

## HIMAWARI-KUN

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# HIMAWARI-KUN

by [StoriesAndMagic](#)

## Summary

Aiba Masaki is a free spirit who doesn't want to fall in love, but then he meets Sakurai Sho. And it becomes an interesting Summer.

## Notes

I have never been to Japan so the places I describe are product of my imagination. The names are of real locations in Japan, though.

# Chapter 1

The wind. Sakurai-san loved the wind. It whispered to him, it intertwined itself between his fingers, it caressed his hair and made him feel at ease, no matter how strong it blew. His other passion were flowers and plants. He was a botanist working at the botanical garden in Yamanashi. He felt so fortunate to live the life he so desired since he was a child. He was kind hearted, a good friend and an excellent lecturer.

The Botanic Institute of Research was an old building near the Garden, dated from the 1800s. Sakurai-san used to visit its library to prepare his classes. From the huge windows he could glimpse the majestic, permanent beauty of the Fujisan. There was a small secluded field at the back of the building, plenty of plants and creatures lived there, no one taking care of them but Nature. It was a sort of wild place in the middle of the orderly and clean Botanic Institute. Sakurai-san liked to stroll amongst the high grass and the exotic flowers. One of them was a big himawari that stood out. The botanist used to stop in front of it and observe it: it was a wonderful flower containing all the allure of the yellow fields near the botanical garden. He often wondered why such a lonely flower had taken residence there instead of being with the rest of them.

Sho smiled. He remembered fondly the days he spent with Ohno-san, his former lover. Those days were gone, just like him, but his heart never felt pain, only nostalgia. Ohno Satoshi was made of sea water, and as such, he studied the oceans. They crossed paths one day, fell in love, got together and later separated. It wasn't meant to be, Satoshi couldn't live far from the sea and Sho couldn't live far from his flowers.

- More beer? – Asked Harada-san.

Sho shook his head. He was eating at his usual place: the Harada farm. The owner, a small woman who had taken over it when his husband passed away, was an excellent cook and a tough worker.

- I'm loving this udon! – He exclaimed.

Harada-san kept looking at his phone but replied to the young man:

- I do it myself but I'm going to need help soon.

One of her sons helped her in the farm alongside the employees they had contracted. But her daughter wanted nothing to do with it and moved to Tokyo to be a business woman. She promised her she'll send back to the farm one of the best cooks she knew.

- Aiba-san is arriving any moment. – She told Sho.

- Is he the Tokyo chef?

The woman giggled:

- He's one of Michiko's friends. He's a vet but he cooks well, apparently. He's going to help me in the kitchen and with the animals. He wants to try the country life.

Sho laughed. A pleasant sound that resonated across the dining room.

- So he's the best cook she knows?

- Exactly.

Harada-san winked.

- I'm going to open one of the old bottles of sake. We'll need it.

She left and Sho looked outside. The wind was rustling, the bamboo trees dancing to its rhythm. He could feel the change in the air.

- It's going to be an interesting Summer.

## Chapter 2

- Uh oh!

His joyful eyes grew bigger and sheer happiness appeared all over his graceful features. He winked his nose and let out a funny sound. The scenery in front of him was breathtaking, nothing he had ever imagined.

- You can even see the Fujisan clearly! – he said to nobody.

He had forgotten he had the latest Iphone in his hand and that he should do a phone call. He was standing at the train station grabbing his suitcase and getting distracted by everything. A staff person approached him.

- Do you need help? A taxi? Do you need to hire a car?

The young man got himself back to reality and nodded enthusiastically.

- A taxi will be fine.

He called Harada-san to inform her he was at the station and that a taxi was going to take him to the farm.

Once in the car, he kept asking questions to the driver, kept ooohing and awwwing at what he was seeing and behaving like the ‘clumsy, overexcited puppy’ that he was according to Michiko.

The farm was a traditional house just like he had imagined by the explanations of his friend. He had seen Harada-san in pictures but was surprised by how fragile she looked.

- Yoroshiku onegaishimasu! – He bowed.

- Mah, mah, mah. No need for such formalities with me, boy.

Harada-san introduced him to her son who accompanied him to his room.

- Are you planning to stay here for a long time, Aiba-san? – asked the man.

- I am. But you never know where life takes us.

While he was checking his room and putting his clothes and toiletries inside the wardrobe and drawers, he reflected on his life until that moment. He had always lived adventures, whether in Tokyo or in Chiba in the Summer, he had always been there for his family and friends. He had never had a lover, though. He was too unpredictable to fall in love or to let anyone fall in love with him. He was a free spirit and he wasn't going to change that. The city was a kaiju that threatened to swallow him so the opportunity to live and work for a while in the country was one he could not refuse. Despite not knowing anyone there, despite having to accommodate himself to a new job, the challenge was exciting.

When he was done unpacking, he searched for Harada-san but couldn't find her. He found a chubby white cat that started rubbing himself against his legs as soon as he saw him. Aiba-san petted him and continued the search. The house seemed empty, silence adorning all the areas, so different from the noisy city.

In the tiny restaurant, no one was left. It was time to close off until the next day. So he decided to step outside. The wind was blowing, moving the grass and the leaves of the trees, he stared at them, mesmerised. Then, he walked towards a group of cherry trees that were showing all the splendor of its fruits. A figure was standing there, immerse in thought. Black hair, white skin, big eyes, full lips. Aiba –san stopped in his tracks to check if he was another human being or a kami. He had never seen such a beautiful creature in his life. The young man noticed him and smiled, which made him even more beautiful.

- You must be the new employee of Harada-san. – He said while approaching him.

Aiba-san nodded, his voice was refusing to get out of his mouth.

- My name is Sakurai Sho. I'm a friend of the family and a usual customer of the restaurant. Sakurai Sho bowed and Aiba imitated him.

- I'm Aiba Masaki. – He almost stuttered.

- Masaki is a name I have always liked, for some reason.

- Me too. – He sounded like a baka. Why were Sakurai-san's eyes so gentle?

They exchanged some more pleasantries until Sakurai-san announced he was leaving, saying:

- Well, I'll see you around.

Aiba-san remained in the same spot for a few minutes more and then decided to keep exploring the surroundings of the farm. It was going to be an interesting Summer.

## Chapter 3

Masaki thought it was a good idea to wear knee short trousers and a fedora to class. There were people of all ages there but they were country people not accustomed to edgy, trendy city folks. Elderly ladies and some gentlemen admired him while younger people sneered in disdain. For the first time, he thought he was out of place there. But that had never stopped him, it was another challenge, another adventure.

He took out from his backpack a notebook and a pen and waited for the lecturer to enter. The classroom was spacious, beautifully covered in wooden strips, it made him dream he was in one of those English schools he saw on TV or films.

The professor was elegantly dressed, quite fashionable, to be honest. He looked at the faces of the students and smiled warmly. With his right hand, he moved his black fringe from his forehead and started by thanking everybody in the room for attending his class. It was about medicinal herbs and how to use them in gastronomy. Harada-san had suggested him that class to expand his knowledge. She finished the suggestion pointing out that Sakurai-san was a great lecturer.

Indeed he was. He made it fun and engaging. He had a deep but soft voice and an exquisite pronunciation, perfect for a teacher or a narrator. Masaki learnt a lot and was determined to apply that learning to his cooking for the restaurant in the Harada farm.

A week had already passed since he first set foot in Yamanashi. He knew already how to make soba manually, had started working in the kitchen with Harada-san and had already met the animals in the farm: two horses, Shironeko, the chubby cat, a cow and a couple of chickens. They were in good health and needed no supervision from him. It had been hectic, he hadn't had time to socialise or to go out. He had met some customers, some of the workers in the farm but no one else. Well, apart from Sakurai-san, that is.

On Sunday he had come to the restaurant accompanied by a smaller young man with boyish features. They ate together and laughed plenty. Sakurai's friend had a sort of annoying cackle. Masaki had observed them when he could until Harada-san had found him and smacked him.

- Isn't he pretty? – She said to him once they were in the kitchen – Ninomiya Sensei is the prettiest doctor in Yamanashi.

Masaki had nodded.

- I think he's Sakurai-san's boyfriend.

Masaki silence was deafening so Harada-san had continued:

- Do I sound like a gossip?

Masaki had shaken his head.

- Do you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend? Is my daughter your lover?

Then, Masaki had started to laugh.

- No! Never! I'm single. And I'm going to be so for the rest of my life. Here's some gossip for you.

Harada-san had shrugged her shoulders and kept with her work.



## Chapter 4

After the class, Sakurai-san guided their students to a tour inside the building of the Botanic Institute of Research. They all marvelled at the gorgeous library and the excellent views from there, and appreciated the atmosphere of peace and study surrounding every hall and classroom.

When they were leaving, something caught the eye of Aiba-san. He approached Sakurai-san who was seeing off one of the gentlemen and shyly pointed at that small field at the back of the building. Sakurai-san smiled and guided him there when the rest of the students had left.

- Interesting, isn't it? – He said. – Nobody takes care of it except for the the rain, the sun and the wind.

- It's so precious – whispered Aiba-san. He crouched down to watch the plants more closely and then ran to it when he glimpsed the big himawari.

- The star of this place.

Aiba-san looked at Sho with wonder in his eyes. Sho liked the innate curiosity and enthusiasm for everything of that boy Masaki.

- Isn't it strange? A sunflower alone here when there's an immense, splendid sunflowers field not far from here? – Aiba-san said.

- I'm asking the same thing every day. – Replied Sho.

- Doesn't it feel lonely? – There was a certain sadness in Aiba's voice.

- Maybe. Or maybe it thinks the company of other species is more satisfying than that of other himawari.

Aiba-san noticed Sakurai-san was by his side, very close, so close he could smell the cedar scent he was wearing. He felt dizzy and took a step towards a group of daisies.

- If you like this place, you can come here whenever you want.

That comment took him by surprise.

- I wouldn't want to bother you.

Sho touched him lightly on the arm while speaking:

- You won't. I'm making you that offer.

Masaki then started to explain how busy he was, how many things he had still to learn, how hard Harada-san made him work and how he had no time to make new friends.

- But I think you've made a new friend. – Protested Sho.

He was looking him in the eyes and Aiba-san stepped backwards and stumbled, almost falling on his bottom. Sho tried to catch him but he almost fell as well. They both started laughing loud, the flowers reacting to the sound with imperceptible cheers.

- Why don't we go out to dinner tonight? – Sho said when they recovered and were walking outside. – There are other excellent places to eat besides Harada-san farm, you know?

Masaki was tired and confused. He wanted to go back to his room in the farm and check the annotations and the dossier from the lecture but he also wanted to have a little bit of fun. So he accepted the invitation.

They met at 7 in the evening at the botanical garden gate. Masaki had changed clothes and was dressed in something more appropriate for the occasion. Sho wore his white shirt and navy suit combination from the morning. Masaki informed him that Harada-san was going to forbid him for even entering the farm if Masaki came late to work the next day.

- She thinks you're going to get me drunk or something.

Sho was very amused.

- She won't ever do that to me. I'm her best customer.

They went to a sushi place, stuffed themselves, drank copious amounts of beer and then went for a walk before heading to their respective homes. Masaki felt relieved and disappointed at the same time. Sho had introduced him to some of his friends but Ninomiya Sensei wasn't there. He wanted to know if he really was Sho's boyfriend in order to tell Harada-san all about it.

The Summer air was soothing and the night was clear. The stars were shining but the moon was showing his dark side to the world. Masaki breathed in noisily.

- This is so different from Tokyo. So peaceful. I could stay here for years.

Sho's eyes were examining his face, the little details, the switch in expressions.

- Nothing is stopping you. There's no lack of work for a cook or a veterinary here.

- I'm not the type to settle down. I like to run free. – He said nonchalantly.

Those words hit Sho hard but he preferred not to analyse the feeling.

- Isn't Summer the best season of the year? – Masaki asked to the sky and then he looked back at Sho:

- Will you show me the himawari fields one of these days?

Sho simply nodded, putting the sour sensation in his stomach aside.

They said goodbye and took separate taxis. Sho to his big house in the inner town and Masaki to the fields and the farm.

Sho looked outside the window of the car up to the sparkling stars in the sky. He smiled, the starry night was so much like the sea.

Masaki got out of the vehicle and looked up at the sky before stepping inside the house.

There, no buildings, no towers, no high-rises, no bridges, no factory chimneys framed, constricted the stars.

## Chapter 5

Sho was crying. He was sitting on his bed after taking a bath and the tears started flowing for no reason. He chalked it up to the amount of beer and the bit of sake he had drunk during the dinner. It had been a nice evening, Masaki was an excellent and smart conversationalist: funny, clever, charming, fearless. He was handsome too. Sho had noticed how men and women alike gazed at him in appreciation. Why was he feeling down all of a sudden?

He finally wiped his face and laid himself down. Masaki's words resonating in his head: "Will you show me the himawari fields."

He fell asleep with the image of a joyful young man dancing amongst the round yellow flowers.

It was a windy morning, Sho was in love with the wind. It was bringing menacing clouds and making the trees and plants of the botanical garden sing and dance. He was waiting for a group of school kids that wanted a guided tour. The weather wasn't exactly the right one for this kind of event but they would have fun either way. The kids loved the visit, they were especially enchanted by the clovers, the yuzu trees and the big number of tiny bonsais across the garden. Some of them protested because they expected to see sunflowers, but both the teacher and Sakurai-san told them there was a huge meadow not very far from there that they could go to any day.

At midday, Sho received a phone call from Ninomiya Sensei asking him if he wanted to go to the farm for lunch or to another place. Sho's first instinct was to say 'another place' but why wouldn't he want to go to the farm as usual? Why wouldn't he want to see Masaki again? They drove there in Ninomiya's car while he told Sho all about his long shifts at the hospital and how glad he was that he had the day off.

When they arrived and had parked the car, Harada-san was waiting at the entrance. She pointed a finger at Sho:

- You're banned from this property.

Sho laughed:

- What? He didn't come late, did he?

- He's in bed, sick. He's been puking since last night.

Sho got worried.

- But we didn't drink that much.

Ninomiya Sensei chimed in:

- Are you talking about your new chef? He has probably caught a gastrointestinal virus. May I check him up?

Harada-san frowned but allowed them both to come in and accompanied the doctor to Masaki's room.

The young man was washing his face and was about to drink a bit of water when the door opened. He felt shame rushing up to his cheeks when he saw Sho and Ninomiya Sensei.

- I'm sorry to bother you all – He apologised.

As the doctor predicted, it was a simple virus. He ordered him to rest, to drink plenty of liquids and to fast during that day. Afterwards, he left with Harada-san who had announced she would give them free food in payment. Sho stayed in the room for a while.

- I feel responsible. – He said.

Masaki giggled:

- But you did nothing wrong! Besides, I really feel better now.

Sho stared at him.

- Get well soon because we'll go to the himawari field on Sunday.

Masaki cheered, Sho smiled, the rain started to tap on the room's window.

## Chapter 6

He woke up feeling great. The advice Ninomiya Sensei had given him had worked and, on Sunday, he was again on full form. He had a date with Sho, he promised he was going to take him to the himawari fields and the day had come. He felt really happy. He had worked hard during the rest of the week to appease Harada-san so she would allow him that day off. He was content, hopeful and he didn't know why.

Sho opened his eyes to the light of the morning. He had slept so well, knowing that Masaki's illness was transitory. He got up of bed and looked outside the window of his room. The sun in the sky was announcing a warm day, his heart filled with something he couldn't quite put his finger on. He had a date with Masaki and he was getting nervous.

Sho went to the farm directly from his house. Had breakfast there while waiting for Masaki. At the appointed hour, Masaki rushed to his table. He was wearing baggy, comfortable clothes and his brown hair was messy. Sho couldn't contain a big smile. Masaki was simply beautiful. After promising Harada-san nothing would happen and that they would return safe and sound, they picked a couple of bikes and proceeded towards the meadows.

As they were cycling closer to the fields, Fujiyama was getting larger, like a giant jizo ready to bless them. The huge yellow patch becoming clearer, as if an invisible artist was painting flowers in a big canvas.

- What a wonderful Summer day! – exclaimed Masaki when they arrived. He dismounted from the bike and walked inside the field. Some of the sunflowers were almost as tall as him. Sho was standing not far from him, observing the contrast of Masaki's white shirt against the yellows, the oranges and the blues. Masaki laid on the ground and closed his eyes.

- Thank you for this. – He whispered .

Sho sat down next to him. He was mesmerised by the beauty of it all.

- Can we live here forever? – Asked Masaki without opening his eyes.

Sho hand moved trying to reach a strand of brown hair that was sticking out too much, but stopped when Sho realised what he was doing.

- Tanabata is next week. – he said.

Masaki replied with a sound. Sho stood up and scrutinised their surroundings with his gaze.

- You should come to watch the fireworks. We do the tanzaku hanging on the bamboos at the botanical garden.

- Good idea.

He was still closed-eyed and immersed in his own thoughts. The morning was going to get hotter when the sun would climb to the top of the firmament.

- We should go back to the farm and return in the afternoon. – Sho announced.

Masaki opened his eyes then.

- Why? It's fine now and I'm okay. Don't worry.

- The white cap on the Fujisan turns red when the sun sets. It's a gorgeous image.

Masaki laughed and sat up crossing his legs on the ground.

- You're a romantic!

Sho blushed and Masaki immediately realised what he had said.

- I mean...I didn't thought you would notice these things. You're a scientist after all.

- Oi! – Sho smiled and tried to shake the awkwardness off. He was starting to believe that date was a very bad idea.

Masaki stood up and apologised.

- You must think I'm an idiot. I'm sure you wanted to hang out with your friends rather than with me on your day off.

Sho couldn't answer. His head was spinning. What the hell was happening? Everything was so perfect and, then, something had to spoil it.

- Don't be silly, Aiba-san.

- I have to learn to shut my mouth. Let's go back, it'll be better.

Masaki was stepping away from him. Sho couldn't let that happen, couldn't let an stupid occurrence to ruin such a great moment. He grabbed him by the wrist.

Masaki was going to protest so Sho tugged at him. The younger man ended up against his body, chest to chest, lips too close. So close Sho couldn't help to press his to that beautifully sculpted mouth. Masaki didn't resist, he leant into the kiss and even dared to caress Sho's cheek with the tip of his fingers. The heat of the sun melting their brains, the soft wind speeding their hearts. Masaki broke the kiss first:

Sho couldn't contain the words coming out of him:

- I love you.

Masaki panicked, shook his head vigourously.

- I don't.....I don't do love.

Like one of those rapid dragonflies, he fled from the fields. Sho remained there for a couple of hours, listening to the gentle song of the wind, watching the himawari dances, trying to calm his heart and to mend his head.

## Chapter 7

Masaki put his foot on the ground and stopped the pedalling. He was getting far from the meadows and feared he was going to get lost. Why? Why? Why? His brain was repeating that question over and over again. Sho and him were friends, Sho had helped him to adapt to his new life in the country, why did he kiss him? Why was the taste of Sho lips still lingering in his mouth? Why was he feeling sick again? He was an adult man, he had had a few affairs but love never was an option. Love just complicated things, love was a chain that tied one's freedom up. He was free, he was adventurous, he didn't need love. And why was he thinking about love now? He felt gratitude towards Sakurai-san, this is what it was, nothing more. He was good-looking and intelligent but so was Ninomiya Sensei. Plus, wasn't the doctor Sakurai's boyfriend?

After a while, Masaki noticed the heat and that he was sweating profusely. He needed to find shelter or he was going to get a heat stroke.

He bicycled back to the farm hoping Sho wasn't there. Harada-san screamed at him to get a shower when she saw him inside.

- Where's Sakurai-san? – She asked.

Masaki didn't reply just went straight to his room.

- Did you lose him? – she shouted.

- You city folks are weird. – she shrugged and went outside.

Once at the entrance, she saw Sakurai walking towards her. He looked like an apparition.

- Did you die in the fields? Right now, you are the picture of a yurei.

- Sort of – mumbled Sho. He took a breath and continued – There was a misunderstanding between Aiba-san and myself. Just tell him I won't bother him anymore.

Sho paused and smiled faintly. Harada-san started to get worried.

- I won't bother you either. I'll be eating at the restaurants in the town from now on.

The elder woman raised her eyebrows.

- Is that boy my daughter sent here such a nuisance? I'm going to have to keep him busy with the animals if he is chasing my customers away.

Sho shook his head nervously.

- It's not his fault. He's a good cook and a nice guy.....

He couldn't say more and excused himself with the promise to come back one day in the near future.

Sho called Ninomiya-san to come pick him up if he was off. Harada-san overheard the conversation.

- You better marry that doctor, Sakurai. – She murmured before going back inside to berate the city boy.

Ninomiya Sensei was driving the car while grinning in amusement. He was off duty and had come to pick Sho up, they decided to go for sushi that day.

- So what happened with your little excursion? Did you get sunburnt or something?

- I don't want to talk about it.

Sho had remained silent for a while, looking through the car window and pouting. Ninomiya

laughed.

- Don't tell me! Nah...I've known you for a long time, Sho. I think I know what's going on. You looked like this when Satoshi....

- Don't! – he pointed a finger at the doctor – Mind your own business.

Ninomiya laughed again.

- Well, he's a cute guy. I don't blame you.

- Stop it, please

Sho fidgeted. He had been such an idiot. What on Earth had made him think he had any possibility with the 'I'm free' Masaki boy? Why was his heart breaking in pieces if he barely knew the man? He was an adult, he should behave like one. But it was Summer and those eyes were filled with joy and wonder, the himawari looked beautiful, that brown hair smelled of coconut and that smile was mesmerising. The wind was telling him to kiss him, the sun was pushing him towards him, the flowers were celebrating.

- Am I a romantic? – He asked to no one in particular.

- Well, you like flowers too much so I think so.

There wasn't any mocking in Ninomiya's tone. He was speaking sincerely.

- Flowers are meant to be with others, but some prefer to grow alone. – He said.

- Those are called solitary flowers in botanical speak. – Responded Sho. – And it seems I tend to get fond of them. Like Himawari-kun at the Botanic Institute.

The doctor parked the car and they walked to the sushi place. The gentle buzzing of the insects was creating a pleasant symphony and Sho could inhale the perfumes of the diverse vegetation.

- Have you ever wondered why Himawari-kun chose the Botanical Institute?

The question took Sho by surprise. They were still in the street walking towards the restaurant. He didn't answer. He had wondered about it many times but couldn't find a reason. Himawari-kun didn't need anyone taking care of him, he didn't need other sunflowers by his side, maybe he chose the institute because he needed him. Sho chuckled at his own thoughts. He was a damn fool romantic indeed.



## Chapter 8

It was red. And pink. And some orange brush-strokes. The whole sky was painted in those colours as the sun seemed to be swallowed by the huge mouth of the volcano. Masaki was sitting amongst the sunflowers, watching the sunset over Fujisan. Just like Sho had told him that morning, he had returned to the field to observe such a wonder. It left him breathless, awed: beauty like this couldn't be found in the city. But he was feeling lacking, empty. He was missing something. The air was warm, the crickets played their rhythmic melodies, nothing but peace surrounded him, but he didn't feel at ease. Sho should have been there by his side, his voice narrating the events, depicting every little nuance of the gorgeous sunset. But Sho was mad at him and Sho had abandoned him. He was probably sleeping in Ninomiya's arms right now. Harada-san had scolded him for scaring Sakurai-san off, she told him Sakurai wasn't coming back. Why was he worrying about it now? He could make friends easily, he didn't need Sho for that. Then, he remembered that he mentioned the Tanabata celebrations at the botanical garden. That would be the right time and place to meet new people. Masaki suddenly got excited. Sakurai-san wasn't returning to the restaurant but nobody had forbidden him from visiting the garden.

Next day, he couldn't keep from watching the customers while working in the kitchen. A friend of Harada-san had brought Japanese yam from the mountains and they were cooking it.

- Where can I find a nice yukata? – He asked.

Harada-san looked him up and down and remained silent.

- I want to go to the Tanabata festivities.

- You're too tall to wear my son's.

The old lady exasperated him but he really liked her. She was exactly like Michiko had told him.

- I don't need to borrow one, I want to buy it.

- Go and ask Sakurai-san...oh but I forgot, he isn't coming today. Nor tomorrow. Nor....

- Okay, okay. I got it. That was a low blow, though.

He was smiling despite those words hurting. He was determined to mend things with Sakurai-san.

Harada-san finally informed him about a small shop in town where they sold well made, pretty yukatas.

- But you have to finish your work before heading to town. – She added. – Lazy heads are not welcome in my house.

The shop was indeed small. It was cozy and smelled of lavender. A lovely bespectacled man assisted him in everything he needed. He returned to the farm with a big smile on his face and completely satisfied. Back in his room, Masaki dressed with the yukata and the zori to show Harada-san. She stood in the then empty restaurant hall looking at him with a mixture of pride and emotion in her eyes.

- You look as good as Kami-sama himself. And I'm speaking honestly.

She hugged him which completely surprised him.

- I was going to get a simple black yukata but then I spotted this one and I thought it'd be perfect.

Harada-san took his big hand in her tiny ones.

- It is indeed perfect. The himawari pattern gives it a beautiful touch.

- I'll pick my phone and you take a picture to send it to Michiko. – He told her.

The old lady frowned.

- You haven't learnt anything. This isn't for her. This is only for him.

She walked off leaving a confused Aiba in the hall.

- What do you mean?

He shrugged it off and went back to his room. He didn't understand that woman and wasn't planning to.

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Notes

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

SMAP' Summer Gate was playing on Masaki's phone and he was humming along to it while walking towards the botanical garden. It wasn't a long distance from the farm and he had decided to enjoy that Summer morning. He was wearing the yukata and sneakers, he'd change to zori at the Garden. He was carrying his tanzaku in a pouch. He never wrote serious wishes just funny ones, although he feared the kami would think he was mocking the celebration and would punish him.

The Garden looked lovely. There were colours everywhere from the flowers, the origami, the streamers, the lamps. Masaki smiled when seeing the people gathering there. Children running around, eating candy, adults drinking while talking with friends. It was the perfect picture of happiness. A guy was crouched down in front of a group of kids explaining to them that Hikoboshi and Orihime were in reality the stars Vega and Altair which were visible on the firmament during those days. Masaki snickered, catching the attention of the guy.

- Is there a problem? – He said. His voice didn't sound menacing at all and he had a really friendly face Masaki liked instantly.

- None. But they're kids and the story of the star lovers is a beautiful one.

The guy got up and faced Masaki:

- Science is also beautiful.

The kids were watching them attentively.

- I know, but let imagination rule the world for one day!

- Let me guess, you're an artist. – Said the guy.

- Not exactly. I'm a cook. And I'm also a scientist as I'm a veterinary who's now doing other things.

The guy grinned.

- My name is Kazama Shunsuke. I come from the Yamanashi Science Museum.

- Aiba Masaki desu.

They both bowed and the kids applauded. After saying goodbye to the children, they went for a walk. Masaki told Kazama his story and how he had landed there and was now working at the farm. Kazama told him he was visiting his parents and enjoying the Tanabata festivities. They walked past Ninomiya Sensei accompanied by an attractive, elegantly dressed, taller man.

- I'm glad to see you here. – The doctor said. – I haven't seen Sho-san yet.

Masaki was caught off guard by the mention of Sho. He wasn't even thinking about him.

After the proper presentations, Ninomiya added:

- Nice yukata, Sho will love it.

Silence seemed to suddenly wrap it all. Masaki could see Kazama and the doctor talking, could see people around him laughing and cheering, could see Ninomiya's friend speaking to him but couldn't hear anything. What was that comment about? Why wasn't Ninomiya Sensei with his boyfriend? Why was he caring about Sho again?

- Takashina Sensei and myself have to leave, we have a long shift at the hospital today. We just came to see the atmosphere.

Those words infiltrated in his mind and woke him up from the reverie.

- Tell hi to Sho-san if you see him.

Masaki frowned and couldn't help but retort:

- Why?

The air turned thick and uncomfortable. Ninomiya was sneering at him.

- Because you're here.

Masaki's mouth spoke before thinking:

- But you're his....I mean...you and him...

Ninomiya started to laugh out loud while clapping his hands. When he could compose himself, he told to the other doctor:

- I can't wait for Sho to know about this!

They said goodbye to the two confused men and left.

Aiba and Kazama continued their walk, hung their tanzaku on the bamboo trees, ate, drank and spent the whole day together. They mixed with acquaintances and old Kazama friends, enjoying themselves thoroughly. No sight of Sho anywhere, which relieved Masaki. Although he couldn't stop thinking about Ninomiya's words. He was starting to dislike the pretty doctor.

It was late afternoon, the light of the sun was dimming and the people were heading to the town in order to watch the fireworks. It had been a long day but Sho wasn't tired. He felt sort of relieved. He had met with friends, enjoyed himself plenty and was now drinking a cold beer while gazing at the sky. He picked a piece of green cardboard and wrote on it: 'may Himawari-kun awake from his spell and become a prince'. Then, he hanged it on one of the trees. He finished the beer and stepped away from the adorned bamboos when he saw a figure approaching him. He was tall, had brown hair and was wearing a black yukata. The feeble rays of the sun projected its luminescence towards that figure. The yellow pattern on his Summer kimono drawing a sunflower. Sho felt dizzy, his Himawari-kun had actually turned into a prince, a flesh and blood human being. He then realised that figure was none other than Masaki. He tried to hide from the other man's view but couldn't move. He was so fricking beautiful and ethereal Sho had difficulties to breath.

Masaki stopped the moment he spotted Sho, he thought about turning around and go back from where he had come but that would have been rude.

- I...I wasn't looking for you. I was told I could get something to drink here for me and my friend.

Sho swallowed back the tears that were forming in his eyes.

- There's beer there. – Sho pointed at it and looked away from Masaki. He couldn't bear his presence.

Masaki stepped closer to him.

- The Tanabata festivities were great. Thank you for telling me about it.

Sho prayed he didn't stay longer, that he grabbed the drinks and left.

- I'm sorry if I hurt you. – He said after a long pause. – I understand I'm not worthy....

- I can't help this, you know? I wish I could – He put his hand over his chest where his heart was beating fast.

- I can't help it either. – Was Masaki's answer.

The taller man was about to walk away when something took a hold of him, something soft, sweet but powerful. He stepped even closer to Sho and cupped his face between his hands.

- If we allow this, you're going to end up hating me. – He whispered.

The night was nearing above them. Orihime and Hikoboshi were finally going to embrace.

- Never. I could never hate you. – Sho whispered back at him.

They kissed softly and hugged tightly, neither of them wanting to let go. Masaki took a decision that precise moment. He was going to make love to Sho that night and he was going to go back to Tokyo as soon as he could get a train ticket. He'd excuse himself to Harada-san and would tell Michiko it didn't work with her mother.

## Chapter End Notes

It's going to end well, I promise.

## Chapter 10

Masaki was engulfed by warmth. The warmth of the Summer night, the warmth of Sho's arms around him, the warmth of the sensations after sex. They had made love until early in the morning. Caressed, kissed, rubbed, touched, licked, until extasis. Masaki had had one night stands before but this time it felt different. He didn't want to but he had to admit it was more passionate, more Earth-shattering than ever. Sho moaning, his own body aflame, his soul being consumed by something other than lust, Sho's words resonating in the room "I'm so in love with you". He devoured his mouth to prevent him from talking anymore.

The botanist was peacefully sleeping now while he couldn't even shut his eyes. Masaki disentangled himself from Sho's body, went to the bathroom and put the yukata back on. The lights of the new day were reaching out to them through the big windows in Sho's bedroom. Masaki kissed Sho lips once more, softly but longer than he intended. He left the room and then the house without making any noise, like a skilled cat.

He had to go back to the farm but he roamed the town streets as if he was a lost soul. He didn't want to go back to Tokyo, he wanted to stay there forever and work in the country and spend more time with his new friends and love Sho until they both were grey and old. But all that was against his nature and one can't fight against oneself. Dawn was casting its red colours over the building of the Botanic Institute of Research. Masaki wondered about the big himawari there and felt like visiting it but obviously the building was still closed. He wanted to say goodbye to it before returning to Tokyo but that meant seeing Sho again and he really didn't want that.

- You have it good. – He spoke to the building hoping his voice would reach the sunflower inside. – You're free and you have him to take care of you.

Masaki continued walking until he finally picked his phone and called a taxi. The car brought him to the station that was already buzzing with the early trains and the first travellers. He got a ticket for a Tokyo bound train that departed in two days. He had to first settle things with Harada-san and the rest.

Sho opened his eyes slowly. The sun was already up and dancing in the sky. The bed was empty, his room was empty and he felt empty. He knew Masaki would leave, he didn't hope for anything else. The sheets smelled of him, his skin was still reeling from the touch of Masaki's hands and he would cherish that night forever but the disappointment was a sour taste in his mouth.

- Himawari-kun didn't become a prince after all. – He said.

Something inside of him was telling him to fight, to go and get what he needed but he was quite realistic and knew all that was in vain. Masaki hadn't promised him eternal love. In

fact, he hadn't promised him anything but a night of pleasure. He definitely wasn't coming back to the restaurant at the farm for a long time. Seeing Masaki would only hurt him more.

Sho closed his eyes again although he didn't want to get asleep and go late to work. He remembered everything from that night: the spiciness of Masaki's caresses, those lips like ripe fruits, the honey of his voice, the way that voice cracked when he told him "I need you so much".

Sho opened his eyes startled and got up of the bed almost in a jump. That hadn't been a dream, that wasn't a product of his foggy mind, Masaki had actually said those words to him. Which meant that maybe he really had something to fight for. At that moment, his phone rang, Sho answered it, it was Ninomiya.

- You won't believe what happened yesterday at the festival. – The doctor told him.
- You won't believe what happened to me either. – Replied the botanist.

## Chapter 11

Sho couldn't stop laughing. The patrons at the bar were glancing at him but he didn't care. He had met with Ninomiya at a place near the hospital to have breakfast and to chat. The doctor had told him about the misunderstanding the previous day during the festivities.

- I swear – added Ninomiya – He really thought you and I were dating.

Sho kept laughing. The doctor was his childhood friend, almost like a brother to him. It was so surreal.

- Which makes me realise he's as gone for you as you are for him. – He sipped on his glass of minted ice tea.

Sho wiped the tears in his eyes and got quieter.

- We had sex last night. – He said nonchalantly. Ninomiya raised his eyebrows.

- But I feel like I'm hitting a brick wall. I know how he feels, he showed me how he feels, but he doesn't know or doesn't want to know.

- Why did you let Satoshi go?

The question took him by surprise. He pondered for a while and, then, replied:

- He wasn't made for this. He belongs to the sea. I guess he wasn't made for me.

Ninomiya nodded in agreement.

- I'm going to fight, Kazu, I promise, but it might not work.

The doctor smiled:

- There are plenty of flowers in the Garden but there is only one you can't forget. Only one that is constantly with you. It came out of nowhere and stayed close to you until now.

- I'm such a coward! – Masaki screamed startling some birds.

He was in the middle of the himawari fields. He had hired a bike and cycled up there. He hadn't returned to the farm yet and was being late for work. Harada-san had sent him a menacing text but he wasn't ready to face her. A soft wind blew between the flowers making them sway, their round and bright corollas observing him knowingly. He looked up in the direction of the Fujiyama and smiled:

- But I could live here forever. Sometimes adventure is pausing. But I don't want to break his heart.

He remembered the way those lips and skin tasted, remembered how fast his own heart was beating. He felt trapped, like Himawari-kun behind that ancient wall. He swallowed and mounted the bike to go back to the farm.

Harada-san and her son were making bread when he arrived. The woman threw a stern look at him and told him:

- I think I remember clearly that I once told you I don't want lazy heads in my house.

Her voice was calm which made it more frightening.

- I'm leaving on a train the day after tomorrow. – He blurted out.

Both Harada-san and her son stopped what they were doing and looked at him.

- Leaving? Where? – She asked.

- Back to Tokyo. – Masaki lowered his head. He wasn't able to meet her eyes.



- So you already got bored of your adventure in the country?
- Sumimasen, Harada-san, I know I'm disappointing you and Michiko but I can't stay here anymore.

She approached him and pointed a finger at him:

- Do whatever you please but don't think you're going to live in my house during these two last days without working. Change your clothes and go clean the animals.

Masaki nodded and proceeded to do as ordered.

- You're still here, huh? – Sho spoke to the big himawari inside the Botanic Institute. He touched it with his fingertips and closed his eyes. He could feel Masaki's body in his arms, their hearts beating together, the silk-like touch of Masaki's hair over his skin. He snorted, he had a lecture that morning, that wasn't the right time to get hot and bothered. He walked out of the secluded field into the building. His phone beeped. It was a message from Harada-san which worried him a bit. She didn't usually text him when he was working. So he checked it.

“Aiba-san is returning to Tokyo the day after tomorrow. Do something about it or you'll be the biggest idiot in the whole of Yamanashi. I know he was with you last night. He smelled of your perfume. You have expensive tastes and I always remember that.”

Sho choked. He was embarrassed that Harada-san had noticed something like that and, at the same time, felt a mixture of sadness and rage. He thought about cancelling the lecture but he was a professional above all.

Suddenly, a strong gust of wind washed over the back of the building. The glasses in the windows rattled while some strange sensation pierced through Sho's insides. He turned his head towards the back field in an impulse. Himawari-kun's trunk was broken in the middle, its corolla falling to the ground. Sho ran to it and picked it with trembling hands.

- No, no, no, you can't leave me like this! – He told it desperately.

He delicately put it back up while thinking how to repair it. But he didn't have time: his students were waiting, Masaki was waiting. Another strong wind gust positioned the flower upright. Sho left it like that and walked quickly to his class. Once there, he excused himself. He told the students something unexpected had happened and he needed to mend some things. He left the building with the same force of the wind that was bringing heavy rain to the region.

## Chapter 12

The horse moved its head in appreciation while Masaki absentmindedly brushed its mane. His head was faraway. He was thinking of fleeing from Tokyo once he arrived there. Up north perhaps, to Hokkaido. He'd find something to do there. He wouldn't have to explain anything to Michiko or anyone. He'd make himself disappear.

- I'm such a coward. – He whispered.

Shironeko was by his side, watching him with big amber eyes. Raindrops were splattering outside, thunder drumming over the mountains. Masaki didn't want to leave.

A wet and flustered Sho appeared at the entrance of the stable. He was just as beautiful as that first time he saw him and believed he was a kami manifesting himself.

- Harada-san told me you were here.

Masaki didn't reply, he kept brushing the horse.

- Himawari-kun is broken.

Masaki closed his eyes and stopped what he was doing.

- He couldn't endure the strong wind. He cracked and fell. I'm not sure I can fix him.

Masaki finally looked at Sho. There was pain in those hazel eyes.

- What do you want me to do? – He asked.

- I don't want to lose you. I'll go wherever it is you're going. I don't care for anything else.

Masaki threw the brush to the ground and stormed out of the stable. Sho ran after him. They reached the bamboo trees near the road to the sunflower field. Rain was falling on them but they didn't seem to mind.

- You don't understand! – shouted Masaki.

Sho held him.

- We're made to be together.

Masaki pushed at him and disentangled himself from the other man's arms.

- This shouldn't have happened! I came here to be free! I came here to start something new! I shouldn't have fallen in love with you!

Sho smiled. Small raindrops running down his cheeks and filling his mouth.

- But that won't change even if you go to the end of the world. You love me and I love you. That's the only truth.

He held Masaki again.

- We have so much to tell each other. Just let me try it with you.

Masaki caressed Sho's wet black hair. He was so afraid he was trembling in those arms. Sho noticed it and said:

- We better go back inside, you're getting cold.

Then Masaki kissed him passionately. He didn't want to let go of Sho, of the himawari fields, of the farm, of Harada-san, of his new friends, of Yamanashi. He wanted to plant his roots there and blossom.

The solitary sunflower was laying on the ground at the secluded field inside the building of the Botanic Institute of Research. A pool of water, some leaves and petals from other plants creating a death bed for it. One of the professors of the institute saw it and shook her head thinking about the sadness that would feel that botanist so fond of it.

Sho and Masaki were inside the stable again. Masaki insisted on finishing his work despite the protests of Sho who told him he was sure Harada-san would spare him this time.

- He's dead. - Said Masaki suddenly – Himawari-kun is dead. It's impossible he has survived this storm if he was already broken by the wind.

Sho looked outside. The rain was diminishing, the clouds were running away. He knew Masaki was right but he didn't care. You have to lose some things to win others. That's life. He took Masaki's hand. Himawari-kun was there with him.

## Chapter 13

Masaki was on his knees crying. The vision of Himawari-kun like a still-life painting had broken his heart. He knew he was dead, but actually witnessing it was too much for him. Besides, he was feeling something inside of him was dying too. Sho was by his side, he felt sad but knew that was inevitable and that it would bring new things into his life. Like some sort of good omen.

They ran to the Botanical Institute as soon as the storm ended. Harada-san seemed happy to see them together but threatened to send them to the top of Fujisan if they didn't return soon. Masaki picked the flower, looked at Sho and both knew what they had to do. The scholars and lecturers at the institute were also a bit affected, everyone there had gotten fond of the huge, intrepid sunflower. The pair left in a taxi.

The sunflowers at the field were quiet, unmoving, silent. Sun was shining again, the insects buzzing, life continuing. Masaki deposited Himawari-kun on the soil, among the rest of them. An earthworm crawled through the mud to get to him.

- He was a solitary flower but he won't be anymore. – He said.

- Like yourself. – Added Sho.

Masaki stared at him. Sho felt uneasy, as if he was going to disappear from there any minute.

- I'll be with you, no matter where you go. – He repeated.

- I'm not going anywhere.

Sho caressed Masaki's cheek, still wet from the rain and the tears.

- You belong here.

Masaki shook his head.

- I belong with you.

The blue sky was announcing another hot afternoon. Summer was still alive. The sunflowers watched the couple kiss and embrace. Everything was in place again.

Masaki promised Sho he was going to try and remain settled. Sho told him that if he ever decided to run away to be free, he was going to run behind him like a shadow.

They went back to the farm to inform Harada-san that Masaki was moving out. He was going to live with Sho. The woman couldn't contain her joy but smacked them both.

- I'm glad you both have figured things out. You have made me suffer and you're not even my sons.

She pointed at Sho:

- You have enough space in that huge house of yours for you to share it with this idiot.

Then she pointed the same finger at Masaki:

- You come late to work or don't come and I'll...

- Never! – The young man interrupted her. – It's going to be a long association with you, Harada-san.

She smiled and winked at them:

- You know? Ninomiya Sensei and Takashina Sensei could use that train ticket for a vacation. With that, she returned to the kitchen.

That night, Sho and Masaki made love in the secluded backyard of the Botanical Institute of Research, under the moon and the stars, and in front of the flowers and plants that randomly grew there. Afterwards, they lay there for a while, watching the stars and feeling dizzy with the fragrances of the vegetation. Sho laughed at how unprofessional it all was but he didn't care, he was happy. His Tanabata wish had come true.

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.....

The wind, Aiba-san loved the wind. It whispered to him, it intertwined itself between his fingers, it caressed his hair and made him feel free. He loved it when it ran through the himawari fields because the big flowers danced to its rhythm. He loved to walk across the yellow paths, to lay on the ground by his lover and acknowledge the real meaning of freedom.

Another Summer had come, the Harada farm was busier than ever and he was at peace. He was becoming a good chef after all. Michiko had visited, Kazama-kun was staying at their house for a week. The doctors had gone to Tojo University in the big city for a degree and were returning that day. Masaki was planning something especial for them. Sho asked for permission to Harada-san and the woman allowed him into the kitchen. Masaki was preparing soba while thinking what to cook to celebrate Ninomiya and Takashina's return. Sho kissed him on the cheek.

- There's a himawari bud on the same spot in the building where Himawari-kun grew. I discovered it this morning while showing the plants to a group of students.

Masaki smiled:

- He's just like me. He can't live without you either.

FIN.

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