles were!"

"Is that so?" Yumie-san grins. "I recall Osamu-chan telling me himself just fine the other day."

"Well, as the not-owners of the shop, we're more unbiased," Atsumu asserts, puffing out his chest and pointing a thumb to himself.

Yumie-san laughs. "Shin-chan is right. You two can't stop competing with each other, can you?"

Shouyou laughs with her. "It's really funny to watch actually."

"Shouyouuu!" Atsumu whines.

"Both you and Osamu-chan," Yumie-san says, shaking her head. "So handsome yet so easy to tease."

"Yeah..." Shouyou cups a hand around his mouth and mutters audibly to her: "Although I think Atsumu-chan is a little easier to tease."

Atsumu lets out a gasp of betrayal.

"*And a little more handsome too,*" Shouyou quickly adds in a whisper. He grins smugly when Atsumu's ears go red.

"I will pretend I did not hear that," Yumie-san announces, walking over to the kitchen sink. She pulls a cutting board from the drying rack and sets it down on the counter. "Now, who would like to chop the onions?"

Dinner is delicious as expected. Although Hinata is sure he and Atsumu failed to chop the vegetables as precisely as either Osamu or Kita could have done, nothing could ruin the wonderful taste of fresh ingredients from their farm.

Over dinner, they talk about Osamu's business, about the recent volleyball season and their latest championship victory, about the upcoming Olympics and plans to congregate at Onigiri Miya for a watch party. Really though, throughout all this, they are talking about the ins and outs of their daily lives. As Shouyou sits there listening to Yumie-obaasan's stories while sharing some of his own, he can't help but think about how easy it is to be with them all like this, gathered together at the small coffee table in the living room sharing a meal. Kita and his grandma both have such a homely, cozy vibe, and talking to them feels like tucking comfortably into a warm bed at the end of a long day. Maybe it's something in the water, or maybe because the air around here is so light and fresh, and because the two of them have built such healthy rhythms and routines into their lives, but Shouyou swears that Yumie-san is twenty years younger than she says she is. The lines along her face are so smooth yet carry so much wisdom and vitality. It feels so magical.

They ask Shouyou about his time in Brazil, and of course they do. It's the most foreign and far-off element that's been brought to this table. Kita is appreciative of his stories despite having little interest in traveling. Shouyou has the impression that Kita still cares to hear what other worlds are like. Plus, whenever Kita listens to someone, Shouyou feels like he *really* listens. His attention is solely focused on *you*, and you feel like everything you are saying matters, and matters in a way that is larger than yourself. So Shouyou tells him about his first week stumbling his way through a new town full of new experiences with limited Portuguese, how he had had his wallet stolen right off the bat, and what it felt like to relearn how to play volleyball in an entirely new way.

Telling Kita-san about Brazil is as easy as cracking a fresh egg over his favorite breakfast, glossy yolk slipping into place, sunny-side up. Familiar. Like sitting at the table with an old friend. The comfort that settles in his belly spreads to his arms and legs as he talks, warming him from the inside out.

And yet...

At the same time, even while the warmth Shouyou feels starts making a home in his chest, as he continues to speak about Brazil, a longing ache begins to tug at his heart, its grip tightening like a fist the longer he goes. Eventually, it strengthens to a point where, in the middle of dinner, Shouyou reaches for Atsumu's hand under the table. Atsumu smiles at him like it's the most natural thing in the world and squeezes his hand back. The moment he does, Shouyou feels like he's regained his grounding, the same way he finds inner balance during meditation and yoga, and for a moment, with his hand in Atsumu's, regardless of how many things are up in the air around him, Shouyou is confident that as long as he has Atsumu, he can always recapture his landing.

Once all the food has been eaten and tea has been drunk, Kita shows them to their rooms. Mercifully, he gives Osamu a room of his own separate from Atsumu and Shouyou's. Atsumu rolls his eyes as Osamu lets out an audible sigh of relief.

After a full day of walking around in the sun and eating good food, Shouyou is more than ready to get into bed. When he comes out of the shower, he returns to the room to find that Atsumu has already laid out the large futon and blankets.

"Ooh, thanks, Tsumu," he says, drying his hair with a towel. He takes a seat next to the makeshift bed and gives Atsumu a kiss on the cheek. "I'll warm it up for you when you go shower."

"Gotta make everything easier for my little spiker, as always," Atsumu chuckles, ruffling his wet hair affectionately. Shouyou beams.

When Atsumu leaves for the bathroom, Shouyou flops down onto the mattress and spreads his arms and legs all over it, relishing in how soft the fabric and the cushioning feels. By the time Atsumu gets back, Shouyou is already snuggled under the covers, feeling at relaxed and at peace.

"Didja have fun today?" Atsumu asks upon reentering the room. He stows his clothes away into his duffel bag then goes to turn off the lights.

"Mmhm," Shouyou hums as Atsumu lifts the blankets so he can slip in between the sheets beside him. Once beneath the covers, Shouyou pulls Atsumu closer to him and they lay face-to-face on their sides, cheeks against their pillows. "Kita's farm is amazing."

Atsumu lets out a soft laugh and smiles. "Glad ya liked it."

"Thanks for bringing me," Shouyou says.

"Course," Atsumu replies. Now that Atsumu is lying down, it appears he is quickly being overtaken by sleepiness. Shouyou can tell his eyes are fighting to stay open. "Wouldn't want you to miss this trip with us for the world." Atsumu yawns. "Wouldn't want ya to miss any trip ever with me in the world..."

Shouyou grins. Reaching up, he gently presses a thumb between Atsumu's eyebrows and rubs circles around his temple. "You should sleep. It's been a tiring day. And you look like you really need it."

"Aw, but I wanna look at you a bit longer," Atsumu says, eyelids heavy even as he tries to keep them open.

Shouyou giggles. "You can look at me any day."

“It’s not enough,” Atsumu pouts. Bringing a hand up to cradle Shouyou’s face, he adds, “It’s never enough.”

Shouyou shifts closer so he can kiss him full on the mouth. It’s a slow, sleepy kiss but that doesn’t stop Atsumu’s jaw from moving, lips opening to slide his tongue along Shouyou’s, languidly licking into his mouth. They continue to kiss, slow and sweet, lips sliding against lips, occasionally catching on teeth, until Atsumu’s mouth eventually goes slack from sheer exhaustion.

Shouyou pulls back and runs a hand through Atsumu’s hair, pressing his lips to his forehead. Atsumu lets out a quiet noise between a hum and a moan and closes his eyes.

“Love you, Tsumu,” Shouyou whispers.

“Love you, Shouyo…” Atsumu mumbles back. Shouyou stares, his heart swelling as he watches Atsumu succumb quickly into deep sleep.

Shouyou always thinks he’s beautiful, but there really is something special and intimate about how vulnerable and sweet Atsumu looks in his sleep. All of that smug energy hidden deep beneath such an angelic face. Who would’ve thought?

Shouyou yawns. He knows he ought to sleep too, but he can’t help but stare and take in more of Atsumu while he’s in this state. Deep down, after everything that’s happened, as much as he loves him, Shouyou is starting to realize somewhere deep in his gut: he won’t be able to do this forever.

So he stares and stares, feeling his heart pinch with each passing second.

Shouyou loves him. Like, *really* loves him. He loves the way Atsumu looks at him like everything’s right with the world, the way it makes Shouyou feel like everything’s right with the world too. But Atsumu is as selfless with love as Shouyou is selfish with it. Volleyball is a necessity and Shouyou has no idea how their world might crumble if he taints this too soon. Who knows how Atsumu will look at him afterwards. Whatever happens after will come when it comes. Is it so bad to keep these last few precious moments sacred and glorious? (For himself?)

Leaning forward, Shouyou presses another kiss to Atsumu’s forehead and lays his cheek on the pillow, watching Atsumu breathe until he drifts off himself.

*

*But I'm a fire and I'll keep your brittle heart warm
If your cascade ocean wave blues come*

Would it be enough if I could never give you peace?

*

Bom dia, Adriana!

After careful consideration, I have decided to accept Asas's offer starting on the 2022 V.League season.

All the best!

Shouyou Hinata

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End Notes

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