

Captaincy

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/7623550) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/7623550>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Haikyuu!!
Relationship:	Hinata Shouyou/Tsukishima Kei
Characters:	Hinata Shouyou , Tsukishima Kei , Yamaguchi Tadashi , Kageyama Tobio , Yachi Hitoka
Additional Tags:	Future Fic , Third Year , long fic , Slow Build
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2016-07-30 Words: 16,661 Chapters: 1/1

Captaincy

by [sounds like gibberish \(buckactually\)](#)

Summary

Tsukishima agrees to be team captain, with one caveat.

Chinese Translation

Notes

Haha so I'm not satisfied with this fic entirely, there are parts that I like and parts I wish I'd spent more time on and things I wish I'd stretched out a little more (or trimmed!!), but I'm going on a week-long road trip and I wanted to get this outta my head before I left. So I apologize if some things feel like they moved too fast or came out of left field. And thanks for reading something so unnecessarily long.

- Translation into Русский available: [капитанство](#) by [Savethedreamer](#)

“Well, ah, it’s that time of year,” Coach Ukai says, rubbing the back of his neck. “We’re aiming for Nationals again, but there’s no guarantee that we’ll even make it through the preliminaries. So, the four of you need to start thinking about who will be your next captain, after the third years have left.”

They’ve all been held behind after practice. It’s the end of August and the preliminaries feel like a world away, but...well, their coach isn’t wrong.

“Talk it out amongst yourselves,” he instructs them, “and get back to me on your decision. I might decide to go in a different direction but, well, it’s more meaningful if you choose.”

*

The four of them walk from the gym through town at an easy, meandering pace. Hinata is wheeling his bicycle along in unusual silence, Kageyama is balancing a volleyball on the tips of his fingers, Yamaguchi is checking his phone, and Tsukishima...

Tsukishima is pretending to listen to music, but he’s caught up in the creaky wheels of Hinata’s bike as they go round and round and round.

“Don’t you think Yachi-san should be here for this?” Yamaguchi says suddenly.

He’s the first to break the stillness that’s been cast over them since leaving the gym.

Kageyama tosses the volleyball up and catches it neatly. “Didn’t she go home already? If Coach wanted her to be there, he would have asked her to stay too, wouldn’t he?”

“Yeah, but...she’s part of the team, right? And she’s in our year...”

“I think Yacchan would tell us to decide on our own, probably,” Hinata says. He’s still looking straight ahead at the street in front of them, but Tsukishima doesn’t think he’s actually seeing anything there.

“Ah...I guess, yeah,” Yamaguchi agrees half-heartedly after a few seconds.

If you want to spend time with her, just come out and say so, Tsukishima wants to say.

He doesn’t.

They come to the open park at the end of the street, the park that requires them to shuffle through an alley single-file (Hinata gets on his bike and rides ahead) before they can come out to the grassy stretch. There’s an easier way to get there, but by now this is habit.

Kageyama sets the ball to Hinata, who, after propping his bike against a tree, returns it with an almost-perfect receive.

“If we’re talking captains,” Yamaguchi says, “then it should be Tsukki, right?”

Tsukishima is standing next to him as they watch the two volleyball maniacs, and he sees when Kageyama jerks to a stop, like someone twisted his wind-up key the wrong way. Hinata saves the high-flying ball Kageyama's let loose with one of his miracle jumps, catching it and landing a cautious distance away. He watches Kageyama, and Tsukishima watches him.

"Hah?" snaps Kageyama. "I'm more of a captain than he is!"

"Tsukki is in charge of our blocks during the games!" Yamaguchi argues back. "He's got the timing down for the plays—"

"I run the plays during the games," says Kageyama. A vein starts pulsing in his forehead. "That's what it means to be setter! I'm obviously the better choice!"

Tsukishima heaves a sigh. "Just being a setter doesn't mean you're qualified to be captain, you simpleton."

Not that he wants to get into this, but Lord help him, Kageyama is as annoying as ever.

"Hah, Tsukishima?" That vein becomes more pronounced, and Kageyama's nostrils flare. "You think you can be a good captain with your shitty personality?"

"I think it should be Tsukishima."

They all fall silent and look at Hinata, who's still holding the volleyball and watching them all with a strangely calm expression.

Tsukishima feels like someone just smacked him upside the head.

He's been waiting for Hinata to loudly—obnoxiously—present himself as an option for captaincy. Because that's what Hinata does. He tries to be everything. Ace, hero, decoy, star...Hinata naturally hunts out the spotlight in an effortless hunger; a loud, ravenous beast.

So this is something of a shock, especially considering how rational their small center ace is looking right now.

"Hinata..." says Yamaguchi, sounding about as stunned as Tsukishima feels.

"What the hell, dumbass Hinata?" Kageyama spits.

Hinata just stands there like an unmoving pillar.

He's still short—laughably, when compared to Tsukishima—but he's grown a little since their first year, standing at a halfway respectable 168.4 centimeters. His hair is longer, too, pulled back into a half ponytail at the back of his head. In that moment, Hinata looks somewhat mature.

"Well, it should be," Hinata says at last. "Tsukishima has a handle on our first years, just like Ennoshita-san. He stays calm when we're in a tough spot during matches, and he doesn't let things get to him. If we're going to choose captains, it should be things like that, right?"

Kageyama looks like he wants to strangle something.

Tsukishima clenches his hands at his sides to keep from doing something stupid, like rubbing his chest because he feels oddly touched at this endorsement. How irritating, how *unnecessary*—

He pastes a taunting smile on his mouth. “Oh? But what if I don’t want to be captain?”

The maturity leaves Hinata in a flash, and now Hinata is scowling, his face contorted into something hilariously ugly.

“Damn you, bastard Tsukishimaaaa!”

Tsukishima snickers audibly, prompting Yamaguchi to scold him with an appalled “Tsukki!” that, despite being whispered, carries across the park.

“Oy!” Kageyama snaps. He points at Tsukishima. “I’m not gonna lose to you! Dumbass!”

“Learn a new insult, Your Majesty.”

“Tsukishima!”

Rather than engage with the fuming Kageyama, Tsukishima turns to Hinata. “I’ll be captain,” he says, “only if you’re my vice-captain.”

There is a vacuum of sound.

Hinata’s mouth pops open.

“Your vice-captain?” he squeaks out.

“Wait, Tsukki, are you serious?” Yamaguchi asks in alarm.

“I might be able to stay calm during matches, but I can’t get anyone’s mood up,” Tsukishima says. “Hinata is good at that sort of thing. He’s good at flattering and encouraging our teammates. I can’t do that at all.”

Hinata backs up a little. “Did you just say something nice about me?” he gasps.

“Shut up.”

“I can’t believe Tsukishima said something nice about me!”

“Do we have a deal or not?”

Kageyama rushes to stand in between them. “Oy!” he shouts. “Don’t ignore me! I’m going to be captain.”

“All in favor of Tsukki being captain?” Yamaguchi says over Kageyama.

“Aye,” Tsukishima says in a bored tone, just to annoy Kageyama, but he’s watching Hinata instead.

Hinata’s eyes light up and he smiles so brightly that despite the night sky, Tsukishima feels like he’s standing in direct sunlight. He has to squint a little and forces himself not to look away.

“Aye!” Hinata says. It’s a double affirmative—for Yamaguchi, and for Tsukishima.

“Aye!” Yamaguchi rounds them off cheerfully. “All in favor of Kageyama being captain?”

Kageyama stands there, his fists awkwardly balling up as his cheeks turn red. He clicks his tongue and mutters, after a long minute of pressured silence:

“Fine.”

*

Tsukishima wouldn’t have suggested it had this been a year ago, or if Hinata didn’t have such an immense capacity for growth.

In one year, his shitty playing has evolved into a terrifying arsenal of experience and instinct. Hinata is actually *good* at volleyball now—not a genius like Kageyama, or an expert like Nekoma’s Kuroo, but a solid, dependable teammate.

Beyond that, Hinata has begun to inspire others. The first years look up to Hinata perhaps the most out of all their senpais because during their televised matches during the Spring Tournament, Hinata got the most commentary. Not surprising, of course. Hinata draws attention no matter what he’s doing, an effortless eye-catching charisma cloaking him in a bright aura.

Maybe it’s because Hinata no longer sucks, but he’s become a reassurance to the team, a lot like Nishinoya. Probably trying to *be* like Nishinoya.

For Tsukishima, Hinata is still an annoyance. He’s still a frustrating measuring stick that finds Tsukishima lacking. He’s still insufferable.

But if he’s going to be captain, he’ll need someone inspiring to do what he cannot.

*

Not that this is an immediate concern.

Despite what Coach Ukai said that night, Tsukishima is perfectly confident that they’ll make it through the preliminaries. They were in the best of sixteen during the last tournament only because they faced Shiratorizawa early on and Nishinoya had twisted his ankle during their previous match. Since then, the entire team has upped their defense and Tsukishima couldn’t find any team in their preliminary block that might cause them trouble.

Besides, Tsukishima doesn't want to think about a Karasuno without Tanaka or Nishinoya. Despite his aloof nature, he counts on those two to carry the game in tough times. The first years aren't bad players—Amane, their new libero, is impressive—but Tsukishima doesn't like when things change.

*

Yachi comes to visit him during lunch period the next day, toward the end of the break. She sits down in the empty desk in front of Tsukishima and waits for him to take off his headphones and sit up straight.

He pointedly ignores the excited murmurs of his male classmates. Yes, Yachi is cute. No, she's not his girlfriend. No, he's not "so lucky" to have a female manager—he's lucky to have a competent manager. There's a world of difference.

"Hinata told me what you guys talked about last night," she says with pink-tinged cheeks.

"Ah. Yeah." Tsukishima fidgets in his seat. "Sorry. We decided without you."

"No, no, I wouldn't have been any help," Yachi says. She waves her hand to dismiss his apology. "Did you really ask Hinata to be vice-captain, though?"

Tsukishima feels Kageyama glaring daggers at him from across the classroom. He barely avoids rolling his eyes. Being in the same class as His Majesty is a constant annoyance.

"Yeah, I did," he answers Yachi. "Why?"

"It's surprising!" she says. "You're always so irritated with him. I wouldn't have thought you'd want him to spend *more* time with you."

Tsukishima's lips turn down involuntarily and Yachi flinches. He smooths out his expression.

"I'm just being logical," he says.

Yachi gives him a tentative smile that makes something in his chest go cold and resentful. There's a hint of almost-knowing on her lips that has his hackles raised.

"I think it's a good decision," Yachi tells him. "You being captain. I'll look forward to working with you next year."

"Mm."

*

As expected, they make it through the preliminaries with straight sets. Tsukishima won't say they had easy victories, not as his thighs burn and sweat laces down his spine, but they were never in a pinch.

Ennoshita approaches him after the second match (they had only two, since they sat out the first), wiping his face with a towel. He hands Tsukishima a much-needed water bottle.

“Captain, huh?” he says.

Tsukishima flinches.

“Coach made us talk about it,” he mutters. “That’s all.”

“He had us decide too, before preliminaries,” says Ennoshita, entirely unfazed. “At the time I didn’t think I could do it at all. It’s good you have the confidence to take over. If I had been more confident, maybe we could have gotten further than best of sixteen in the last tournament.”

“That wasn’t your fault,” Tsukishima tries to say, but Ennoshita waves him off. “Let me know when you want some instruction on the boring stuff we captains have to do.”

Tsukishima frowns. “Why? Do you think we’re not going to make it to Nationals this year?”

After a surprised second, Ennoshita punches him in the stomach—just hard enough to be painful, accompanied by a playful grin.

“Don’t think I’m handing over this position to you so soon,” he scolds Tsukishima.

*

In the end, they do win the prefecture elimination and secure their spot for the Nationals, although it’s a close 5-set match with Aoba Jousai.

Tsukishima doesn’t hear anything from his teammates about the captaincy for over two months. Ennoshita approaching him was the last of it, and they’re already in mid-December when Coach Ukai holds the seconds years back after practice, Yachi included this time.

“So?” their coach prompts after a minute of fidgeting quiet from the five of them. “Have you decided on your pick for the next captain? I should tell you, with your exams coming up and the Spring Tournament right after, you won’t have any time to think about it until after we’re back from Tokyo.”

“...We’ve already decided,” Yamaguchi announces.

“Oh?” Ukai’s eyebrows raise.

“Tsukishima as captain, Hinata as vice-captain,” says Yamaguchi.

Kageyama grumbles wordlessly next to Hinata, and Tsukishima doesn’t give him the satisfaction of peering over to see his distress.

“Hinata?” Ukai blinks and looks from tallest to shortest player in bald surprise. “Ah, Tsukishima, is that what you’d like? Not Kageyama as vice-captain?”

“No,” Tsukishima answers, and he feels he cannot say that one word strongly enough. “It has to be Hinata, or I’m not doing it.”

Coach Ukai looks like he's about to laugh. "Hm," he says, and then studies them. Tsukishima is uncomfortably aware of Hinata to his right, a burning presence he's unable to ignore.

"Hm," their coach says again. "Now that I've thought about it, I think I agree. Alright. I'll let Takeda-sensei know when I see him next, and we'll start putting together the forms for you both."

Kageyama lets loose another grumble, and Hinata mutters, "It's because of this that we don't want you as captain" in the exact tone of voice guaranteed to annoy Kageyama the most.

Tsukishima looks straight ahead as the two begin to punch out at each other.

"Also," Ukai goes on, ignoring the fighting duo as well, "Yachi-san, you need to start thinking about a new manager as well."

Yachi snaps to attention next to Yamaguchi, and they all look over at her.

"Um," she says.

"Shimizu stayed with the team until after Nationals last year, so she had time to train you throughout your first year, but Takeda-sensei tells me you're aiming for University of Tokyo."

Hinata releases one of his wordless exclamations. "Yacchan, that's incredible!"

"I haven't taken the entry exam yet," Yachi tells him, but she's blushing at the praise.

"Considering that," says Ukai, "you might need to retire from the team early to study, like some third years do after the first tournament. Of course, it's up to you, but you might need to start recruiting now instead of waiting for the new school year and pulling from the first years that come in."

Yachi nods, looking very serious. "I'll think about it," she tells them all.

"Good," Ukai says. "Well, that's it. Make sure you eat properly when you get home."

"Yes," they chorus.

*

For the second time, they all walk together from the gym, this time with Yachi sitting aside Hinata's bike as he wheels it along.

Tsukishima feels like needles are pressing lightly on his skin. He keeps his hands in his pockets. Beside him, Yamaguchi keeps looking back at Yachi and Hinata with darting eyes.

"You're really going to University of Tokyo?" Hinata is saying in his usual loud voice.

"Um, well...they've got a great graphic design course there, and a business course," she answers shyly. Tsukishima has to strain to hear her. "I think I want to double-major in both

and open my own design business one day.”

“Wow! That’s amazing, Yacchan.”

“Thanks… But, if it means I have to quit the club early… I don’t want to do that…” she trails off.

Hinata makes a panicked “waah!” and Tsukishima turns around to see Yachi near tears.

“Yachi-san!” Yamaguchi exclaims. “Are you okay?”

“Hah?” Kageyama turns around as well. “What’s going on?”

“I’m fine!” Yachi tells them, waving her hands and then lurching forward to grab the handlebars of Hinata’s bike as she loses her balance. “Really!”

Tsukishima sighs and stops walking, which prompts everyone else to halt. Yachi slides off the bike and looks up at him nervously.

He stares down at her with narrowed eyes. “If you don’t want to quit the club, then don’t,” he says in a clipped tone. “You should do what you want to do. You’re smart enough to handle both, right?”

Yachi beams up at him after a second. “Thanks!”

“Ah, Tsukishima,” Hinata grumbles. “That was way too cool!”

“*You* might have to retire early, though, if you want to go to college,” he tells Hinata. That immediately sets a nasty frown on Hinata’s face. “Same to you, Your Majesty.”

“Shut up, Tsukishima,” snaps Kageyama.

“Yeah, shut up!” says Hinata. “There’s no way I’m quitting early. Besides, you’ll only be captain if I’m here, right?”

Tsukishima glowers, but he can’t argue.

Yachi steps up to Kageyama and hands him a wrapped candy, saying “Here,” as if to counter his bitterness over losing the captaincy with sweet. Seeing her standing there loosens something in Tsukishima’s chest. He takes in a deep breath.

“But first,” Yamaguchi says, “we’re headed to Nationals. And we’re gonna win this year.”

“Yeah,” Hinata and Kageyama say in unison.

“Yes,” says Tsukishima.

*

They don’t win the Spring InterHigh.

They make best of eight, which is amazing, really, but Tsukishima is still not satisfied. He waits until he's alone before he unleashes frustrated, angry tears. No one expected them to come this far, no one thought Karasuno could do it, especially not twice in a row, but he wants to go further. He wants to *win*.

Maybe Hinata's hunger is contagious. Maybe it's his fault that Tsukishima's crying in a bathroom.

*

When the third years leave, everyone is emotional.

Tanaka is openly sobbing and yelling about his manly tears, while Nishinoya is just yelling. Ennoshita, at least, has a dry face, but with the way his mouth is wobbling Tsukishima knows that he'll be weeping later on. Kinoshita and Narita are both leaking tears from the corners of their eyes.

Not that any of the first or second years are much better.

Tsukishima hates to admit it, but the energy in the room is getting to him. He keeps his mouth shut to avoid saying something stupid or sentimental.

Ennoshita reaches up to clap him on the shoulder. "I'm counting on you," he says.

This prompts Nishinoya to jump up on him and Tanaka to all but tackle him. Tsukishima's tender mood—such as it was—evaporates on the spot.

*

Akiteru comes home to stay a while a few weeks later.

As usual, they talk about volleyball. It feels good to talk about volleyball with his older brother, like they're putting salve on an ever-decreasing wound.

"How's it going without your third years?" Akiteru asks after some talk about Nationals.

"Ah..." Tsukishima leans back, staring up at the stars from his seat on the porch steps. "It's different. We haven't even played any practice games yet but it feels like we're playing without a safety net."

"That's because you are the safety net," his brother says. "You'll get used to it. It helps to have a good captain. Ah! Who's your new captain, by the way."

He fidgets. "Oh. Um. Me, actually."

"*What?*"

"We decided a while ago—"

"Why didn't you tell me?" Akiteru demands.

Tsukishima shrugs uncomfortably. “It never came up.” After a few seconds he feels compelled to add, “Hinata’s my vice-captain.”

Akiteru scratches his neck. “Oh?”

“Yeah.”

“I see.” Akiteru grins broadly and gives him a thumbs up. “That was a good decision, Kei! He’ll help you out a lot.”

Tsukishima frowns. “What do you mean, good decision?”

“Well, it was your idea, right?”

“Yeah, but...how did you know that?”

Akiteru’s grin turns sly. “Because you said he’s ‘my vice-captain,’ not *the* vice-captain.”

Tsukishima glares at his hands.

*

My vice-captain.

My vice-captain.

Tsukishima rolls over in bed and sees that it’s a little past two a.m.

He punches his pillow.

*

Only one of their first years, Miyamura, played as regular during the Spring InterHigh. It’s an adjustment to add two more wing spikers and a new libero to the mix. Amane does alright blending in with them as they practice for the prefectural tournament at the end of the school year, but Hashimoto and Egami are overeager and stiff in turns.

During their first practice match—with Jouzenji, of all schools—Tsukishima is at a loss to help mesh their new line up. Kageyama displays exactly why no one but him thought he should be captain as he spits out lines like “just do better, dumbass” and glares.

Tsukishima did alright instructing them alongside Coach Ukai during practices, but now he’s stuck.

It’s Hinata who claps Egami on the back during a time-out and says:

“What’s the worst that can happen? You know, my first practice match, I messed up the whole first set and hit a serve at Kageyama’s head during set point. You can’t do worse than that, right?”

Egami nods like a bobble head doll. “Right.”

“So what are you scared of?”

“If I mess up and we lose—”

“Have more confidence in us!” Hinata says. “We’re all on the court together. If you make a mistake, we’ll be there to cover it. Remember, everyone on this side of the net is your ally. That goes for you too, Hashimoto-kun!”

Tsukishima can see everyone’s shoulders loosen, can *feel* the tension in the air lift.

He remembers the first time Hinata said that to him. *Everyone on this side of the net is your ally*. At the time, he’d been quoting Tanaka from earlier that day. It hadn’t had an impact on him then. It hadn’t done anything for Tsukishima at all, except annoy him, maybe.

He feels compelled to put in his own words after hearing Hinata speak.

“We’ve been at this a lot longer than you,” he tells Hashimoto and Egami. “The three of us”—he gestures to Kageyama, Hinata, and himself—“have been starting players since our first year began. Right now, we’re not expecting you to be good at it, especially with a new line-up. Of course we want to win this match, but it’s a practice match to get you used to playing with us. Trust us to take care of things.”

“Well said, captain,” Coach Ukai tells them.

Hinata flashes Tsukishima a glowing smile of approval. Tsukishima’s fingertips twitch involuntarily.

*

It’s a week later when Yachi, very shyly, asks if she can leave practice a bit early that day.

Coach Ukai agrees, considering that all they’re doing right now are flying falls and receive drills—nothing they need to make special note of, unlike serving—but Hinata, naturally, has to ask her why.

“Uh,” Yachi stammers. She links her hands together behind her back and blushes beet red.
“Um.”

“Yacchan?”

Tsukishima feels himself tensing up a little. He hates that reaction.

“I have a date.”

It’s faint, but by no means inaudible.

Thwack.

Tsukishima sees Yamaguchi out of the corner of his eye, lying on the ground and rubbing his nose and forehead. It doesn’t escape his notice that Yamaguchi is doing his best not to look at

Yachi.

“A date? Really?” Hinata sounds despondently confused, and Tsukishima clenches his fists.

“Yeah.”

“Oh. I see. Have fun!” says Hinata, and Tsukishima watches him wave Yachi off as she changes shoes and leaves the gym.

Hinata stays quiet for the remainder of practice. Tsukishima watches him warily. He can’t figure out what expression it is that Hinata’s wearing, but it makes him unsettled.

*

They’re changing in the team’s club room when Hinata says, “I didn’t know Yacchan had a boyfriend.”

“She doesn’t,” Yamaguchi mutters. “He asked her out for the first time two days ago.”

“Oh, really? How did you know that, Yamaguchi?”

Yamaguchi shrugs. “I saw it happen.”

It’s just the second years in the club room, since the first years are still doing receives with Ukai for another half hour. Amane could have gone home with the second years, but he volunteered to give out advice for his year mates.

“Who’s the guy?” asks Hinata.

Why are you so curious? Tsukishima wants to snap at him.

He doesn’t.

“He’s in Yachi-san’s class,” Yamaguchi says. “Shima-something.”

“Shimaoka? Isn’t he on the basketball team?” says Kageyama.

Of course, *of course* Kageyama would know the guy in question, if he was on a sports team. How annoyingly typical. How thoroughly Kageyama.

“Wow, is he?” Hinata seems to drift off into his own thoughts again.

Tsukishima slams his locker door shut with an unnecessary amount of force.

Yamaguchi sighs. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Tsukki,” he says, and trudges off.

It’s fine that Yamaguchi wants to leave without him—if he’s nursing a broken heart, that’s actually better for both of them, because what can Tsukishima say?—but now it’s only him and the two idiots.

The silence is unbearable.

“Do you think Yacchan likes Shimaoka?”

Of course, the silence is preferable to this.

“Hah? How should I know?”

“It’s just a question! Jeez, Kageyama, your face is so scary all the time!”

“If she’s missing a practice to go on a date with him she must like him a lot.”

“Not everyone is as obsessed with volleyball as you two,” Tsukishima points out, irritated.

“Maybe she knew tonight would be a basic practice and picked now because it’s her only time off. She’s also got to study for her entrance exams next year, you know.”

Tsukishima is staring at his locker door so he can’t see Hinata’s expression, but his eyes narrow when Hinata says:

“Yacchan sure has a lot going on, huh? She’s incredible.”

Kageyama yawns as he trudges to the club room door. “Well, it’s none of my business. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Good job today,” Tsukishima says reflexively, which Hinata echoes. It’s something captains say, and it’s becoming a habit—even when talking to Kageyama.

“Yeah, same to you,” says Kageyama.

After another long minute of silence, Hinata says, “Dating someone... I never really thought about it before, but it must be hard when you’re in a club, huh.”

Tsukishima turns around to go and see Hinata is waiting for him. That jars him.

“I guess.”

“Have you dated anyone since starting high school?” Hinata asks him.

They leave the club room door closed but unlocked for the first years—Miyamura has the key, since he’s been a regular for a while—and head down the stairs.

“Don’t be stupid, of course I haven’t. When would I have time?”

Hinata dashes the rest of the way down the steps and turns to look up at him with a scowl.

“Jeez, it was just a question, Tsukishima. Why is everyone so angry today?”

“I’m not angry, you’re just annoying,” Tsukishima says, and sighs. “And Kageyama was angry because he thinks everyone should only focus on volleyball, just like the both of you.”

“Huh?”

“You’re almost a third year in high school and you haven’t thought about dating until now,” he points out, reaching the base of the stairs. He falls into step with Hinata, though he should

just leave.

“That’s—I mean—no, I’ve *thought* about it, as in, I’ve...thought about it,” Hinata protests. “I just didn’t think about it, I mean, well, *actually* dating someone. You know?”

“Not really.”

“I just can’t imagine doing volleyball and dating someone,” Hinata says. “That wouldn’t be fair to your girlfriend, right?”

They’ve reached the bike rack. Hinata squats down and begins fiddling with the lock on his bike.

“Ennoshita-san managed just fine.”

Hinata whips his head around. “What?”

“Ennoshita-san has a girlfriend,” Tsukishima says. “I can’t believe you didn’t know. You must be really oblivious.”

“Really? Who’s he dating? For how long?” Hinata asks, breezing right over the insult, which bothers Tsukishima for several reasons.

“A girl on the tennis team. They’ve been dating since the beginning of the school year. They’re in the same class.”

“Oh...” Hinata finishes unlocking his bike and they set off together.

Tsukishima doesn’t know why he’s walking with Hinata, doesn’t know why he keeps in stride with the much shorter boy, why he’s still engaging in this conversation when he’d rather just go home and pointedly not think about it—

He knows exactly why.

“Same class, huh?” muses Hinata. “I guess that would make things easier. You’d be able to see them more often that way. Oh! But,” he goes on, “wouldn’t it be better if you were in the same club?”

What Tsukishima wants to say is this:

If you want to date Yachi, why don’t you just date Yachi and leave me in peace? Why are you making me listen to this? Why are you putting me through this? Why are you testing my limits with this conversation, and for god’s sake why haven’t you thought about dating? Aren’t you a guy? What’s wrong with you?

What Tsukishima actually says is this:

“If you think it’d be easier to date a team mate, why don’t you just ask Yachi out?”

“Hm.” Hinata twists his mouth in a thoughtful pout. “Well, I don’t really think of Yacchan like that, I guess.”

*

And that's the sentence that taunts Tsukishima all night long.

*

The next day, at practice, Yachi doesn’t talk about her date until she’s asked, and then only to say:

“Well, it was fine, I guess.”

Tsukishima suspects—had suspected from the beginning—that Yachi had only gone on the date because she’d been asked, not because she likes Shimaoka from the basketball team.

He doesn’t bother explaining this theory to Hinata, who only continues to look thoughtful, but he mentions it to Yamaguchi.

Yamaguchi’s serves get better after that.

*

They lose to Wakutan during the prefectural tournament’s semifinals. Their first years are strong, but they’re still learning how to work together and the newness costs them.

Tsukishima has to keep a calm face on while reassuring his first years that this wasn’t their fault, they didn’t lose because of the new blood—which is true, it’s a new team and it’s all on them equally—but inside he feels like screaming.

Hinata is clearly barely hanging on to his heartening smile.

“You were great,” he tells the sobbing Egami. “Wakutan is just amazing, you know? And they’ve been playing with that lineup since the InterHigh preliminaries. You can’t blame yourself for something that you’ve got no control over!”

Later, Tsukishima follows Hinata outside and watches his vice-captain douse his head under cold water, listens to him scream into the outside sink’s drain.

Tsukishima wants to scream, too.

On the way home, Hinata and Kageyama sit together, radiating the same disappointed fury, the exact same wavelength of determination and angst.

It strikes Tsukishima for the first time, in a deeply unpleasant manner, that he is *jealous* of Kageyama. As if Kageyama would ever look at anything besides volleyball—but he syncs up with Hinata, they share something special, and Tsukishima can’t ever...

No, not jealous. *Envious*. Because he has nothing to be jealous over.

*

“So, as captain, you need to prepare a speech for the opening ceremony,” Takeda says.

He’s sitting at his desk, craning his neck to look all the way up at Tsukishima’s face. Offhandedly, Tsukishima worries that their faculty advisor might end up with a neck brace by the end of next school year if he’s going to insist on holding meetings this way.

“A speech,” Tsukishima repeats flatly.

“To get new members,” says Takeda.

“Ohhh!” Hinata exclaims at Tsukishima’s right, the top of his head below the line of Tsukishima’s shoulder. If he reached over, he could easily wrap his arm around Hinata’s shoulders at a perfect resting height.

He doesn’t.

“Hinata should do it,” says Tsukishima. There’s no way he could make himself sound excited enough to entice new members. Not without sounding vaguely threatening.

“I won’t argue with your decision,” says Takeda. “But you should be the one to write it, Tsukishima-kun. Better yet, the two of you should do it together. Take some time during the break between the school years and figure out how you want to present the volleyball club.”

*

Even though they’re on vacation, practice is nearly every day. There’s not exactly a block of time for the two of them to sit down together and work on anything other than volleyball techniques. After a week of missed opportunities, it’s Yachi who makes a suggestion.

“I have to make a speech, too,” she says, “to get a new manager. If you like, we can all work on them together. Do you want to come over to my house after practice?”

“Yacchan, you’re amazing!” Hinata exclaims. “Oy, Tsukishima, isn’t Yacchan amazing?”

“Yeah,” says Tsukishima. He feels the prickling of needles on his skin again. “Sure.”

Yachi’s smile is wide.

*

It’s only four o’clock when their all-day practice ends. Kageyama wants to keep Hinata behind and keep practicing, but Hinata waves him off. Tsukishima struggles not to feel smug about this.

They ride the bus with Yachi, Hinata leaving his bike locked at the school. Yachi and Hinata sit together, chatting animatedly, and Tsukishima keeps his headphones on because he doesn’t want to hear how well they get along.

I don't really think of Yacchan like that, Hinata said, but what if just bringing up the subject got him thinking about her like that? What if something changed in between now and then? What if Yachi feels that way about Hinata?

This is ridiculous. Completely ridiculous.

Tsukishima's never been to Yachi's home before, but Hinata barges in with a "pardon my intrusion!" and immediately makes a beeline for the kitchen, pausing only to greet Yachi's mother with an energetic bow and a glowing smile.

Yachi's mother's eyes travel to Tsukishima in the foyer, where he's still taking off his shoes next to Yachi.

"Oh? Where's Kageyama-kun?"

"It's a captain's meeting," Yachi explains breathlessly. "Um, this is—"

"Pardon my intrusion," Tsukishima interrupts her, bowing to Yachi's mother. "I'm Tsukishima Kei. I'm the new captain. Thank you for letting us work in your home."

Yachi's mother lets out a pleased laugh. "Well, well," she says. "It looks like some of the boys in your club can behave themselves, Hitoka." She doesn't say it as though she disapproves of the idiot duo, though.

Tsukishima enters the house proper and lets Yachi lead him to the dining table, where Hinata is already putting out glasses of juice.

"Yachi-kaa-san!" he yells out. "Thanks for always having this!"

"Of course, Shoyo," Yachi's mother says. "I have some work to do so make sure you're quiet, okay?"

As Hinata agrees—loudly—Tsukishima wonders if Yachi's mother refers to Hinata by his first name because he's been here a lot, or because that's just his inviting personality.

The prickling of his skin gets worse.

He can't concentrate on his own speech at this rate, so both of them help Yachi. She's surprisingly bad at writing speeches, for all her brains. Her first draft is stiff, and her presentation stiffer. Tsukishima ignores Hinata's suggestion of "making it more gwaa!" and switches in more dynamic words.

"You're really good at this," Yachi says at one point.

"Tsukishima's good at everything, huh?" adds Hinata.

The way warmth enters Tsukishima's chest at the compliment is pathetic.

"Um. Not really."

After drinking three glasses of the juice he was so excited about, which ended up being a sports drink, Hinata has to dash to the bathroom.

When the bathroom door shuts, Tsukishima says, “Thanks, again. For letting us work here.”

“Of course,” says Yachi. “Though I feel like I’m the only one getting things done.”

He doesn’t want to say it.

He doesn’t want to know, but:

“Hinata comes here a lot?”

“Mm. With Kageyama-kun too, sometimes. I help them study.”

“Thanks for that,” says Tsukishima.

“Ah! No, I’m happy to do it,” Yachi tells him with a nervous wave of her hand. “Hinata really tries his best, you know? Even if he doesn’t like sitting still.”

Tsukishima grips his pencil a little tighter.

“If you want,” he says, “I can go.”

“Huh? But you’re helping me so much with this!”

“If you want to be alone with Hinata, I don’t want to be in the way.”

What. Are. You doing? he asks himself, accompanied by some garbled internal screaming.
What is the matter with you?

Yachi’s cheeks burn bright red. “Ah, well,” she replies in a wobbly voice, “I like Hinata, but...not in that way. So. You don’t have to worry about me.”

The particular inflection she puts into “worry” has Tsukishima snapping his head up and looking her straight in the eye.

Although she seems embarrassed beyond belief, Yachi holds his gaze. There’s a knowing in her that stabs directly at him and Tsukishima reels back in his seat. He doesn’t know how, but she *knows*, and now his cheeks are burning too and he can’t look at her anymore.

They’re sitting there awkwardly in total silence when Hinata returns from the bathroom.

“Eh? Yacchan? Tsukishima? Is something wrong?”

“Nothing!” Yachi says in a high, obviously false tone. “Um, I think my speech is done, so if you want to work on yours now...?”

“We’ll get to it tomorrow,” Tsukishima says. He stands up. “Thanks again, Yachi.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah! Thanks, Yacchan.”

When they leave, Hinata is still looking back and forth between Tsukishima and Yachi, a curious frown on his face. Tsukishima can't summon a single word.

*

The next day, they go to his house.

"Kei, welcome home," his mother calls from the kitchen. She can always hear the front door opening.

"I'm home," he mutters, and adds, "I brought someone."

"Oh?" his mother comes to the entryway, wooden spoon in hand and an apron on.

"Pardon the intrusion," Hinata says, bowing. He's still exuberant as ever, but at least he's not dashing inside the house and helping himself, like he did at Yachi's home. "I'm Hinata Shoyo. I'm on the volleyball team with Tsukishima."

"He's...the vice-captain," Tsukishima explains.

There's no way he's going to say "my vice-captain" in this house.

"We have a speech to prepare," Tsukishima continues. "Is it okay?"

"Of course, of course!" his mother presses a hand to her mouth. "This is the first time Kei's brought home a friend other than Tadashi."

Saying something like "he's not my friend" feels too rude, so Tsukishima keeps quiet.

Hinata says, "Thank you very much!" and bows deeply.

"Oh, my, you're so short compared to Kei," his mother coos. Tsukishima tenses for Hinata's reaction, but: "It'll be so nice to have someone my height in the house. Hinata-kun, are you staying for dinner?"

"Um..." Hinata looks up warily at Tsukishima.

"We've got a lot of work to do, so he'll be here a while," Tsukishima says. "Why not."

Hinata's face lights up. Tsukishima feels a squeeze in his chest.

Damn it. Damn it all to hell and back.

*

There wasn't ever a phase of "figuring it out," these feelings for Hinata. There was no moment of impact or slow journey towards the truth.

It was a little like breathing; one moment he was exhaling, perfectly fine, and the next he was inhaling, the knowledge that he was attracted to that particular nuisance settling into him.

He resents knowing his own feelings. He resents being introspective and rational, because it leads to knowing he not only likes a guy, he likes the most loudmouth, annoying guy who happens to be his rival and his partner in volleyball.

Tsukishima doesn't know if he's gay.

He's never thought about it, one way or the other. He's never really liked someone before. Engaging with people in that context had never appealed. He's only ever ranked people in categories of interesting, tolerable, or obnoxious.

Perhaps it's because Hinata is all three—an unpleasant outlier that can't be put in a box—that things have come to this.

Liking someone is irrational and unnecessary but he can't get rid of it.

Even worse, sometimes he doesn't want to.

*

“Ohhhh? Tsukishima, you like dinosaurs?”

“Um. Yeah.”

Hinata is standing on his bed, looking at the dinosaur toy collection on Tsukishima's shelves.

“Wow,” he says. “Wow! I didn't know that about you!”

“Well, of course you didn't. I didn't tell you.”

He watches Hinata's back, watches Hinata's hands as he picks up a stegosaurus toy and holds it in his palm. Examines the half-ponytail at the back of Hinata's head, how hair springs out all around it. His hair is barely contained into that small bundle. It looks wild and carefree and...

No. He doesn't want to think of Hinata as “sexy.”

“Um...” Hinata says, not looking at him still. “Did something happen between you and Yacchan last night?”

“Hah?”

“Sorry, if it's none of my business.”

Tsukishima sighs loudly. “Nothing. There's nothing going on between Yachi and I.”

Although, he has to admit, today at practice was awkward. He didn't have the courage to look at Yachi, barely talk to her even, and Yachi was stiff as cardboard whenever she approached him.

Because even the oblivious Hinata noticed, Tsukishima follows up with, “She found out something that I don’t want to talk about.”

“Oh.” Hinata turns to him, smiling, like he’d never brought it up. “Okay.”

If you like her, just say so! Tsukishima wants to scream. If you like her, admit it and just cut me loose already, you damn monster!

He doesn’t.

*

After a few hours of hard work, Tsukishima thinks they’ve done a good job. They’re both sated from dinner, and after a small rest period in which Hinata browses through Tsukishima’s music collection, he takes his bike and pedals off into the night.

“He’s a sweet boy,” Tsukishima’s mother says when Tsukishima comes back in from watching Hinata’s fast-retreating form. “You should have him around more often.”

“I might,” says Tsukishima. “For club reasons, I mean.”

*

“Ah, so, we’re the Karasuno boys’ volleyball team,” Tsukishima says into the taller of the two microphones. He just barely keeps from clearing his throat to clear the air.

“You might not know this, but we’re a nationally ranked team!” Hinata jumps in. He leans in a little closer to Tsukishima. The space between them is warm. “For the last two years, we’ve gone to the Spring InterHigh tournament in Tokyo! This year, we’re aiming to win Nationals!

“Volleyball is a sport that involves several positions. This guy and I”—Hinata gestures between himself and Tsukishima—“are middle blockers. We knock down spikes from the other team and get a lot of scoring in with both offense and defense!”

Tsukishima scratches the back of his neck. “Ah, the volleyball we play involves a lot of hard work and practice, but…it’s pretty fun.”

He wishes he could slink off the stage already. This isn’t where he belongs.

Hinata, on the other hand, is practically glowing.

“Come join our team!” he cheers. “It’s okay if you’ve never played volleyball before. If you like to jump, and you like to win, you should play! Even if you don’t join our team, come by and cheer for us during our official matches. We promise to make it fun!”

Hinata smiles broadly and puts his fingers up in a peace sign.

The first years applaud for them, probably out of politeness, but Hinata waves at the crowd like he’s received a standing ovation.

Inexplicably, this amplifies the level of applause.

When they leave the stage, Hinata turns to Tsukishima with a panicked expression.

“Gah! Tsukishima, do you think we should have told them we’re in magazines? Do you think more people would want to join with that?”

“Don’t be stupid,” says Kageyama as he passes them. “We don’t want people who only want to have their picture taken, dumbass.”

Tsukishima nods. “Yeah. We can’t have players like that if we’re going to win Nationals.”

Hinata’s face gets weird.

“Tsukishimaaaaa!” he wails. “I can’t believe you said that!”

“What?” Tsukishima snaps, annoyed.

“You never used to say things about winning Nationals!”

“Well, that’s the plan, isn’t it?”

“Tsukishima!”

Hinata jumps on him, his arms and legs wrapped around Tsukishima’s middle.

“Oy!” he shouts, but if he’s being honest, he’s more nervous than annoyed with that warm body pressed up against his. He’s more aware of Hinata than ever before, and—

He shoves Hinata off quickly. “Cut that out,” he mutters.

“Eh?”

Tsukishima’s heart doesn’t calm down for the rest of the day.

*

He and Hinata are in the same class this year.

When Tsukishima checked the board to find his name before the opening ceremony, his eyes caught Hinata’s name on his class list, like a magnetic pull.

Hinata sat down in the seat behind him, but Tsukishima made them switch seats. Just because Hinata wanted to sit in the back doesn’t mean he can actually see over twenty centimeters above his eyelevel, the idiot.

If it were up to Tsukishima, they’d be at opposite sides of the classroom. Having Hinata so close is nerve-wracking, unsettling—having him staying so close and so still goes against everything.

But, well, if Hinata were on the other side of the classroom...

This way, Tsukishima can pretend he's looking at the blackboard if his attention drifts, at least.

*

By the end of the day, eight first years have joined the team. Add that to the five second years from last year, they've got a solid foundation.

Yachi is still looking for a new manager, but she tells Tsukishima:

"I'm not worried. I'll find someone, and besides, I'm staying until we win Nationals."

He nods. He doesn't look at her.

"I'm not going to tell anyone, you know."

Tsukishima tenses up.

"What?"

"About...you. I wouldn't do that."

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Yachi playing with the ends of her hair. She's really grown it out since their first year.

He clears his throat. "What do you mean?"

"Um...I don't want to say it out loud, but..."

Damn. There's no way for him to get out of this, is there?

"Uh. Thanks."

After a few seconds she asks, "Are you ever going to tell him?"

No need to ask to whom she's referring. "No."

*

He doesn't want anything from Hinata, but here's the thing:

When he's waiting to see Hinata, he becomes restless and fidgety.

When Hinata leaves, he feels his mood drop like a sudden temperature decline.

When the bare possibility of Hinata being with someone *in that way* comes to bear, Tsukishima gets anxious and possessive and irritable.

When Hinata is not around, he thinks about the next time they'll meet.

It's an embarrassing, unpleasant cocktail mix of emotions that Tsukishima didn't sign on for. He doesn't want this.

But he's also starting to want it so badly his teeth ache with holding back his words.

*

The first time he and Hinata have a meeting with Coach Ukai it's to discuss the Golden Week training camp. Yachi's there to talk food and donations, and Takeda is present as well.

Tsukishima notices how Yachi deliberately sits a seat away from him, so that Hinata (running half a minute late) has no choice but to sit between them. Next to Tsukishima.

His entire left side tingles.

"The first years don't know what the training camp involves," Ukai says as he goes down his checklist. "Some of them might find it too much work. As team captain, you'll need to watch out for that."

"Uh huh," Tsukishima agrees dully. "I'll do that."

"Do you have any thoughts on particular training drills?"

"Um..." he purses his lips. "Our blocking is pretty mediocre, except from Hinata and myself. If we could spend some time focusing on that...and obviously receives..."

"Serves," says Hinata. "I think if we focus on it, a few of our first years could do a good jump serve. And Yamaguchi's already started to coach Iseki on the jump float serve."

Ukai taps his chin. "Hm. If we focus on one per day...but see, we've also got a few practice matches lined up. Nekoma can't make it this year, but Takeda-sensei has spoken with a few schools and they're all interested. Why don't the two of you take a look at the schedule and see what you want to do."

"Okay," Tsukishima and Hinata say in unison.

They've never spoken in unison before. It feels...

He doesn't know how it feels.

"Hey, Tsukishima," Hinata says later, "can I come over to your house tomorrow?"

*

Here's what Yamaguchi says the next day:

"Tsukki, are you dating Yachi-san?"

Tsukishima glares at him so hard that Yamaguchi blanches under his freckles.

“I am not,” Tsukishima says irritably, “going to have this conversation with anyone else. Who cares who Yachi is dating? What does it matter? It’s not me, and it’s not Hinata. I don’t think she’s dating anyone, and I honestly don’t care.”

“Whoa, Tsukki, are you alright?”

“I’m *fine*,” he grumbles. “Just really tired of this. Hinata keeps talking about Yachi, and now you, and—”

“Hinata? Does he like her?”

Tsukishima stands up from his seat on the outdoor bench. “Yamaguchi, shut up.”

“Oy, Tsukki!”

“I’ll see you later.”

*

The irritation, the anger, is still bubbling just at the lid of Tsukishima’s self-control when Hinata comes over.

They don’t talk on the way to his house after practice. It’s just Tsukishima, Hinata, and Hinata’s bike, a taut quiet stretching between them.

Tsukishima’s mother isn’t home.

It’s quiet in the house. Tsukishima heads to his room, not paying attention to Hinata, until:

“Did you get in a fight with Yamaguchi?”

He turns around. “What?”

Hinata rubs the back of his neck. “Ah, during practice you two didn’t talk at all, and he seemed upset, and you seem angry...”

“Is it your business?” Tsukishima demands.

“I—”

“What does anything have to do with you?” he goes on. “Why do you care?”

Hinata’s gaze becomes sharp. “Because you asked me to be your vice-captain. That makes it my business.”

“It’s your business when it comes to volleyball, and that’s it,” says Tsukishima. In the back of his head, he’s screaming at himself to shut up. “You’re not my friend.”

“I’m your teammate,” Hinata shoots back. “It’s my business if you fought with Yamaguchi, because that affects the team. You *asked* me to care.”

Tsukishima feels his lips twisting. “When did I do that?”

“The hell, Tsukishima? What’s wrong with you today?”

“Can we just focus on training camp plans?”

Hinata seems to blaze up. “If you’re gonna be like that, I’m going home,” he says.

After he leaves, Tsukishima spends about half an hour mentally kicking himself.

*

This happens on a Friday. The gym is being fumigated over the weekend, so they don’t have any practices. It isn’t until Monday that Tsukishima sees Hinata or Yamaguchi again.

Rather, he sees Yamaguchi, but he doesn’t speak to him.

Not because he’s ignoring his friend. Tsukishima is embarrassed, filled with shame—why should he take out his frustrations on someone else? He hates himself for it.

Hinata he sees in class, but Hinata doesn’t turn around to speak to him.

The rejection stabs Tsukishima through the heart. He spends the first half of the day slumped across his desk in classes, staring out the window.

He doesn’t leave his desk during lunch, because he has no appetite, but about ten minutes in he hears a scraping and sees Hinata turning his desk around.

They face each other in their seats.

“Are you still grouchy?” Hinata asks him.

Tsukishima sits up slowly. “No.”

“What happened?”

He keeps his mouth shut.

Hinata sighs. “Why do you always keep things to yourself, Tsukishima?”

“I—”

“What’s the worst that can happen?”

Oh, it’s just so unfair. Hinata’s eyes are wide and innocent, perhaps filled with mild reprimand, but there’s nothing complex or twisted in him. Not like him. Tsukishima *feels* so intensely in that moment that all the air is pulled from him and he can’t breathe it back in.

The worst that can happen?

“There’s someone I like,” he says carefully.

Hinata frowns in confusion. “So?”

“It’s definitely not Yachi.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

“But it is someone on the team.”

He watches Hinata’s puzzled expression as he muddles through this, watches as each word gets turned over in that action-oriented mind, until realization dawns.

“Oh,” says Hinata.

“So I’m tired of people asking me about who Yachi is dating, or who she likes,” Tsukishima continues hurriedly, “because I’m not...”

Hinata’s cheeks tinge pink. He slumps forward on his desk, covering his face in his hands.

“Sorry,” he says.

“Why? It’s not your fault.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” he says.

“I know.”

Hinata’s hand drops to the desk and he looks up wordlessly at Tsukishima.

Right then, he feels this soft, persistent need to reach out and brush Hinata’s hair with his fingertips—the wildness of his bangs as they fall all over his face and stick out in every direction. The lightest of touches, the only indulgence he can allow himself to even want.

He doesn’t.

“Do you want to tell me...who it is?”

Tsukishima feels his heart actually skip a beat, disgustingly.

“What’s the point?” he evades the question.

“So someone else knows, I guess,” Hinata mutters. “So you don’t feel so alone, maybe.”

He shrugs. “Yachi knows.”

“Oh.”

Tsukishima feels compelled to add, “But thank you.”

*

There's a subtle change between them after that admission. During practices, Hinata stands a little closer to Tsukishima than before. He's a little quieter when Tsukishima is talking, even on the other side of the gym.

It's almost as if Hinata is guarding him, but Tsukishima doesn't let himself think about what that means.

*

Two weeks before Golden Week training camp, Yachi recruits a new manager—temporary, just to try out the club, but it's heartening for the exhausted first years.

Her name is Hirono Matsuri, she's eager to impress Yachi, and apparently, she's extremely cute.

Almost every single boy has something to say about how cute she is, and it quickly becomes annoying. They talk about her long hair, and her smile, and how short and sweet she is. All the things Tsukishima wants to say about another person entirely, god help him, except he can't.

“What do you think about her, Hinata-senpai?” Iseki (a first year) asks in the club room after practice one day.

“Hm?”

“I mean, Yachi-senpai is cute, but Hirono-chan is *super* cute, right?”

Tsukishima watches out of the corner of his eye as Hinata shrugs uncomfortably. He looks away as Hinata glances to him and stares straight ahead at his locker door. It feels like déjà vu.

Hinata lets out a nervous laugh. “Ah. Well. I guess she is. I wasn't thinking about it.”

A chorus of disgruntled objection: “Ehhh?”

“Isn't it more important that she wants to be a part of the team?”

More jeers of disapproval.

Tsukishima slams the door shut and says, “It's time to go home now.”

The first years become suddenly quiet. Tsukishima stomps out of the club room.

*

“You know,” Tsukishima says, “most guys would keep their distance after finding out what you did about me.”

Hinata pauses in the middle of unfurling his futon right next to Tsukishima's. “Huh?”

He fumbles for a way to say what he wants to without pushing Hinata away.

“Most guys...find it gross,” he says at last. “If there’s another guy who...well.”

Hinata twists his mouth awkwardly. It’s unbearably cute.

“You’re not gross.”

“...Thanks.” His face and neck become warm.

“Tsukishima, you’re not gross!” Hinata insists, sitting on his knees and leaning forward. Somehow he’s gotten himself into the perfect position to receive a kiss. “You’re normal. It’s not like you’re going around attacking our teammates, right?”

“Well, obviously not,” says Tsukishima.

“So I’m okay sleeping next to you,” concludes Hinata.

But I’m not okay, Tsukishima wants to say.

He doesn’t.

*

Golden Week training camp has started. Tsukishima is grateful that this year, at least, Hinata isn’t flailing around like an overexcited puppy—but on the other hand, Hinata is sticking to him with no sign of letting up.

Tsukishima can’t breathe properly.

His heart can’t calm down that first night after Hinata has tucked himself into the futon beside his own, although Hinata stops moving and apparently falls straight to sleep.

He wakes up each morning fifteen minutes before everyone else is scheduled to, only to find Hinata and Kageyama are already out and taking an early run.

In a way it’s a relief, but he’s still steeped in envy.

He’s also tired and forces himself to focus on other things.

Tsukishima is learning how to project his voice to call out plays, count for stretches, and reel in his unruly first years. He’ll never be as loud as Daichi-san or Ennoshita, but Coach Ukai is teaching him how to at least be heard.

“It comes from the stomach,” Coach says when Tsukishima asks him on the second day. “You’re not speaking from here”—he puts a hand below his neck—“but from here.” His hand goes to his stomach, below his rib cage.

“That’s not where the lungs are,” Tsukishima points out.

Coach only smirks. “That’s where the diaphragm is. If you watch a really good singer, you’ll see their stomach shakes a lot when they’re performing. It’s where the strong sound comes from, Tsukishima.”

A video search on YouTube confirms this.

Tsukishima remembers how Daichi-san’s voice seemed to sometimes rumble as if it came from deep in the ground, rattling bones and brains and commanding attention like an earthquake.

Maybe some of that came from the diaphragm, but most of it came from confidence, he thinks.

*

The training camp isn’t just for training, Tsukishima learns a few days in, when Ukai calls to him after practice the third evening of their stay there.

“We have to think about our line up,” he tells Tsukishima with a shrug. “Have you been watching the first and second years closely?”

Tsukishima nods.

“Good. What do you think of our current line up?”

Himself, Kageyama, Hinata, Miyamura, Amane, Hashimoto, and Egami.

“Our third year starters can’t be switched out,” Tsukisima says immediately.

“Agreed.”

“Miyamura is good,” he goes on. “He’s been playing at a high level for a while. But I think... Hashimoto isn’t strong enough on defense when compared to Iseki.”

Ukai nods. “I was thinking the same thing. Well, on the other hand, Hashimoto has played in more matches than Iseki.”

“Perhaps...” Tsukishima presses his lips together.

“Hm?”

He shrugs. “Perhaps we could have a rotating line up per set during our practice matches,” he says. “I know that means we’ll constantly be readjusting to the dynamics on the court, and we might lose more practice matches...but...”

“But that way we know what dynamic works best,” Ukai finishes, nodding thoughtfully. “It’s an interesting idea.”

“If we keep Hinata, Kageyama, and Amane as constants, we should still play strong no matter what.”

“Not you?”

Tsukishima shakes his head. “I want to watch.”

A sly grin grows on Ukai’s face. “Oh? You’re taking this team captain position more seriously than I thought you would.”

“How rude,” says Tsukishima. “I’ve been serious for a while.”

*

For some reason Tsukishima hesitates to tell Hinata the plan for the practice matches. He doesn’t say anything at dinner even though Hinata sits right across from him, nor does he speak up in the baths.

(To be fair, he doesn’t talk to Hinata at all, ever, in the baths. He doesn’t want to risk anything mortifying.)

Finally, he mentions it when they’re sitting on top of their futons side-by-side, waiting for the second years to finish up their bath and the first years to head in after them.

Hinata listens wordlessly, his large eyes scarily focused.

“So what do you think?” Tsukishima asks after explaining everything.

Hinata stands up and walks over to Kageyama, tapping him on the shoulder and interrupting his conversation with the first year setter Nawabe. Tsukishima watches Hinata point back at him and meets Kageyama’s blank stare. Hinata waves Yamaguchi over next.

Yamaguchi ends up sitting at the foot of Tsukishima’s futon, and Kageyama at the foot of Hinata’s.

“Tell them about your idea,” Hinata tells him.

“Um...a rotating line up during practice matches to see what starting players work best together,” he says slowly.

Hinata points at Tsukishima while addressing the other two. “He wants Kageyama and I to play the entire time while he sits out some matches to watch.”

Both Kageyama and Yamaguchi’s eyes snap to Tsukishima. They both scowl.

“What?” says Tsukishima.

“Everyone should rotate out,” says Kageyama. “Nawabe and Ueda are both setters. They should get a chance to play.”

“I want to watch too,” says Hinata.

“The two of you *want* to sit out matches?” Tsukishima says, blinking. “Are your heads alright?”

Kageyama scowls. “Oy. We’re not first years anymore.”

“We’ve got to think about the team when we’re gone,” says Hinata. “Jeez, Tsukishima.”

Tsukishima feels a little persecuted. “With you two”—he gestures between Hinata and Kageyama—“on offense and Amana on defense, we won’t lose so easily, you know?”

“If we’re losing, bring in a pinch server,” Yamaguchi grumbles. “That’s what I’m here for, Tsukki.”

“I don’t want to lose,” adds Hinata, “but I don’t want to lose the summer tournament even more. If we have to lose some practice matches to have a better team, then, well...that’s nothing we haven’t done before, right?”

“As long as one of us third years are on the court we can keep the team together,” Kageyama says. “Don’t be so self-sacrificing, dumbass.”

Tsukishima feels oddly reassured by this.

He realizes then that his hesitation in telling Hinata was a bizarre fear that Hinata would agree with his plan. Hinata agreeing that the team—that *he* needed Kageyama more than Tsukishima would be a critical blow.

“I don’t want to tell the first and second years that we’re trying them out like this,” Tsukishima says to the other three. “I don’t want them to feel pressured.”

“That’s a good idea,” says Yamaguchi.

Hinata stands up again. “I’m going to get something to drink,” he announces. “Do any of you want anything?”

Tsukishima shakes his head.

“Tea,” Yamaguchi says.

“I’m not sure,” Kageyama says. “I’ll come with you.”

Just like that, they leave, and Tsukishima does his best to keep a straight face.

“Tsukki?”

He looks to Yamaguchi, who appears deeply uncomfortable.

“Hm?”

“You and Hinata...you’ve been getting really close.”

Tsukishima's ears burn. "Um. Not really. We just do some extra club stuff together...since he's my vice-captain...and we're in the same class this year, so...it's just he's around a lot so..."

"Do you like him more than me?"

It's a tense second before Tsukishima realizes the context of this "like"—and then his heart drops into his stomach because he's a massive jerk.

"You're my best friend," he tells Yamaguchi. "Hinata and I aren't like that."

"But you wanted him to be vice-captain," says Yamaguchi. He fidgets in his spot at the edge of the futon. "I haven't...I've never asked you why. I mean, I know what you said, but it feels like there's more."

Tsukishima rubs his neck. "Um. He's what I'm not...he's...um. He makes me feel like I have to try harder. And...if he makes me feel like that, then he should be in a position to make everyone feel like that. And I need him. I want him."

It's a dangerous statement, but it's to Yamaguchi, so it's safe.

It has to be safe.

Yamaguchi nods slowly. "So you trust him more than me?"

"That's not it at all."

"No?"

"No," Tsukishima says. "Technically speaking, the person I trust most on this team is Kageyama. That's got nothing to do with anything else. Hinata's my vice-captain. You're my best friend. They're not the same thing at all. What I get from him is different than what I get from you."

"Okay." Yamaguchi's shoulders relax. "Okay."

When Hinata and Kageyama come back with drink in hand, Tsukishima wonders, suddenly, if those two have talked about him the same way he and Yamaguchi talked about Hinata. They aren't best friends by both their admission, and yet...

And yet.

*

The practice matches are a mess—especially when Kageyama is sitting out a set—but Karasuno wins more than half of them, and the lineup starts to become clear.

Hashimoto gets switched with Iseki, and it's one of the hardest things Tsukishima has had to do. He's not the one who makes the call, that's Coach Ukai, but he signs off on it.

All the third years sign off on it.

Maybe once they retire Hashimoto will make the cut, but right now it's the strongest who get to stand on the court. There's no arguing with that.

*

On the last day of Golden Week, Kageyama corners Tsukishima when they're packing their things.

Tsukishima is just tall enough to not feel trapped by Kageyama's too-close permanent frown—but he still doesn't want it anywhere near him.

"What?" he says, bracing for a fight.

Kageyama glare is slightly different than usual. It tickles at Tsukishima's memory.

"Um," says Kageyama. His eyes dart away. "I just... wanted to say... you're doing well as captain."

Tsukishima feels like he's just tripped over his own feet.

"Excuse me?"

"You're a good captain."

"Well, don't act like I'm torturing you," Tsukishima says as he recovers from the shock. "You came up to me, remember."

Kageyama balls his hands into fists. "I just wanted to tell you that you're doing a good job, that's all. Don't let it go to your head."

"Don't let it go to your head, *captain*."

"Hah?"

Tsukishima snorts.

As Kageyama turns around to storm off, he says, "Thank you."

Kageyama nods once, still facing away.

Only when he leaves does Tsukishima see Hinata watching him closely with an unreadable mien.

*

"Hey, Tsukishima," Hinata says a week later during lunch. "Can I ask you something?"

They're both at their desks in the classroom with lunchboxes in front of them. For once, Hinata isn't digging into his food. He's barely picking at his rice.

“What’s bothering you now?” says Tsukishima.

“It’s a weird question.”

“As though all your questions aren’t weird?”

Hinata doesn’t even rise to the bait. Tsukishima puts down his chopsticks and pushes his lunch away.

“The person on the team you like—”

Tsukishima tenses.

“Is it Kageyama?”

“What?”

Maybe he heard this wrong.

“I just…” Hinata shrugs, and shrugs again. “I know it’s a weird question.”

“I don’t like Kageyama,” Tsukishima says. “I don’t even like him as a friend.”

“Oh.”

This is too much.

Tsukishima puts his head down on his desk and abandons his lunch altogether. There are far too many butterflies in his stomach anyway.

Every time Hinata asks about something romance-related, Tsukishima loses a year off his life.

He folds his arms and gets comfortable. His eyes are tired, though he’s never been able to nap. Perhaps he can at least rest his eyes and pretend to sleep.

Tsukishima lets his thoughts drift away, not dwelling on Hinata or volleyball or school, just white noise inside his skull. It lasts for a while until:

“Tsukishima? Hey, Tsukishima. Are you asleep?”

Tsukishima doesn’t want to continue their conversation, even if it’s cowardly. He holds still, breathes lightly and doesn’t allow so much as a twitch of his closed eyelids.

From the seat in front of him, he hears a faint rustling of fabric, and then—

Something is pressing on his fingertips.

Hinata’s fingers.

Those are *Hinata's* fingertips gently matching up to Tsukishima's own, linking one by one from pinky to forefinger. If Tsukishima wasn't awake, he'd sleep through these light touches.

It's so hard to pretend he's unaware and unaffected when his heart is beating this hard. This has to stop.

Before Tsukishima can work up the nerve to fake his awakening, Hinata's touch abruptly lifts. A few seconds later, Tsukishima discovers why.

"Oy, Hinata," Kageyama's voice says from way above. "What are you doing?"

"Shh!" Hinata hisses. "He's asleep!"

"Hah? What do I care? And what were you doing?"

"N-nothing!"

"You were just—"

"There was some dirt there, so I was..."

Tsukishima stirs, ending the pair's conversation.

He doesn't want to hear Hinata explain those touches away. If there's a rational explanation, he doesn't want it—he doesn't want any explanation at all, because anything Hinata might say will disappoint him. Tsukishima wants to hold this moment close as a once-in-a-lifetime treasure.

That sort of urge makes him irritable.

"What," he says, as he fakes blinking awake, "are the two of you doing, watching me sleep? Gross."

He doesn't look at Hinata at all.

*

"You're watching him a lot today," Yachi says at his elbow during practice that afternoon.

Tsukishima flinches and looks down at her. "I am?"

"Yep." Her eyes are focused on the serve receives Ukai is putting Nawabe through on the court.

"Oh. Thank you."

He clenches his hand tightly.

*

Nekoma is hosting a weekend training camp in Tokyo two weeks before the summer tournament—which is to say, three weeks after Golden Week. It's a last minute stroke of luck for the team to attend since Takeda had to fight the vice-principal to let them attend so soon after Golden Week. The lure of winning Nationals and gaining that prestige wins out, eventually.

Hinata, oddly, is subdued after receiving the news.

"What's the matter with you?" Kageyama asks him when the four of them are walking home.

Hinata shrugs. "Kenma won't be there this year."

And that sends a spike of irritation right into Tsukishima's bloodstream.

"So? Lev and Inuoka will be."

"You're so annoying, Kageyama," says Hinata.

"Akaashi won't be there, either," Tsukishima says. "That's just how it is. High school teams change every year. This time next spring, none of us will be playing volleyball together."

"Tsukki, come on," says Yamaguchi. "You don't need to say something like that right now!"

"That's so depressing," Hinata agrees.

But Tsukishima's words have the desired effect: Hinata is beginning to perk up. The ability to change Hinata's moods stokes an embarrassing pride in Tsukishima that he can't quell.

"You still text Kozume-san, right?" asks Yamaguchi.

"Yep!"

Tsukishima wonders when, exactly, he became this possessive, reactive sort of person. At which point did his feelings for Hinata turn him into someone petty?

He's afraid to examine that question in detail.

*

Hirono Matsuri joins as official manager under Yachi.

It's fine, really.

Tsukishima personally doesn't care for the girl one way or the other, and he's irritated at how fixated the first years are on their cute new manager, but it's got nothing to do with him. Yachi chose Hirono for a reason, he's sure.

The trouble is, well, the boys.

He remembers, vaguely, their first year—Nishinoya and Tanaka's obsession with Shimizu, the constant chatter about their cute and beautiful managers from other teams. Even Hinata

wasn't entirely immune to Shimizu either, although Kageyama was constant as ever in his singular mania.

None of that had touched Tsukishima, so he ignored what he could of it.

Corralling first year boys who won't shut up is something he can't ignore.

They're still focused on volleyball more than Hirono, at least. Tsukishima won't have to sit the lot down for a lecture just yet, but the fact that he's already composing the more scathing lines in that lecture isn't a good sign at all.

*

The day Tsukishima surprises his team while leading stretches in a loud voice is a day worth remembering for a long time.

Practice begins normally. The first years are doing their best to chat with Hirono, who, to her credit, is more focused on assisting Yachi in set up than holding a conversation.

Tsukishima watches Kageyama and Hinata pass a volleyball back and forth, watches Egami tie his shoes with his usual diligence, and eyes the first year boys. He's always done well at expressing himself when irritated, for better or worse.

"Get over here!" he calls, right from the diaphragm, and the high ceiling gives his words an echo.

The chaos in the room halts and one by one, heads turn to look at Tsukishima.

He doesn't like this attention, but it's too late now to back down.

"Time for stretches," says Tsukishima in that same carrying voice. "Get yourselves together and get over here in thirty seconds."

There's a brief spell of absolute stillness, and then a sudden scramble as the entire team—three third years, five second years, and eight first years—rush to do as he says.

Everyone obeying him is something Tsukishima could get used to.

"Ready?" he calls out.

He catches Hinata's eye. Hinata gives him a thumbs up and a grin that has Tsukishima's heart stumbling.

"On my count!"

*

"Tsukishima was so cool!" Hinata says after practice. He puffs out his chest and puts a sneer on his face that Tsukishima is a little insulted by. "Get yourselves together!"

Yamaguchi laughs. “Yeah, that’s exactly what he looked like!”

That’s even more insulting.

“Oy,” he says to the pair of them. “Show a little respect for your captain.”

“Sorry, Tsukki,” says Yamaguchi.

“I think you were great,” says Hinata. His cheeks are flushed pink and his eyes are bright. “It reminds me of our first year with Daichi-san. I feel like we can do anything right now!”

Tsukishima narrows his eyes. “If you rob a store, so help me—”

“Jeez, Tsukishima, I wouldn’t do that.”

“Make sure you don’t.”

“I know what Hinata means, though,” Yamaguchi says. “Can’t you feel it? Like...we can do *anything*.”

“All I did was raise my voice.”

“Exactly!” says Yamaguchi. “If you can do that, anything’s possible!”

Hinata snickers.

Tsukishima reaches out and grabs a fistful of Hinata’s bangs and tugs upward, causing Hinata to yelp in pain and start slapping at Tsukishima’s hand. He lets go a few seconds later than he’d intended: Hinata’s hair is soft and feels good between his fingers.

Just like how he’d imagined.

“I can’t wait to see all the guys’ faces in Tokyo,” Yamaguchi says. “They won’t even recognize Tsukki when he does that.”

*

They arrive in Tokyo a few days later and almost immediately get to practice matches.

Gone are the days when they lose every set—they can’t win every time, but Karasuno pulls off a steady rhythm of winning and losing that feels like they are at least accomplishing something.

The energy in the gym during every set is incredibly intense.

Every team here wants to win. It’s a relief to know Karasuno is the only team from Miyagi, because facing any of these powerhouses during the summer tournament would be overwhelming.

There are enough monsters in their prefecture already, anyway.

*

Tsukishima's muscles are thoroughly strained. When he flops into his futon after a hot shower, he's ready to collapse into sleep. Perhaps if Hinata hadn't set up his futon next to Tsukishima's during that shower, he could have been calm enough to do just that.

But that empty, waiting futon nags at Tsukishima. He pays attention to it out of the corner of his eye, only half-paying attention to the book he's reading while waiting for lights out.

Hinata enters the room a solid ten minutes after Tsukishima. Two things run through Tsukishima's mind at the sight of his vice-captain:

- 1) His hair is still damp.
- 2) His hair is loose from its half-ponytail.

Tsukishima sighs to siphon off some of the nervous energy building in his chest.

"Hey," he says as Hinata approaches, "why are you sleeping next to me again?"

"Do you want me to move?" says Hinata.

He grits his teeth. "...No."

Hinata's smile is dangerous, somehow, though there's nothing different about it than usual. Perhaps it's just Tsukishima knowing that he's teetering dangerously close to an edge. Like watching a volleyball brush the edge of the net and not knowing which side it will fall on.

Hinata drops onto his futon at Tsukishima's side and exhales a contented sound.

"I miss playing against Kenma, but I'm glad we're here before the summer tournament," he mumbles into his pillow.

"I know, you've said that already," says Tsukishima. "At least thirty times now."

"Yeah, yeah."

Tsukishima watches Hinata for a precious extra second before he returns his eyes to his book. "You can go ahead and fall asleep, you know. I'll be up until sensei comes in for lights out."

"Mm. Can't sleep just yet."

"Liar. You sound exhausted."

"Hah? So do you, Tsukishima!"

There's no way I can fall asleep with you right there, he thinks.

"Oh? Why not?"

Tsukishima's blood runs cold. Had he said that out loud?

Oh, no.

No, this is not good.

“Doesn’t matter,” he says with all the calm he can collect. “Just stop bugging me and go to sleep.”

“Hey, Tsukishima—”

Takeda comes in at just that minute and ushers a few first years inside with a gentle, firm reprimand about staying outside past curfew. As Takeda announces lights out, Hinata pokes Tsukishima’s side.

“Stop,” he tells Hinata. He folds his books closed and puts it beside his pillow.

“What did you mean by that?”

“Go to sleep,” Tsukishima says.

“Hey—”

Tsukishima rolls over onto his side and faces toward the wall, away from Hinata. His throat is dry and his eyes are burning. With an inward scream, he plucks off his glasses and puts them on top of his book. He feels a little more exposed now that his vision is blurred but it is at least a sign to Hinata that he’s done talking.

The relief of that lasts a mere five minutes.

Hinata starts poking at him again, jabbing in different places with different levels of pressure each time so that Tsukishima cannot get used to the sensation.

He grits his teeth, determined to ignore—

Hinata’s leg lands on top of Tsukishima’s lower half and he starts kicking at Tsukishima’s feet.

“Stop,” Tsukishima says quietly, through gritted teeth.

“Why can’t you sleep?” breathes Hinata.

“Because you’re bothering me.”

“Tsukishima—”

“Seriously, stop.”

With a sigh Hinata rolls away from him.

But the damage has been done. Hinata’s leg wrapped around his own has Tsukishima struggling to calm his pounding heart. He feels stiff as a board from head to toe, and impossibly warm. How is he supposed to relax now?

*

Two hours later—he knows it’s been two hours because he’s been checking his phone—Tsukishima lays on his back, staring at the ceiling and listening to the snores and sleep-sounds of his teammates. The half-moon shines through the window and casts the room in a faint light that keeps his eyes open.

At a loss for what to do, he gets up and treads silently to the door.

The bathroom is down the hall, and the eerie almost-darkness between their room and his destination calms Tsukishima more than anything else has so far. The bathroom is disconcertingly bright in comparison and he squints upon stepping inside.

After using the urinal, Tsukishima looks at his reflection while washing his hands. He has to narrow his eyes to see himself without his glasses on.

There’s something wrong with him.

There must be, if he’s saying his thoughts aloud.

But there’s something wrong with Hinata, too. Hinata knows that Tsukishima likes a guy, though he still at least doesn’t know who. He should be wary of Tsukishima in some respects.

Unless...

No.

Tsukishima squeezes his eyes shut and pushes that thought out of his head.

He can’t think like that when Hinata is in the futon next to him.

The hallway is pitch-black on Tsukishima’s return, now that his eyes have adjusted to the florescent lights of the bathroom. He walks cautiously with his arms outstretched until he reaches the room.

At least the moonlight is still providing a faint outline for Tsukishima, so that he doesn’t accidentally step on one of the first years.

He slips back under his covers with a heavy breath and closes his eyes.

Not a minute later, something heavy lands on his legs from under the covers.

Hinata.

“Stop,” Tsukishima whispers as his heart starts banging against his ribs and echoes in his ears.

“Why can’t you sleep?”

Hinata’s leg slides in between Tsukishima’s legs and—

This needs to stop.

Tsukishima releases an irritated grumble and rolls over toward Hinata. The sudden movement surprises Hinata, who pulls back without extracting his leg from between Tsukishima's. Just like that, Tsukishima is pulled forward. He reaches out his hands to brace himself. His wrists twinge upon impact with the floor and he drops to his elbows to keep from damaging anything important to his blocking.

They land with Hinata sprawled on his back, Tsukishima hovering over him.

Hinata draws in a shaky breath.

Tsukishima can barely see Hinata, but the little of what he can see is this:

Hinata's eyes are wider than usual, his mouth is slightly open, and he's looking directly up at Tsukishima.

The blood pounds harder and harder in Tsukishima's ears and drowns out all noise. His skin is on fire.

Hinata swallows.

Without thought or reason, restraint or will, Tsukishima lowers his head slowly, slowly, slowly, until his lips brush against Hinata's open mouth.

He waits—

Hinata doesn't move away—

Tsukishima breathes out through his nose, and crosses his personal Rubicon with the pressure of a kiss. Hinata's lips are warm and soft. He smells like bath soaps.

He lifts his head and looks at Hinata again. Hinata's eyes are impossibly wide now, and he seems to have stopped breathing.

Tsukishima—very slowly—rolls away from Hinata and back to his own futon. He sighs and scrubs his face, and puts his hand to his chest so that his heart won't break out of his ribs.

Sleep won't happen any time soon tonight. Not now.

*

Hinata is gone when Tsukishima wakes up the next day, bleary-eyed and running on only two hours of rest. The empty futon is a stab in the heart.

Which is stupid, because of course Hinata is doing his early morning run.

But...

Well.

He'd been hoping that maybe Hinata couldn't sleep either. For a good reason, not disgust. But maybe it was disgust that had Hinata getting up even with so little sleep to go out and run.

This was useless. This agonizing was useless.

So why can't I stop? he thinks, grumpily.

*

Hinata doesn't say anything at breakfast.

Rather, he doesn't say anything about the kiss. He behaves frustratingly, horrifically normal; at complete ease in Tsukishima's presence, without any self-conscious or nerves.

Tsukishima is just barely holding on to his composure.

During the practice sets he can at least throw himself into volleyball and not think about his monumental mistake of the night before. His only thoughts are of blocking and spiking and receiving, not of kisses or loose wet hair or moonlight-bathed moments.

When lunchtime arrives, Tsukishima sits by himself, avoiding even Yamaguchi.

Hinata doesn't approach him.

Tsukishima doesn't take it personally. Right now Hinata is spending every possible second with his friends from the other schools. It would be weird if Hinata didn't hunt the spotlight right now and stayed with Tsukishima instead.

Besides, he doesn't want to be near Hinata right now.

Tsukishima's subconscious was at work during the morning practice sets and he's come to a conclusion. Hinata's lack of reaction to the kiss can mean only one of two things:

One, Hinata doesn't remember what happened. He may think the entire moment was part of a strange dream. Being Hinata, and therefore unfazed by strange dreams (most likely), he's choosing not to bother Tsukishima with the details.

Two, Hinata remembers what happened and is pretending he doesn't. By pretending he's protecting both Tsukishima and himself from embarrassment, and therefore outright rejection.

Either way, Tsukishima has absolutely no chance with Hinata.

*

Which means, he realizes on the long bus ride home, that he might as well see it through to the end.

*

“You’ve played against some of the strongest players in Japan’s high schools,” Ukai tells them when they return home that night. “You’ve been able to look at yourselves and your volleyball with an honest eye and take note of your strengths and weaknesses.”

They sit in the gym, cross-legged and watching their coach as he speaks. Yamaguchi is on Tsukishima’s right, Kageyama on his left, and Hinata is on Kageyama’s left.

It feels...off to not sit next to his vice-captain, even though it was always Hinata who sought him out and not the other way around.

It feels exposed.

*

“If you’re going to hate me now I’d really like to know sooner rather than later.”

Hinata looks up from fiddling with the lock on his bike. His eyes are wide.

“What?”

“If you hate me now,” Tsukishima says. His hands are stuffed into his pockets. “Just tell me. I’ll talk to Takeda-sensei about taking you off vice-captain. I’ll move seats. Just let me know now.”

“Um.” Hinata stands up slowly, his bike still locked.

“I don’t like dragging things like this out.”

Hinata scratches the back of his neck. “I don’t understand what this is about.”

Tsukishima glowers.

Nothing. Still a blank, confused expression on that captivating face.

“Don’t make me say it,” Tsukishima says through gritted teeth.

Hinata shakes his head slowly. “I like being your vice-captain,” he says. “And I don’t need you to move seats. It’s fine the way it is right now.”

He doesn’t say anything about not hating Tsukishima.

“Are you sure it’s fine?” he goads Hinata. “Aren’t you afraid I’ll attack you again?”

“What do you mean, attack?”

Oh.

God help him, was it option one after all?

“Last night,” Tsukishima grinds out.

Hinata presses his lips together very slowly. Press, release, and lick. And swallow. And press again. Tsukishima can't look away from that mouth.

"Oh," says Hinata.

A long minute of silence passes, a minute in which Tsukishima hears his heart pounding in his ears, and hears the creaking of branches in a light wind, and a few early cicadas testing out their summer cry, in which the entire world leaves them to their own devices.

"*Oh*," Hinata says again. He puts a hesitant finger to his lips.

Tsukishima turns away. "So let me know," he says, "if you're going to hate me from now on."

He's about to start walking as far as he can until he either sprints or collapses—he can't tell which one his legs want to do—when Hinata calls out:

"Why would I hate you?"

He halts.

Nothing. Hinata doesn't follow that up with anything. Was it an honest question?

Because I, another guy, kissed you. Because I like you, and I kissed you when you were pinned down and helpless, and maybe you didn't pull away, but I shouldn't have done it.

He doesn't say this.

He says: "Do what you want. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Eh? Tsukishima? Wait, Tsukishima!"

Tsukishima doesn't stop walking, and he doesn't turn around. He doesn't want Hinata to see him shaking, or for Hinata to notice the burn of his cheeks.

To not be hated is such a devastating relief.

*

The blocs for the summer tournament came in while the team was in Tokyo. Takeda-sensei hands him a chart Monday afternoon before practice.

Their first opponent will be the winner of a match-up between Niiyama and Ougi Minami. From there, it was anyone's guess. Tsukishima can't remember a single tournament when at least of the powerhouse schools weren't in their bloc. It presents a challenge, but lately, Tsukishima's been excited by challenges.

He tapes the chart to the inside of the club room door, so that it will be the last thing the team sees when they exit.

As Tsukishima is securing the last corner, a brilliant head of hair pops up before his eyes.

Hinata stands directly in front of Tsukishima, pouring over the bloc chart with assumingly hungry eyes. His back is a breath's distance from Tsukishima's chest.

For a second, he is completely frozen, and then he remembers to breathe.

The inhale he takes is sharp and startled.

Hinata's shoulders immediately tense.

They stand there for several long seconds, or perhaps minutes, or perhaps hours, completely unmoving, until Kageyama clears his throat irritably.

"Can you move?" he says. "I want to take a look, too."

Tsukishima steps aside as fast as he can, and Hinata practically flies across the room.

Thank god for Kageyama's utter lack of situational awareness, Tsukishima notes as he focuses on getting his heartrate back to a normal level.

The strain of the moment is erased when Egami, racing into the club room late, slams the door wide open into Kageyama's face. Tsukishima can't hold back his snicker at the red welt on Kageyama's forehead and Egami's utter terror, and the room erupts into jokes and cackles.

*

Tsukishima sits down across from Yachi during lunch break.

"I know what you said last year," he begins without small talk, "but are you sure you can stay with the team through the InterHigh?"

Yachi pauses mid-chew and puts her chopsticks down.

"Hmf?" she manages through her mouthful.

Tsukishima motions for her to swallow.

He says, "I was meeting with Takeda-sensei yesterday and I saw your test score for English."

Yachi's swallow is audible.

"I wasn't trying to look for it," he assures her. "It was on top of Mori-sensei's desk."

"What did I get?"

"A sixty-seven percent."

"What?"

She looks pale.

“Ninety-five is usually your average, right?”

“There’s no way I got sixty-seven,” Yachi says firmly, but her panicked eyes don’t match her tone. “That’s just ridiculous.”

Tsukishima shrugs. “That’s what I saw. I guess you’ll get that back later today, so you can tell me for certain. But if you need to quit the club after the summer tournament—”

“You’re the one who said that if I wanted to both, I could do it,” she says.

“Yeah but—”

“Would you say that sort of thing to Hinata?”

After saying this, Yachi seems to realize she’s stepped on a landmine, so she hastily adds:

“Or Kageyama? Or even Yamaguchi?”

Tsukishima doesn’t know what to say to that.

Yachi folds her fingers together and leans forward. She’s far shorter than even Hinata, but in that moment, she has a presence he can’t ignore.

“Sometimes I think you treat me differently because I’m a manager, and not a player,” says Yachi. “I’m just as invested in the team as the rest of you. I love watching after you guys and helping you. I’ve learned a lot, and not just about volleyball. Being the volleyball team’s manager is important to me. So what if I got a...”—she gulps—“a sixty-seven percent? I’ll just study harder for the next test! Don’t talk down to me.”

“Yachi, you’re aiming for University of Tokyo,” he argues. “I don’t want you to quit, either, but if you can’t get into your dream school because of a high school club—”

“But you wouldn’t think of it like that,” she says. “So don’t think I do.”

Tsukishima crosses his arms. “I’m not looking down on you. I think you’re part of the team. I just want to make sure you won’t regret staying with us when you should be looking at your options realistically.”

Yachi’s eyes narrow. “You know,” she says, flipping her ponytail behind her shoulder, “that part of you is still the same.”

He blinks.

“Excuse me?”

“It’s like you’re afraid to take big risks because they might not work out, so you do the best you think you can handle and then give up.”

Tsukishima feels like he’s been punched.

“I do not,” he says.

“You’ve gotten a lot better about it, where volleyball is concerned,” Yachi tells him, “and your practical approach to the game is what makes you so good. I just didn’t realize that’s how you are all the time.”

“That’s how you see me?”

“Yeah!”

“Well,” says Tsukishima. He doesn’t have anything to add to that. “*Well.*”

*

He has *evidence* that taking big risks doesn’t pay off. Recent evidence!

*

You do the best you think you can handle and then give up.

Oh, he realizes late at night, staring up at his ceiling. That’s what he did so recently. That’s exactly what he did. He did just that.

*

“Come take a walk with me.”

Hinata pauses halfway through the process of sitting astride his bike.

He lowers his leg.

“What?”

Tsukishima looks over his shoulder at the club rooms, hoping no one steps out and intrudes on this important conversation.

“Walk with me for a bit,” Tsukishima says.

Hinata’s eyes narrow. “Aren’t you avoiding me?”

“Yes. So come take a walk with me.”

“You don’t make any sense.”

Tsukishima folds his hands into his pockets and stares down at Hinata, who meets his gaze squarely.

At last he says, “I need to talk to you.”

“Is it about Yacchan?” Hinata asks suspiciously. “She told me you tried to get her to quit the team the other day. I don’t know why you’d do that a week before the tournament but—”

“I didn’t try to get her to quit, and no,” Tsukishima says, “this isn’t about Yachi.”

“No?”

“No. It’s about me.”

And you.

“Oh. Okay.”

“Great,” says Tsukishima. He nods once. “Great. Thanks.”

“Where are we going?”

Tsukishima thinks about it for a second. He hadn’t planned this far ahead. His nerves didn’t let him get past the part where he approached Hinata at the bike rack for a redo of their last confrontation.

At last he admits, “No idea.”

Hinata nods slowly. “How about the park, then?”

“Um. Sure.”

They head in silence through the town. The air is heavy and charged with enough ion to make Tsukishima’s arm hair stand on end. The creaking wheels of Hinata’s bike give the sole sound of the walk.

Tsukishima doesn’t want to start talking about this in public. He might be taking a giant risk here, but he’s not going to wave his issues to potential passersby.

They come to the alley that leads to the park.

Hinata hops on his bike and rides ahead and Tsukishima follows after.

It seems he’s always been following after Hinata, one way or another, always trying to catch up, always trying to beat him or stay in step with him, but Hinata has always—*always*—been out of reach.

Well, he can’t stop trying to reach now of all times.

When Tsukishima comes out of the alleyway, Hinata is waiting for him.

“What did you want to talk about?” Hinata asks.

He’s so carefree and unassuming, his brown eyes wide and curious and utterly unflustered.

“Um,” Tsukishima says.

Hinata waits.

If Tsukishima is always following, at least Hinata will be waiting for him.

It wasn't always that way. When did Hinata start waiting for him instead of running on ahead? When did that change?

"That was my first kiss," Tsukishima says suddenly, and now he can't stop talking. "I didn't plan on it, and I wasn't even thinking about...I didn't have any dreams or...*ugh*, I wasn't trying to take advantage of you, but I did, and of course you're not interested. Of course you're not. So what I'm trying to say is I'm sorry, but I'm also glad you were my first kiss, and I'm sorry that I'm glad about it—"

"Oy," says Hinata. His cheeks are brilliant red and he's clutching the handlebars of his bike so hard that his knuckles are stark white. "What's this about?"

"If I don't talk about it like this I don't know if I'll ever get past it, so just bear with me."

Hinata shakes his head. "I don't know what you're talking about. I really don't get it. I mean, I'm your vice-captain, aren't I?"

Tsukishima opens his mouth to point how very little that has to do with anything, but then he takes a closer look at Hinata.

Hinata, whose small frame is trembling with...anger? Nerves? Both? Hinata, whose face is lighting up the entire park with that radiant flush.

He remembers when the question of captaincy first came up, right here in this park on a cool night over half a year ago now.

He remembers Hinata's squeaking voice, and—

It occurs to Tsukishima that Hinata is the only person who refers to himself as Tsukishima's vice-captain, specifically. Not "the vice-captain" but always, simply, "your vice-captain," since the very first day.

Tsukishima slowly, deliberately, rethinks his strategy.

"Hinata," he says after a long silence, "how do you feel about it? The...the kiss?"

In answer, Hinata cocks his head to the side. "Feel? What do you mean exactly?"

"I mean," Tsukishima says, "what were your thoughts about it?"

"Um." Hinata takes one hand off his bike to scratch the back of his neck. "I mean, it was my first kiss so I don't have anything to compare it to...but it was nice?"

"Nice?"

"Yeah."

"You liked it?"

Hinata lets out an awkward laugh. “It really surprised me.”

“But you liked it.”

“Mm.”

Tsukishima is entirely wrong-footed by this conversation. “Hinata,” he tries again, “were you nervous?”

Finally, a direct nod in answer.

“I don’t get you,” Tsukishima says. “You...you *get* that I kissed you, right? You get that’s not normal between teammates or friends or...you *do* get that, right?”

“Of course,” says Hinata, blushing to the roots of his hair now. “I’m not stupid, Tsukishima.”

“So why aren’t you grossed out?”

“I’m your vice-captain.”

And there it is, *again*, the reply that has nothing to do with what Tsukishima is saying...

...Or everything to do with what he’s saying. Because right now, looking at Hinata, looking at those large eyes, looking at the entire history of their high school volleyball career, Tsukishima thinks he might be focusing on the wrong thing that Hinata is telling him.

He’s been hearing *vice-captain*, while Hinata has been saying:

Your.

“My?”

And maybe—maybe the definition has changed for Hinata somewhere down the line. Maybe the importance of the words changed, or perhaps Hinata is just so obsessed with volleyball that the concept of the game and romance became inextricably intertwined, but:

“Yours,” Hinata says.

So if it stopped being about being Tsukishima’s vice-captain and starting being about *being Tsukishima’s*:

“Mine?”

“Yes.”

So to Hinata, it wouldn’t have to be vice-captain. Or at least, it wouldn’t have to be vice-captain, specifically, *anymore*, because the concept of belonging is the heart of the matter.

He might be completely wrong about this.

Hinata is strange. He doesn't approach things with the same logic that Tsukishima does. This might be a wildly off-base assumption. This might be wishful thinking.

Tsukishima lets loose a shaky breath.

His head is light and full of air. His feet are made of lead. He might float away, might vibrate out of his skin, might suffer a heart attack if his pulse keeps up this hummingbird pace.

He breathes in deep and asks, slowly, haltingly, in a voice that wobbles dangerously:

“And...what am I to you?”

Hinata tenses up. He looks, for the first time in this conversation, nervous and unsure. He opens his mouth and says thinly:

“My captain.”

“Your...”

The impact of the word doesn't work the same this way. Tsukishima is the entire team's captain. His role as someone's specific captain isn't limited in the same way a vice-captain's is.

And there, he understands, is why there's such a strain in Hinata's voice. Despite the kiss, despite everything Tsukishima has said or done—or hasn't said or done—there is no certainty. There is no assurance, because when it comes down to it, he hasn't been saying the words that matter.

Here's what matters:

I like you, Tsukishima wants to say.

He does.

*

Fin

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!