

**hard times, baby ;)**

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# hard times, baby ;)

by [la\\_dissonance](#)

## Summary

"My knee's feeling much better now," Sarawat says. "I can run drills as well as anyone else. You know what I can't do, though..."

Not this again. Tine claps his hands over his ears. "I don't want to hear it!"

Sarawat's eyes go all big and innocent. "Hear what?"

(AU starting at episode 9 where Sarawat's wrist was hurt worse than his knee and he keeps asking Tine for a ~hand)

## Notes

There was one throwaway line in episode 9 about Sarawat also hurting his wrist and my brain just seized upon that and went absolutely feral. Enjoy...all this! I did the tiniest possible amount of research and tried to keep things vague for the rest of it, but if anything is grossly off about Thai university culture or Thai culture in general I apologize. Scrubb is a real band but the EP is a completely imaginary plot device.

The title is adapted from Hard Times by Empires. My wonderful & excellent beta alpheratz told me not to do the ;) face but it's nearly midnight and I'm punchy af so it's staying.

ETA: Now available in Japanese! Thanks to Azusa\_s for the translation, see end notes for link.

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

Tine wakes in a hospital bed, disoriented. Hadn't he just been cheerleading? There was a game, an *important* game. Instead, he's in a big echoing hospital room, Fong on one side of his bed and Sarawat asleep in a chair on the other side, his arm in a sling and his knee wrapped in an ace bandage.

Fong catches him up pretty quickly.

When Tine hears that Political Science won 1-0, a rushing starts up in his ears, because it wasn't supposed to happen like this. He wasn't supposed to hear about the win alone, who knows how long after the fact; he was supposed to watch Sarawat from the sidelines and then if, *if* Political Science won, he would have known about it right then and there. He would have been able to jump on Sarawat when he ran off the field, and maybe, in that alternate universe, he would have had something to say to him.

Tine doesn't know what he would have said. The bet is so vague: *a love confession*, but what is that, in concrete terms? If he'd been there, it would have come to him in the heat of the moment, surely. But like this, he's not ready, and he has no idea what he would say. He puts Fong off with a weak joke, and is happy that at least Sarawat isn't awake to hear it. He has some time to think about it, still.

There are tests to sit through before the staff is ready to let Tine leave. Sarawat sits with him, chatting happily, and luckily doesn't bring up the win. Tine decides to count that as a reprieve of sorts. If Sarawat isn't going to mention it, Tine won't either.

When they get out of the hospital at long last, Tine walks Sarawat back to his dorm. It seems like it's only fair: Sarawat was already all patched up and could have left hours ago if he hadn't been waiting for Tine to wake up. And it's not like he can carry all his stuff with his arm in a sling like that. And he's limping a little, he probably shouldn't be carrying anything. Someone has to help him.

Sarawat laughs and jokes the whole way back to his dorm, as if he hadn't just taken a nasty fall in the middle of a game and nearly broken his arm. Tine had seen that foul before he'd gone down himself. It's sheer luck that Sarawat's knee is only bruised; the player from the Architecture faculty had looked determined to make sure Sarawat would never play again.

"Thanks for carrying my stuff back for me," Sarawat says when they reach his room and Tine drops his bag near the couch. That teasing smile is still playing around his lips, making it hard for Tine not to smile back. "So helpful, Tine. You know what *else* I could use help with, while you're in a generous mood..."

His eyes flick down to his arm, immobilized in the brace from fingertips to elbow and held tight to his chest in the sling, then up to Tine's face. He smirks like there's some secret meaning Tine was supposed to have picked up from that.

Tine blinks. "Uh?"

Sarawat's smirk deepens. "Can I call you if I *need a hand*?"

It should be an innocent phrase, but for some reason it gets under Tine's skin. Maybe it's the way Sarawat says it. He drops the warmup jacket he had been clutching and readjusts his own bag on his shoulders.

"I'll pick you up on my way to class tomorrow! Don't be late!" he babbles as he hurriedly backs out the door and fumbles it shut. How can Sarawat get to him so easily? One minute they had been laughing and joking around all easy, and the next minute he had flustered Tine so bad he couldn't even look at him.

Tine makes it more than halfway back to his own dorm, Sarawat's words repeating in his head, before the secret meaning catches up to him. Surely Sarawat couldn't have been implying—?

No, that would be too bold! Even for him.

He can't have possibly meant *that*.

Still, Tine can feel his face heating up. He can't have really meant what Tine is thinking, but now he's thinking about it anyway. *Helping*. Like....that. It should be too embarrassing to contemplate, but Tine can't steer his mind away.

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Because he promised, Tine walks Sarawat to school the next morning. He spends the whole walk to Sarawat's dorm from his own worrying over what excuse he could possibly give if Sarawat demands his confession now.

Through some stroke of luck, Sarawat gives every indication of having forgotten the bet entirely. He hands his bag to Tine and heads off in the direction of the school as if they do this every day. Tine swears Sarawat put extra books in his bag just because he knew Tine was going to be carrying it for him. It never looks this full when Sarawat carries it.

Now that he's tentatively safe from the love confession, Tine is braced for Sarawat to bring up the *help* remark again. Just seeing him in the sling makes Tine think of it, though he'd been doing a good job of blocking the remark and what he hopes is his grave misinterpretation of it from his mind so far. But Sarawat doesn't talk much on the walk, only making a few observations about his unsatisfactory breakfast and a brightly-colored car that passes them. Tine is suspicious.

His suspicions are borne out when Sarawat pauses in front of his faculty, tugging Tine's wrist so he has to pause with him.

"No kiss goodbye?" Sarawat pouts and ducks his head, making his eyes go all giant. It's really not fair at all.

"What!" Tine exclaims. They're not—they don't do that! Except for that one time—and that other time—but they don't do *this*, walk each other to class and then kiss goodbye like Sarawat is Tine's boyfriend or something.



Sarawat's pout deepens. "Just a little one?"

"Unbelievable," Tine gasps, pulling his hand away. "You can't stop, can you? Would you ask any of your other friends for a—for that?"

Sarawat's pout turns sad. It's amazing the range he can get out of this one expression. "I don't want any of my other friends to kiss me," he says, as if it should be very obvious.

"Fine then! Have one of them carry your things." It's hard to tell in the heat of the morning, but Tine thinks his face is probably going red again. It's impossible to be around Sarawat. He clears his throat. "People are staring," he grumbles, and takes off toward his faculty without looking back.

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Tine's resolve to let one of Sarawat's other friends help him, if he's going to be so weird about it, lasts all of two days. It lasts precisely until he sees Sarawat lugging his heavy bag of football gear toward the practice field, and then Tine's running after him and plucking the strap off his shoulder before he can think twice.

"You'll strain something," he offers by way of explanation, hoisting the bag onto his own shoulder.

Sarawat just shrugs, indifferent.

Tine has to jog a bit to keep up with Sarawat now that he's relieved him of his bag. "What are you doing carrying this around, anyway? You can't actually be going back to practice."

"My knee's feeling much better now," Sarawat says. "I can run drills as well as anyone else. You know what I *can't* do, though..."

Not this again. Tine claps his hands over his ears. "I don't want to hear it!"

Sarawat's eyes go all big and innocent. "Hear what?"

Tine cautiously lowers his hands, scowling. "You know what."

"What did you think I was going to say? All I was going to say is I can't play guitar right now."

"You were *not*," Tine says with a frustrated huff, and Sarawat just smiles the smug little smile of someone who knows they got the upper hand.

There's nothing Tine can do to stop Sarawat from going to practice, injury or not. If he trips and falls on his hurt wrist, he's just going to have to deal with it. Tine can at least make sure he doesn't get jumped after practice again, though.

"Promise you'll wait for me after practice is done," Tine says when they get to the field. He has cheerleading tonight, and there's no way to know which of them will finish first.

"I'll always wait for you," Sarawat says, suddenly serious, and just like that, Tine's heart is beating twice as fast for no reason.

"So corny. I just don't want those guys to beat you up again, okay? I'll walk you home."

The corner of Sarawat's mouth quirks up. "You just want an excuse to stay over."

Tine's heart feels like he just ran laps. "No, I don't," he says, to his terrible heart as much as to Sarawat. "I'm walking you to your door, then I'm going to my dorm. I just don't want you to get hurt worse. Promise you'll wait?"

Sarawat shakes his head, like Tine's the one being ridiculous here, but Tine just raises his eyebrows expectantly. Eventually Sarawat says, "Fine, I promise," and Tine hands over his football bag.

He hustles off the football field fast after that. Being here reminds him of the bet and his unfulfilled half of it. Maybe since Sarawat wasn't there to finish the game, it doesn't count? Tine hopes so.

In the end, none of that was even necessary. The seniors let them leave cheerleading practice early, and Tine has to sit on a bench watching Sarawat dribble a ball up and down the field for twenty minutes before he's done too. Sarawat smiles when he sees Tine there, and it does something funny and warm to his insides.

The walk back to Sarawat's dorm is uneventful, nothing lurking in the shadows to get them, and Sarawat doesn't even try to convince Tine to stay the night again until they're at his door. Tine manages to wriggle out of it, but he spends the whole walk back to his dorm thinking about the night none of his excuses had worked, and the way Sarawat had pressed him back into the couch, about his hot, wet mouth and the way his soft hair had tickled Tine's forehead.

The chances of anything like that happening again are pretty slim, Tine figures. Even if he wanted it to—which isn't to say he does!—but even *if*, it seems unlikely that circumstances will ever line up just right again.

And it's not like he can just go up to Sarawat in the middle of music club and say *how do you kiss someone until they drop, I think I need to be shown again*, so he's out of luck.

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The next few days fall into the same pattern. Sarawat seems to decide that no one other than Tine is qualified to help carry his stuff home at the end of the day. The week rolls around to music club's regular meeting, and Sarawat sits through the entire thing despite not being able to play a single note. Every time Tine glances over at him, slouched by the window, he makes the same expression, like a smirk but somehow soft, and Tine's heart gives the same little flutter.

Every time. It's exhausting. By the end of the meeting, Tine feels like he's had a far more torturous experience than Sarawat, who's obviously content to sit anywhere for any length of time. No one was forcing him to be there.

"You're buying me a drink," Tine declares, making a detour for the closest coffee shop. If he were alone, he'd go to the bigger, cheaper one close to his dorm, but Sarawat never seems to be short on money.

Sarawat smirks, like this is what he wanted all along, and not him paying Tine back for the most annoying two hours of his week. That curl in his lips, that teasing light in his eyes, it makes Tine want to—to—

As if Sarawat can read Tine's mind, he just smirks harder. Brighter? Deeper? His eyes are dark but his smug little smile is blinding, it makes it hard to think.

When they get to the coffee shop, Tine orders the most elaborate concoction on the menu. Sarawat only asks for an americano, which makes Tine embarrassed somehow, even though he *owes* Tine. Sarawat goes over to a pair of armchairs by a window and flops down in one after paying, forcing Tine to follow.

"I was going to get it to go," Tine says, reluctantly perching on the other chair.

"What's the rush? I don't have anything else to do today."

Tine scowls and mutters a protest under his breath. Like this, sitting across from Sarawat in a cafe after school, it's too close to a date. All the dates Tine has had have started like this, unless you count the failed date with Pear at the open house. For his part, Sarawat looks completely comfortable, so maybe he's unaware of the associations Tine's terrible brain is forming here.

Mercifully, their drinks come out quickly, and they spend a few moments quietly sipping their multi-layered frappé and espresso in water, respectively.

"How long do you have to have that brace on, anyway?" Tine asks, when it becomes apparent that it's up to Tine to start normal conversation if he doesn't want this whole definitely-not-a-date to be Sarawat staring at him from under his eyelashes. It makes his breath catch in his throat when Sarawat does that, which is just—really annoying.

"Four to six weeks," Sarawat says drily.

Tine does the math in his head and gapes. "That's nearly two months! What did you do, break every bone in there?"

"Nothing's broken, but something's torn pretty bad, I forget what they said it was. Anyway, it's already been two weeks—it might only be two more until I can take it off. And then..." Sarawat's eyes go all hooded and he makes an obscene hand gesture.

Tine splutters into his straw and has to put down his drink before he makes a mess. This is really taking a joke too far. He's going to tell Sarawat to stop, or remind him they're in public, but what comes out of his mouth instead is, "Oh come on, you're saying you haven't *at all*, this whole time?" Which is not something he'd ever in a thousand years imagined himself asking about, and he would be mortified, except Sarawat brought it up first and he's being ridiculous. It's been two weeks. Of course he hasn't been abstaining the entire time.

Except Sarawat shakes his head mournfully. "Not at all. Have you ever tried to go two weeks without? It feels like an eternity, Tine. I'm dying out here."

"You didn't hurt both your hands," Tine points out, then snaps his mouth shut. He hadn't meant to say that either. He really hadn't. There was no need to know.

Sarawat sighs and looks down at his uninjured left hand, opening and closing it a few times. "It's not the same," he says. "I *wish* I were ambidextrous, but it just doesn't work."

The movement had caught Tine's gaze, naturally enough, but now he finds himself staring. With an effort, he tears his eyes away. His face heats up. He wasn't thinking about Sarawat wrapping that hand around—anywhere—and trying in vain to....get off. The mental image was too vivid, even though he *certainly* wasn't thinking about parts of Sarawat he'd seen for one agonizing instant before screwing his eyes shut.

"Uh," Tine says, feeling that some response is required to steer this conversation back on track, but having no idea what. "That sounds pretty rough."

"It is," Sarawat agrees. "And I can't seem to get any help, so I'm just going to have to suffer through it."

Tine makes a wordless exclamation. This again?

"Unless...maybe you changed your mind...?"

"Saraleo!" Tine spits. "Absolutely not!"

That makes Sarawat look kind of wistful, which is the ridiculous icing on the ridiculous cake of this conversation. If Sarawat doesn't want to see Tine jump out of his own skin over and over, why does he keep making the same joke?

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Later that night, after studying for a while and staying on Facebook way too late before crawling into bed, Tine finds his hand sliding under the elastic of his underwear without any conscious thought. It's a habit. It's not like he jerks off every night, but most nights when he doesn't have friends over and he's not so drunk or exhausted he falls straight asleep—sure. He jerked off yesterday and he probably will tomorrow, too, without putting much thought into it.

Except now, of course, he's thinking of Sarawat's two-week dry spell, and how it would feel to get your hands on yourself after that long without. Stretching that out to the full four to six weeks seems unimaginable. Surely Sarawat was exaggerating about his other hand. Once it got bad enough, anything would have to be better than nothing, right?

Experimentally, Tine slides his free hand, the one he never uses for this, into his underwear, and strokes himself slowly. Just because he always *happens* to use the same hand every time doesn't mean he *has* to. Unbidden, his mind supplies him the image of Sarawat flexing his

unhelpful left hand in the golden afternoon sun of the cafe. Tine pushes it away. This isn't about Sarawat at all; this is about disproving a ridiculous claim.

After a few more moments of experimental groping, he tries to get down to business. It's impossible to find his usual rhythm, unsurprisingly, but this is jerking off, not rocket science. He just has to do what feels good until he comes. The idea that Sarawat would have so much trouble he couldn't even come at all is absurd, and that he'd not only admit that out loud, but turn it into a joke—fuck, somehow Sarawat got into this again when Tine is very specifically not thinking about him. He quashes that line of thought with vehemence.

Things go pretty much the same for the next few minutes. Not getting worse, but not really getting any better either. Between the unfamiliar angle, his unpracticed hand, and having to viciously push away thoughts of Sarawat every few seconds, Tine feels like there's a circuit somewhere that just won't connect. He's jerking off, yes, but he's nowhere close to coming. When at long last he gives up and switches hands and comes in under a minute, he's forced to concede that maybe Sarawat has a point. And then he feels sorry for him—six weeks is a long, long time.

And then he buries his face in his pillow and groans, because as hard as he tried, here he is thinking about Sarawat *again*.

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Tine had given Ohm and Phuak a ride to the bar, so he's 90% sober, still nursing the dregs of the beer he'd ordered when they first got here. Sarawat had split a cab with Man and seems to have no such inhibitions. The group has moved from pitchers of beer to rounds of shots, and they show no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

At some point Phuak got up to go talk to a girl near the dancefloor, and Sarawat slid into the empty seat next to Tine. That had been a while ago, and Phuak doesn't make any protest when he comes back to the table, which gives Tine a little thrill of satisfaction that he chooses not to examine too closely.

Sarawat has the glassy, hazy look he gets when he's really drunk, and his motions are all loose and expansive. Tine can't stop looking at him. To check that he doesn't jostle his bad arm, Tine tells himself. He'd gotten permission from the doctor to take his arm out of the sling earlier today, and this trip is supposedly in celebration. Privately, Tine thinks this group would take pretty much any excuse to get wasted.

There's a cheer around the table as another round of shots goes down, and when Sarawat clumsily slams his shot glass down on the table, he picks up Tine's hand. Tine makes a noise of surprised protest, but it gets lost in the noise of the bar. He's left with Sarawat holding onto his hand, tilting it from one side to the other like it's an interesting trading card.

"Hey," Tine says, and tries to pull his hand back.

Sarawat holds on tighter. He fixes Tine with a deep, penetrating gaze that's entirely incongruous with how drunk Tine knows he is. "You have the nicest hands, Tine. Did I ever say? So nice."

"Um," Tine says, momentarily forgetting to take his hand back under the force of that gaze.

"Your hands are like. Strong. But *soft*." He rubs his thumb against Tine's palm, and then as if that isn't good enough, pets him a bit with the exposed fingertips of his hand that's in the brace, gaze still pinning Tine so thoroughly he can barely breathe. His fingers run down the inside of Tine's fingers, which he had never counted as a particularly sensitive area until now, but he finds his hand curling involuntarily into the contact.

Tine makes a small sound that the noise of the bar will definitely cover, thankfully.

"I can't stop thinking about them," Sarawat says, finally breaking that gaze to stare reverently at Tine's captured hand. "You have really pretty hands."

"You said that already," Tine offers. He feels like he should stop this, somehow, but also, no one's paying them any attention. Sarawat likely won't remember this tomorrow. He doesn't *have* to stop it.

And it feels...nice. Tine's held hands with plenty of people, but no one who's paying as close attention to him as Sarawat is right now. No one who's outright *fondling* his hand like Sarawat is, brazen in the middle of a crowded bar. Tine does a surreptitious check around the table, but as he suspected, none of their friends are looking at them, too involved in a bout of booze-fueled one-upmanship to glance their way.

"Yeah, but. Tine." Sarawat turns his head with what looks like great effort, and fixes him in a sincere gaze again. Tine swallows. "You're so—Tine. You're. ....What was I saying?"

"About my hands," Tine prompts, against his best judgement. He shouldn't be helping Sarawat here. He should be *glad* he got off track, that should be a relief, but instead he wants desperately for him to remember what he'd been saying. Tine has no idea what it was going to be, but he doesn't want to stop hearing it.

Sarawat's brow furrows and he gives Tine's hand a squeeze. "No, it was—" he stops there and gazes at Tine for so long Tine thinks he's never going to remember what he was saying. "I can't help imagining how they would feel on me," he finally says, punctuating this statement with another devastating stroke to Tine's palm and fingers. He interlaces their hands and squeezes again.

All of Tine's higher brain function might have shut down. That would explain why he's not reacting right now, why he *can't* react, why he's only sitting here with his mouth half-open, waiting to hear what Sarawat says next.

"It's just really not fair, that I have to be around such a beautiful person every day." Sarawat rubs Tine's hand and gazes up at him, hazy and mournful. "And I can't even do anything about it." He gives Tine's fingers a forlorn little pat. "And you—" he points at Tine—"Won't even help."

Tine gapes. "Me?" He's pretty sure his voice squeaks when he says that.

Sarawat nods, listing dangerously forward before catching himself on the table. "You're so beautiful I can't *stand* it, Tine. And you won't help."

There's no way those two statements should be connected. Maybe, if Tine weren't boxed into the corner of the table right now, he would run away, because he feels like he's burning up in Sarawat's intense, confusing little bubble of gazing and touch. He's far too sober for this conversation.

"I—" he says, and Sarawat pats his hand again. Then he slumps forward and dozes off right there on the table, fingers still folded into Tine's hand.

Tine moves some empty glasses out of the way and shifts Sarawat into a position that looks a bit more comfortable, but he doesn't budge throughout the entire process. He's really out.

Tine could pull his hand out of Sarawat's slack grip, but he doesn't.

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Sarawat's table nap is brief, and he mostly regains consciousness by the time the others are ready to wrap up and go home. Out in the parking lot, Tine thinks about Sarawat getting out of a cab at Man's dorm and staggering home, and he thinks about masked shadows melting out of the dark, and he makes up his mind.

"Hey," he says to Sarawat, blood pounding in his ears. "I drove, let me give you a ride home. You can crash at my place." There's next to no chance Sarawat will say no, but Tine feels like his nerves might jump out of his limbs anyway. Is this how Sarawat feels every time he asks Tine something like this?

Not like this is—anything. Tine just doesn't want to see Sarawat go off into the night alone, and he's tired and he doesn't want to drive twice as far for no reason. He's not going to try anything, like Sarawat always does. There's no reason to feel so nervous over it.

Sarawat smiles and leans into his side. "Okay," he says. "Take me home with you."

"You don't have to make it sound like *that*," Tine protests, but Sarawat is just smiling muzzily up at him. He gave in without asking for any of Tine's excuses as to why this makes the most sense, so Tine figures he can save himself the trouble for once and not list them all out.

Tine bundles Sarawat into his car and lets him, Phuak, and Ohm sing drunken nonsense songs until he drops his friends off at their dorm, and then he helps him up the stairs to Tine's room.

By this time, Sarawat is mostly asleep again, slumping over if Tine doesn't hold him up, mumbling traces of lyrics into Tine's neck. Tine gets him up the stairs somehow, successfully unlocks his door on the second try (the first try is foiled by Sarawat trying to walk through the still-locked door, which takes quite a lot of explaining and shuffling around to recover from), and hoists Sarawat onto the bed.

Sarawat starts sleepily nuzzling his face into Tine's pillow almost immediately, and Tine steps back and surveys the situation he's created for himself. He could sleep on the floor. It would

be easiest, in some ways, to sleep on the floor and avoid this drunk, floppy, overly-demonstrative monster in his bed. But on the other hand, if he tries that, Sarawat might try to sleep on the floor *with* him. And then they'll both be uncomfortable, when there's a perfectly good bed right there.

"Take your shoes off before you fall asleep," Tine says to Sarawat, gently smacking the bottom of one of the shoes in question. Sarawat's feet are hanging off the end of the bed for now, and Tine doesn't want to deal with dirt in his sheets if Sarawat decides to curl up.

"Take them off for me," Sarawat mumbles, half into Tine's pillow which he's now...hugging?

It feels slightly indecent to see. Tine's heart thumps in his chest. "If you're awake enough to talk, you're awake enough to take off shoes."

Sarawat flops onto his back and sticks his feet out toward Tine a little more intentionally. "It's better if *you* take them off, Tine. I'd let you take all my clothes off..."

Tine rolls his eyes. Honestly, the only surprise is that it took Sarawat so long to get there. He grabs a t-shirt and sleep shorts and ducks into the bathroom to change. When he gets out, Sarawat's shoes are on the floor and he's curled up in a tiny ball under the duvet, not even the top of his head visible. Tine's pillow isn't visible either, so he must have hoarded it under the duvet with him.

It could be worse, Tine thinks as he takes his spare blanket down from the shelf in the closet. He carefully balances on the unoccupied edge of the bed and nestles his head on his folded arm. All in all, this is one of the better outcomes possible. Tine isn't sleeping on the floor, and Sarawat isn't awake to make innuendos until Tine dies from embarrassment.

If he were awake, he'd probably be making jokes about how Tine should *lend him a hand* right now. It's been pretty obviously in the *not serious* category up until now, but if Sarawat brought it up again while he was in Tine's bed, where Tine had jerked off thinking about him the other night, then maybe...

Maybe that would change things a little bit.

The fact that they're in a bed, where such things could, theoretically, happen, means Tine would have to think about his response for once, instead of dismissing Sarawat out of hand. He's not thinking about it now, of course; very carefully not considering what he would do or say if Sarawat were to ask for his help. He's absolutely not thinking about it right now, but he *would*, if Sarawat were awake right now and asked, and knowing that makes his heart pound.

There's a quiet snore from the other side of the bed. Sarawat remains very decidedly not awake.

Out of nowhere, Tine remembers the love confession. He can go entire hours in a row without thinking about it now, it's been so long since Sarawat has brought it up, but now that he is thinking about it, he's seized with the absolute conviction that Sarawat's going to wake up in the morning and demand to hear it from him.



And that's if he gets off easy. The terms of the bet had required a posted confession. Tine has no idea what he'd say to Sarawat's face, much less to the student body at large. It's been so long; surely he should have come up with *something* now. Even if it's only a clever deflection, a way to bounce the ball back into Sarawat's court, it makes him feel all weird and exposed not to have anything ready.

He worries over it for what feels like hours, but doesn't come up with anything satisfactory by the time he drifts off to sleep at last.

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Tine's alarm goes off right in the middle of a dream about saving a mafia boss from a pack of velociraptors, which doesn't make any sense in the dream and makes even less sense once he startles awake and promptly forgets half of it.

It takes him a minute to get his bearings, partly because of the dream and partly because the light is weird and there's a warm weight pressing into him. He shifts around a bit and finds that he's half a buttcheek away from falling off the bed. That explains the weird light; normally he sleeps in the middle of the bed and the shaft of sunlight from the window doesn't hit his face until later.

Further investigation reveals that he's so close to the edge of the bed because Sarawat is sprawled decadently over the bed, taking up almost all the available space. He's on his stomach, face mashed into the pillow he stole from Tine before crashing out, and his arm is pressed along the length of Tine's arm. His hand is—his hand is wrapped possessively around Tine's hand.

Tine's fingers twitch as soon as he becomes aware of this fact, but he's awake enough by now to stop himself from snatching his hand back, in case it wakes Sarawat. All the things Sarawat had babbled about Tine's hands last night come rushing back to him at once. Had Sarawat been thinking those things when he'd taken Tine's hand? How had he done it—had he slid their palms together softly, careful not to wake Tine up, or had he grabbed Tine's hand impulsively, unable to resist? Had he done it in his sleep, maybe, as unaware as Tine had been?

When Tine realizes that he's slowly shifting his hand in Sarawat's, wishing he'd been awake when this started, he flushes all over. Sarawat probably hadn't even realized what he was doing. There's no reason for Tine to be replaying all the things Sarawat said in the bar, things about the way Tine's hands feel and wanting them *on* him.

Tine rolls out of bed and makes a beeline for the shower. This is too much. He lets the water run cold in the hope that if the noise wakes Sarawat up, Tine will at least be decent by the time he leaves the bathroom.

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Tine spends the next few days acutely aware of his hands.

It's not like Sarawat even does anything else to call attention to them, but now that the seed has been planted, Tine can't help but notice every little thing he touches or move he makes. His hands are so ordinary, but something about them had caught Sarawat's attention anyway.

Once or twice he catches Sarawat spacing out and when he follows his line of sight—yes, Sarawat had been staring at Tine's hands taking down notes for an essay or fiddling with his drink straw or washing up in the bathroom like any normal person might do. Tine wonders how long he's been doing that for, and if every time he spaced out he's been thinking about how Tine's hands would feel on his bare skin, or wrapped around his.... His...

If that's the case, Tine doesn't know how Sarawat has acted so calm for so long. Tine's been party to these thoughts for less than 48 hours and he's barely holding it together.

On Friday night, Political Science plays against Environmental Science. Tine stands with the cheer squad and watches, his heart in his throat, but the game ends in a tie. Sarawat gives Tine a knowing smile as he jogs off the field, but he doesn't bring up the bet and Tine avoids Sarawat's friends so they can't bring it up either. This gives him at least one more week of reprieve, he figures.

On Saturday morning, Sarawat calls Tine while he's brushing his teeth.

"Scrubb just dropped a surprise EP, do you want to go get it?"

"Brbbbhuh?" Tine says, then spits and rinses his mouth and brings the phone back to his ear. "What? Since when?"

Tine can almost hear Sarawat's long-suffering expression through the phone. "They announced it last night. Didn't you see?"

"I just woke up," Tine says. "I haven't gone online yet."

"Well, hurry up. We can probably get to the record store before they sell out if we take the next bus to the city."

"When's that?" Tine asks, pressing the phone to his ear with his shoulder as he hops into his pants.

"In eight minutes. I'm outside your dorm," Sarawat adds, as an afterthought.

Tine peeks out the window, and sure enough, he can just spot the top of Sarawat's head out on the sidewalk in front of his building. "Okay, I'll be down in two minutes. Did you bring snacks?"

"Just hurry," Sarawat says, and disconnects the call.

They make it to the bus stop with an entire minute to spare and snag seats in the back when the bus pulls up. Tine bubbles with excitement. It's been ages since his last trip to the city, and for there to be new Scrubb music waiting there—it feels almost magical. Tine is a huge fan, of course, but the type of fan who spends all of his time listening to his favorite songs on

repeat, not the type who haunts the band's social media. Without Sarawat he would have heard about the EP eventually, but maybe not in time to snag a physical copy.

Tine grills Sarawat for all the details he has, and makes him show him the announcement, as brief as it is. Tine watches the little 15-second trailer video twice in a row, hunched over Sarawat's phone so he can hear the sound over the noise of the bus. When he starts letting it play a third time, Sarawat digs a pair of earbuds out of his pocket and hands them over with a satisfied little smile.

Tine plugs them in and hands one earbud to Sarawat. They play the clip three more times, Tine watching the screen and Sarawat watching Tine's reactions, before Tine has to pause it to collect himself. Glancing over at Sarawat takes his already-short breath away, because Sarawat is just—softly *glowing* at him. Tine is too full of emotions to tell what his own face is doing in response, but it must be something good, because the corners of Sarawat's eyes crinkle up and Tine's heart flutters.

He wonders, if they weren't in a crowded bus right now, if Sarawat would want to kiss him—whether he wants to right now, maybe, and just isn't asking because he knows Tine would be embarrassed. Tine wonders if he would say yes, if things were different and Sarawat asked.

It feels like he has to *do* something with all this happiness, all this excitement, but there's nothing he can do right now so he just has to let it coil in his chest, wound tight with no release.

They get to the record store before it opens, which Tine is a little surprised at—they hadn't left all that early, despite Sarawat hustling him out the door as soon as he'd woken up—but it must open later than the other businesses around it to accommodate the rock & roll lifestyle of its patrons. Tine shares this theory with Sarawat, who rolls his eyes.

There's a few people milling around outside the store, waiting for it to open. On the bus, Sarawat had talked about getting coffee and breakfast once they got here, but when Tine makes big, pleading eyes at Sarawat, he changes tracks and settles in to wait with an easy smile.

A few more people show up to wait before the store opens. It's not a crowd, exactly, but Tine feels caught up in the excitement of the milling strangers nevertheless. It's the same energy as queuing up to be let into a big concert, nothing but anticipation and the hope you'll snag a good spot to watch.

Thinking about concerts makes Tine think about the Scrubb concert he hadn't known they'd been at together. It's weird, trying to imagine a version of Sarawat who doesn't immediately capture Tine's attention, who he could have just not remembered. It's weird thinking about Sarawat knowing him before Tine had any idea who he was; it does funny, squirmy things to his insides if he thinks about it too much. It's just as well that the store opens soon after that.

Buying the EP is anticlimactic. Tine doesn't have to fist-fight anyone for it, and they arrived early enough that he gets one of the free signed posters that were set aside for the first ten people. All in all, they're in and out of the store in less than fifteen minutes, and Tine still has all that pent-up pre-concert energy careening around in him.

"You're not buying one?" Tine asks Sarawat as they leave.

Sarawat shakes his head. "No need. I can listen to yours."

Tine roll his eyes. "All that fuss, and you didn't even want one for yourself?"

"They're your favorite band," Sarawat says. "The fuss was for you."

Ah, Tine doesn't know what to do with that! He blushes and looks down at his feet. "You didn't have to," he mumbles. He doesn't know how to tell Sarawat he's glad he did, anyway, because he really *didn't* have to make a big deal out of it just for Tine. He probably had plans today before he saw the announcement.

"I wanted to," Sarawat declares, and Tine *really* doesn't know what to do with that.

Instead, he ignores it and drags Sarawat to a nearby park. He'd wanted to tear the plastic off and look at his purchase as soon as it was in his hands, but it hadn't seemed like the thing to do with a line for the checkout behind him.

Sarawat stops to buy coffee and banana roti for them at some stalls they pass along the way, and Tine has to resist opening the bag from the record store right there as they wait for the food. It won't be the same if he can't spread out and takes his time with it, but even though his stomach is grumbling, the diversion is mildly agonizing.

"You got enough for me, right?" Tine checks as they get going.

Sarawat gives him a flat look that says he's being very stupid, and Tine feels like he should be offended. Coming from one of his friends, that look would definitely mean *of course not, you idiot, why didn't you get your own while we were stopped*, but from Sarawat, he doesn't know.

"What kind of boyfriend would I be if I didn't get food for you?"

Tine sputters. "We're not boyfriends! What!?"

Sarawat sighs. "Not yet."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm auditioning to be your boyfriend," Sarawat says cryptically. That was—that was not something they had agreed on previously, Tine doesn't think. "So I have to act like I am, already. Obviously."

Tine clicks his tongue in exasperation but doesn't have anything to say to that because—obviously? *Obviously??*

The park is right across the street now, anyway. Tine can see an empty bench under a tree; if they can just get there, they can focus on important things like Scrubb and put confusing topics like Sarawat auditioning to be Tine's boyfriend (since *when*) safely behind them.

At the park, Tine claims one side of the bench and pores over the album art in the booklet and the signatures on the poster while Sarawat industriously chews through the roti.

"Don't you want any?" he asks at one point, offering the other container to Tine.

Tine waves him off. "Not now. My hands will get sticky."

Once he's finally examined the album and poster to his fill, he packs them carefully away and takes the container of food from Sarawat. This means he's still eating long after Sarawat, but Sarawat doesn't complain. After they're both done, they take their coffees and stroll through the park. Sarawat mentions wanting to find a gift for his mom, so they wander around the neighborhood until they find a busy street with a good variety of different shops, and take their time poking around each of them until Sarawat finds some perfume he says his mom will like.

By that time, Tine is starting to get hungry again, so he looks up directions to a restaurant he remembers from the last time he went to the city with his family. The whole day is so fun and relaxing that Tine almost forgets Sarawat's comment about auditioning to be Tine's boyfriend.

When he does remember on the way back home, it sends a tiny flurry of butterflies off in his stomach. If this was what being Sarawat's boyfriend would be like—laughing about their childhood memories of this or that landmark, getting lost down side streets that looked like a shortcut, not having to worry about any of their friends seeing them and teasing them—it might not be so bad.

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Sarawat nudges Tine when the bus gets close to his neighborhood. "Want to come listen to your album in my room? I have my mom's old stereo, the speakers are pretty good."

In his own room, Tine only has his lousy bluetooth speaker he got as a free prize in a school competition two years ago and his headphones. For either of those, he'd have to download the EP and listen to it on his phone and if it's an option, listening to the physical copy he'd just bought would be much better.

"Really?"

Sarawat nods. "Really. And this way I get to listen to it, too."

"You can listen to it when I'm done!" Tine offers immediately, because it's not like he's going to hoard the music to himself. "I'll send you my download code as soon as I get home."

"What if I want to listen to it with you? It sounds better that way." Sarawat's expression is grave, and Tine has to fight down a cloud of butterflies in his stomach. He never knows how to react when Sarawat says stuff like this, because he never knows what Sarawat *means*. Is he serious? If he is, what does *that* mean?

Sarawat signals his stop and turns the full force of that serious face on Tine. "Come back with me. Say yes, Tine, please."

There isn't much time. The bus is already slowing down; it won't wait for Tine to make a dozen excuses and for Sarawat to patiently argue him out of them. "Okay, fine," he says, gathering up the various shopping bags. Sarawat probably wouldn't be able to carry all his stuff without help anyway.

"Good," Sarawat says smugly, and then the bus stops and they get off together.

It's late and Sarawat's AC has been off all day; his room is hot and muggy. He offers Tine a glass of water, which Tine gets for himself because Sarawat's arm is still in a brace and it makes things like pouring water needlessly tricky.

The stereo turns out to be in a box that Sarawat never unpacked when he moved in, and Tine rolls his eyes. "You just wanted me for the free labor," he complains as Sarawat directs him through unpacking it and setting it up.

"Not *just* the free labor," Sarawat says, sounding so satisfied with himself Tine can't meet his eyes. That tone is a familiar one, the kind that will turn into innuendo if Tine gives it half a chance.

Tine fusses around getting the speakers lined up in exactly the right location for optimal sound quality, but eventually there's nothing left to do but press play. He feels unaccountably nervous—like he's been building this up in his head so much that the actual experience of listening to the music couldn't possibly live up to his expectations. Or that he'll be a poor listener, somehow, and not give it the attention it deserves.

Sarawat reaches over his shoulder and presses play before Tine can agonize over it much longer.

"This isn't the only time you'll ever get to listen to it," he says, but Tine shushes him. The opening chords of the first song are playing and Tine doesn't want to miss a second of it.

The music washes over him as he lies on the floor and stares up at the ceiling. After that first remark, Sarawat doesn't interrupt him again. When Tine looks over, he's lying on the floor too, so close in the small space between the bed and the couch that if either one of them reached over even a little bit, they could be holding hands.

Tine loses track of the lyrics for an entire verse to those thoughts, and only tunes back in when the chorus starts.

All too soon, the album ends. "Can we listen to it again?" Tine looks over at Sarawat, irrationally worried he'll say no. This has to be boring for Sarawat; Tine knows he doesn't like Scrubb as much as him.

Sarawat is already smiling at him, though. "Of course."

Tine gets up and hits play again, and when he lies back down, he arranges his arms so that if he stretches his pinky finger out just a little, it will brush against where the tip of Sarawat's pinky finger emerges from his brace.

The first song is a fast one, lively and upbeat, the kind of thing that will be perfect to listen to on a long drive with the windows down. Sarawat is tapping his fingers along to the beat, and without letting himself think too hard about it, Tine loops his pinky over Sarawat's, trapping it. The tapping stops and Sarawat lets his hand be held. Tine's heart flutters once, twice, and then when the next song starts and Sarawat still hasn't moved his hand, a warm glow suffuses through Tine's chest.

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"I'm going to sleep," Sarawat announces after a long time. They moved to the couch after the floor got too hard, sitting on opposite sides and letting their legs tangle together carelessly. Tine has lost track of how many times they listened to the Scrubb EP. It had been a lot, and then Sarawat had put on some of his music after, claiming that he wanted to hear it on the real stereo.

"Oh," Tine says. He shifts himself up on the couch and looks out the window. It had been dusk when they got back, and now it's pitch dark outside. Tine really isn't looking forward to the walk back to his dorm.

"Stay," Sarawat says.

Tine opens his mouth to protest, then closes it. He feels like he should get out of Sarawat's hair after monopolizing him all day, but he doesn't actually *want* to.

"I still have the extra toothbrush and stuff from the last time," Sarawat says. His eyes are unreasonably big. "You might as well."

"Hmm..." Tine says, and Sarawat's eyes go even bigger and he also bites his lip. It's obviously a ploy, but Tine can feel himself falling for it anyway.

"It's no trouble," Sarawat wheedles.

Tine sighs. He can't shake the feeling that it *would* be trouble, surely, but if Sarawat's saying it isn't, that's his problem, right?

Sarawat tilts his head.

"Okay, okay!" Tine says. If he were smart, he wouldn't agree without adding a condition, like *Okay, as long as you don't climb onto the couch with me* or *Okay, as long as you don't hold my hand in my sleep*. But his heart is already pounding a bit harder, thinking about what happened on this couch last time, and maybe he's not smart, but he doesn't add anything.

Smug now that he's gotten his way, Sarawat stands and starts changing for bed right there in the middle of the room. Tine makes a garbled sound and escapes to the bathroom. It's nothing he hasn't seen before, but that doesn't mean he wants to watch Sarawat undress.

Well. Watching Sarawat undress might not be so bad. It's Sarawat seeing Tine watch him that he really wants to avoid.

"You haven't used this toothbrush, have you?" Tine calls from the bathroom. The toothbrush he used last time is sitting in a cup by the sink, waiting for him.

Sarawat sticks his head around the open door. "No? It's yours."

Tine makes another garbled sound at that—who just *keeps* a toothbrush for someone else on their sink?—but decides to take Sarawat's word for it and brushes his teeth without further questioning.

They get ready for bed in relative harmony apart from that, until Sarawat crawls into bed and holds up the duvet. "Come on," he says, when Tine stays frozen on the threshold. "It's more comfortable than the couch."

Instantly, Tine's mind flashes back to the day they painted Sarawat's room. He knows how comfortable that bed is. He knows what it's like to have Sarawat above him in that bed, arms and legs pinning him in. Not that Sarawat could do that right now, with one arm out of commission. But he's crafty. He's shown he's very inventive and willing to try anything, things Tine wouldn't in a thousand years be able to just go and do to a person.

A shiver goes up Tine's spine. He doesn't want Sarawat to...to *try* things on him. He doesn't *expect* it. But if it were to happen anyway...

Sarawat lifts the cover higher, impatient. "Well?"

Tine huffs a laugh and unsticks his feet from the floor. As soon as Tine gets into the bed, Sarawat cozies up to him, draping an arm over his chest and hugging him territorially.

One or two flocks of butterflies take off inside Tine's torso. It shouldn't feel so good just to be held, should it? Especially not by someone as confusing as Sarawat, who acts like he hates Tine one day and talks about being his boyfriend the next.

Tine pushes against Sarawat lightly. "You don't have to crowd me like this, the bed is big enough for two."

Sarawat rubs his face into Tine's shoulder. "I don't have to, I just want to."

"Ah! Give me some space, get back on your own side." Tine pushes Sarawat again, hopefully not hard enough to actually move him. He doesn't really *want* Sarawat to stop holding him, it's just if he lies there without doing or saying anything, he might explode. What he actually does or says doesn't feel like it's very much in his control.

Sarawat rocks back a little bit but just uses the motion to prop himself up and look down at Tine. It's dark with the lights off, but enough of the light from the street filters in through the curtains that Tine can make out Sarawat's expression, intense and laser-focused.

"I'll give you some space—" Tine's heart falls. "*If*," and that single word has Tine's heart bobbing unsteadily back up, because Sarawat's wagers are always dangerous, always push things a little farther than Tine would have thought to go, and he can't breathe until he hears what Sarawat says next.



"What?" he says when Sarawat lets the moment stretch too long, that dramatic shit. "If what?"

"If you help me out a bit."

Tine's heart is beating a mile a minute, so fast the blood is roaring in his ears. "With what?" Tine asks on autopilot, even though from Sarawat's tone there can only be one thing, the thing he *keeps asking*, which Tine really should have seen coming.

"You know. A handjob. Jerk me off. It's been so long, put me out of my misery, Tine. And then if you want you can have the whole bed to yourself."

"You can't be serious." He *can't* be. Because if he's serious now, that meant he was serious all those other times, when he aksed with absolutely no shame at all—over and over—and Tine had no idea...! Tine's dick, unaware of how terrifying and out of control this situation is, gives a traitorous twitch.

"I am very serious," Sarawat says. His face looks it, all dark and intent and handsome, not a joke in sight.

"So this whole time, you really haven't... uh, jerked off? Even once?" Tine hates how his voice goes all squeaky but it's Sarawat's fault he has to say something like this.

Sarawat shakes his head. "I've wanted to. I've wanted to so much, but I can't—don't laugh, it's not funny—"

Tine opens his mouth and realizes he's about to tell Sarawat he knows, he tried it once, and then closes his mouth abruptly, trapping the words in. He can't tell Sarawat about the time he jerked off thinking about him. It's bad enough that he did it, the only silver lining is that Sarawat never has to know.

"Uh," Tine says.

Sarawat's gaze is just really intense right now. "It probably wouldn't take long at all," he says, and fuck, is he bargaining now? What is Tine supposed to do with this? "If you did it, it would be so good, Tine, please."

"And if I do, you'll stay on your side of the bed after?" Which isn't what Tine wants, but jerking Sarawat off isn't *not* what he wants, and who knows when another chance like this will come up.

"For the whole night," Sarawat says, laying his splinted arm over his heart like he's swearing an oath.

"Fine, okay, I'll do it," Tine hears himself saying, and Sarawat's face splits into a huge grin. He rolls onto his back and looks over at Tine expectantly.

Tine's heart is in his throat. "What, just like that? You can't even take your own shorts off?"

Sarawat pouts. "I'm injured."

"Not so bad you can't take your own shorts off!" Tine protests. Sarawat probably expects him to just reach under his waistband and go for it, and Tine just—can't. He needs Sarawat to make it easy for him, or he's going to freeze up and never do anything.

Sarawat searches Tine's face, where all the weird hesitance and indecision are written plain as day, and somehow whatever he sees there doesn't change his mind. He kicks the duvet down to their feet and shimmies out of his shorts before folding his hands behind his head, starting at Tine the whole time. Tine, lying on his back beside him, feels riveted in place.

Once the shorts are down, Tine's eyes are drawn inexorably to what's revealed, outlined starkly against the dim light from the window. That is definitely Sarawat's dick he's looking at right now. Sarawat's very hard dick. Tine's own dick gives a sympathetic throb.

If there was any doubt whether Sarawat was serious when he made his request, this completely dispels it. It's nothing he hasn't seen before, but this is the first time he's seen it like this, hard and straining, and the first time he's had permission to look his fill. Even though it's so dark in here he can barely make out more than a vague outline. He wants Sarawat to turn the light on so he can see him in full color.

"Do you have any lotion?" Tine asks. He has to swallow a couple times before talking because his throat is too dry to speak.

Sarawat gives a surprised half-chuckle, like he expected Tine to chicken out, but he sits up to rummage around in the crate next to the bed and hands him a half-empty tube of lotion. He flops back down with his hands behind his head again, maybe a little closer to Tine than before, which is considerate. The task before him would be difficult to accomplish if Tine had to reach halfway across the bed.

Tine squeezes some of the lotion out onto his palm and then—there's nothing for it—reaches over and wraps his hand around Sarawat's dick.

Sarawat gasps.

Tine scowls a tiny bit. This is taking away from the experience of touching another dick for the first time in his life, which he had expected to be more deep and mysterious and less like hanging out with Sarawat always is—which is to say, confusing and a bit annoying. "What?"

"It's cold."

Tine clicks his tongue. "It'll warm up." Here he is, touching another person's junk for the first time in his life, and right out the gate Sarawat makes him think he somehow did it wrong?

Sarawat coughs and Tine realizes he's frozen with his fingers loosely wrapped around Sarawat's dick. "It's, uh, it's warm now. You can keep going."

With that instruction to go on, Tine tightens his grip and gives a couple experimental tugs, watching Sarawat's cockhead disappear into his fist and reappear again. His dick is hot in Tine's hand, slick from the lotion and velvety soft. It's generally dick-shaped, but the shape is

different enough from Tine's that it's unmistakably foreign—the same length, probably, but a bit thicker, and the curve is different in a way that Tine can't quite put his finger on.

Tine's dick twitches again, fattening up, which is weird because he never thought jerking off was particularly hot on its own, when his dick wasn't the one involved. Maybe there's a wire crossed in his brain and because his hand is feeling a dick, his dick expects to be feeling a hand and is behaving accordingly.

Sarawat shifts—not quite pushing hips up into Tine's fist, but the vague suggestion of that—and Tine realizes that without meaning to, he's just been feeling up Sarawat's dick like he was the one who started this because he had some kind of dick-touching fetish, and not Sarawat who started it because he wants to get off, which is a perfectly normal, understandable reason.

"Uh, how do you usually...?" Tine had been about to say *How do you want it*, but halfway through he got worried that it was too much of a porn star thing to say and changed tracks.

"This is good to start," Sarawat says, looking over at Tine. His eyes take a moment to focus.

Tine jerks him a few more times, firm but not too tight, not ignoring the head but not lingering around it so much that it's weird—god, now that he's got his hands on it, he wants to memorize every ridge and curve of Sarawat's dick, wants to run his fingertips around the crown and push his thumb into the slit, wants to feel the bulbous shape of it in his palm, wants to get Sarawat so worked up he's leaking and then smear the precome around—and fuck, that would definitely be weird. Not to mention how he wants to let his fingers trail over Sarawat's balls when he gets to the base of the dick, hold them and feel how they draw up against Sarawat's body the more turned on he gets. None of that falls into the *helpful handjob between friends* category, he's pretty sure. He can't do any of that.

Still, Sarawat seems to be enjoying what he is doing, if the way he's shifting slightly in place and breathing a little harder are a tell.

Tine's wrist is going to be sore if he keeps going from this angle. He rolls onto his side, nearly bumping into Sarawat, and scootches down a bit, reaching for Sarawat's dick with his other hand. He has to consciously keep his hips tipped away so he doesn't rub his hard-on against Sarawat's leg, but the angle is much easier like this, and he can see the effect he's having much more clearly. He speeds up, and Sarawat's stomach hollows as he sucks in a breath. He slows down, adding a twist on the upstroke, and Sarawat *squirms*.

"You can—go faster. I'm close."

Tine picks up the pace again and makes an enquiring noise; Sarawat makes an affirmative noise back and kind of lifts his hips up to meet Tine's hand, which is unexpectedly really hot.

"Lighter, too," Sarawat says after a moment.

"Eh?" Tine asks.

There's a pause, and then Sarawat says, "You don't have to grip so tight now. When I....uh, I mean, you can go lighter. And fast."

Tine's brain maybe takes a tiny break to just whirr for a moment, because Sarawat telling him how he likes to finish when he jerks off—to thoughts of Tine, even, who knows! If he was serious about this, he could have been serious about anything—is just. More than he had expected to hear, in this particular moment.

It occurs to Tine, as his brain comes back online, that it's in his power to stretch this out. The way he had slowed down and made Sarawat squirm for it—he could do that again. He could keep Sarawat right on the edge as long as he wanted, he could get to see him panting and desperate. He could extract promises, maybe; confessions, he could see just how much Sarawat will give to come.

Not that he's going to! But he *could*, and Sarawat had asked for this and stripped down his shorts knowing full well what he was handing over. Tine bites his lip against the indecent noise that threatens to come out. Tine hadn't known, at all, what he was getting into; in point of fact, he's been trying not to think about it. But Sarawat has evidently been thinking about it this whole time, and decided it was worth it to keep asking and Tine—is very glad he did.

Sarawat whimpers, impatient. As directed, Tine loosens his grip and lets his fist fly over Sarawat's dick, a blur of motion that has Sarawat shifting his hips and making tiny bitten-off *unf* sounds. He's leaking now, beads of liquid collecting at the tip of his dick, and just once Tine lets himself swipe the precome around, using the slickness to bring the frantic pace up one notch higher.

Tine nearly lets go when Sarawat starts coming, so surprised by the way his dick jerks in his hand, but that would be rude and inconsiderate, and honestly a waste of all his efforts, so he keeps up the light pressure and keeps jacking Sarawat through it until he exhales and rolls onto his side, his head pillowed on one arm.

Tine wipes his hand off on the sheet but stays where he is, which turns out to be a big mistake. Now they're both just staring at each other, faces kissing-distance apart.

Or no, not kissing distance, a regular, normal unit of measurement apart. Three inches, maybe. Except now that Tine has thought the phrase *kissing distance* those are the only terms he can think in. About how Sarawat looks flushed and breathless, lips parted on a sleepy smile, eyes glittering as he watches Tine's face. *Kissable*.

Tine's breathing is going faster now than when he was actually jerking Sarawat off. He wishes he could say something, like *how was that* or *there, my part of the bargain is done*, but the bargain is stupid and the last thing he wants is to remind Sarawat about it. If Sarawat were to drape himself over Tine again and hold him like he did before, Tine doesn't know what he'd do.

He wishes Sarawat would say something, but Sarawat seems content to just gaze at him with half-lidded eyes, making Tine's heart do backflips.

It's too much for one body to hold; Tine has to *do* something with it. They're so close already, all Tine would have to do is tilt his chin up and their lips would be bumping together. In this instant, he can't think of a good reason not to just—move his face the tiniest distance, and then—

Haltingly, Tine starts to move, waiting for the nerves to take over and make him jump back, but it keeps not happening, and he keeps tilting forward toward Sarawat's mouth.

Sarawat holds his breath and his eyes widen, and he stays very still. He could duck away too, Tine thinks, or move forward, but all he does is hold still. He's right there when Tine suddenly reaches him, brushing their lips together and sending sparks dancing over his skin. Tine's glad he didn't stop looking even when Sarawat's features blurred from being too close, because now he gets to see the way Sarawat's eyes flutter shut as Tine slides their lips together, heart squeezing at the smooth drag, the way Sarawat is barely there and so close all at once.

This has barely started and already it's better than it's ever been: there's no surprise to battle past this time, no need to replay this in his mind later to really appreciate the good parts. It's all good parts: Sarawat's gasped inhale when Tine's lips make contact, the second brush of lips as Sarawat kisses back, Tine shifting his weight so he can kiss a little more firmly and the tingles that rush down his spine when he does.

It's soft and warm and extremely chaste, compared to what they'd just done, and it makes Sarawat shut his eyes and breathe out a small sigh, like he can't even take this much. It's really—if Tine had been aware of the power Sarawat handed over earlier; now he can positively feel it coursing through his veins, hot and overwhelming. Tine presses a single closed-mouth kiss to Sarawat's lips, then moves in a little closer, nudging Sarawat's jaw with his chin and kissing him again, keeping it soft and shivery until Sarawat parts his lips and Tine licks inside and Sarawat groans.

Every time his lips move against Sarawat's, drops of pleasure slide down his spine like warm honey, pooling in all the parts of him that aren't moving—his toes, his knees, his ribcage, the hand fallen on the sheet between them, still slightly tacky with Sarawat's come. He can't begin to describe the way he's feeling right now, languid and stretched-out and immovably heavy. Sarawat breaks the kiss to gasp and then finds Tine's lips again—or rather, parts his lips and stays close and makes it incredibly easy for Tine to close the distance—and as Tine dares to slip under the current of kissing him again, he thinks that this is the longest they've touched without Sarawat pushing Tine into something more. Maybe this is already exactly what Sarawat wants. It's heady.

Eventually, after more than three kisses but less than ten, Tine pulls away and lets his head drop to the mattress. He's getting a crick in his neck, but he doesn't want to stop. He wants to kiss Sarawat so long that the kisses blend into one long liquid span of time; he wants Sarawat to roll him over and kiss him back for just as long.

"Will you," Tine says, reaching out and fiddling with the loose, stretched-out collar of Sarawat's t-shirt. Belatedly, he realizes he's doing it with his sticky hand and drops it. "If I... If you're my boyfriend, will I be able to kiss you whenever I want?"

Sarawat's eyes go big and round. "Tine," he says, his voice coming out raspy and unused. He clears his throat. "Are you saying..."

"Answer the question," Tine pleads. His lips are tingling and arousal is pooled low in his belly; he wants to keep going. This is the first time he's had an idea where *if we keep going* actually leads, in concrete terms, and before Sarawat rushes them on to the next thing, he wants to know the whole picture for once.

Sarawat rolls his eyes, but the corner of his mouth curls up and he sounds fond when he says, "Tine, yes, if we're boyfriends obviously we'll make out whenever you want. You can kiss me every time you see me. And," Sarawat says, voice dropping into a conspiratorial register. "That's not all. We can get each other off. The things I would do to you if you let me..."

The admission makes Tine bold. That sounds like a good plan for right now, but he wants to know everything, the entire map that Sarawat has for them in his head. "What else? If we're boyfriends, what else can we do?"

Sarawat's mouth curls into a full smile, his eyes dancing with satisfaction as he warms up to the topic. "Well. We would walk to class together and bring each other snacks and hang out on the weekends when we're not at school. We'll learn about each other's interests and introduce our friends to each other."

Tine pushes Sarawat's shoulder. "We already do that, asshole, that's called being friends."

"Yes, but. I want all that with you more than *anyone*." Sarawat rocks forward and says the next part into the sweaty skin in the crook of Tine's neck, like a secret. "And I'll say the mushiest things all the time." He sighs, the breath skittering ticklish across Tine's skin. "I'll forgive you if you don't do the same, but if you wanted to—" He buries his face in Tine's neck, muffling his next words entirely.

"What? Sarawat, if I said mushy things to you, what?"

When he rolls away, Sarawat is blushing hard enough to see even in the dim light. "It would make me really happy, that's all. Shut up."

Tine's heart gives a little flip. Oh, he would *like* to make Sarawat really happy, and if all it takes is a little embarrassment, then that's—that's easy. "What else?" he asks, eager to hear more.

"Obviously you can't date anyone else or like anyone else while we're boyfriends," Sarawat says. It comes out in a rush, like he's been holding it back for a while.

"I'm not!" Tine exclaims, then adds, "And I won't, that would be stupid if I had—" Tine cuts himself off before he can say *if I had you* and then he feels bad for holding it back, because what if that's the kind of mushy thing that makes Sarawat happy to hear? It probably is. He's lucky they haven't actually started yet, because this is going to take some adjustment.

"You can't either," he says instead, realizing he means it. Seeing Sarawat chase other people and not knowing if he's serious is *awful*; Sarawat should only chase after Tine.

"I only like you, Tine." Sarawat props himself up a bit so he can gaze into Tine's eyes more directly. Tine feels pinned down by the fervor there. "I don't want to date anyone else, ever."

Tine's heart is fluttering madly in his chest. He feels—he feels—it's an impossibly large feeling, tinged with frustration that he hadn't known he wanted Sarawat all to himself earlier. If he had known, then he could have asked for it; it seems ridiculously simple in retrospect. "Then are we...if that's it, then are we already...?" He leans in, taken over by the vastness of that feeling, and only realizes he's tipping his chin up and angling for a kiss when Sarawat puts a hand on his shoulder, holding him back.

"One more thing."

Tine blinks. "What?"

"Everyone will know we're boyfriends." Sarawat searches Tine's face as Tine waits for him to finish talking, a crease appearing between his eyebrows.

"Oh, is that all?" Tine lets out a relieved little puff of air. "As long as *I* know we're boyfriends first that's *fine*, oh my god." The past few months have been a confusing whirlwind, like he's constantly one step behind understanding an inside joke no one will explain to him. But if he's in on the joke—if he and Sarawat are in on it, together, at the center of things, he couldn't possibly care less what his stupid friends and the seniors in the music club and the other kids in his faculty think.

He bites his lip and realizes he's biting back a grin, and then thinks better of that and lets it spread across his face. "Come here," he says to Sarawat, reeling him in with a clumsy arm around his neck. He pulls his phone out of his pocket and turns it to selfie mode, making them both squint in the bright light. Tine kisses Sarawat on the cheek, pressing in until his nose squishes, still unable to stop grinning, and hits the shutter button. The picture comes out off center and overexposed, but it's the most beautiful thing Tine has maybe ever seen. He pulls up instagram and types out a caption, angling the phone to show Sarawat before he hits the button to post it.

Sarawat takes the phone and squints at it, mouthing the words as he reads. *Hands Off My Boyfriend #TeamSarawatWives He's Mine Now*, Tine had written.

"Is it good?" Tine asks.

Sarawat hands him back the phone. "You said 'mine' twice." He looks very smug about it.

Tine grins. "That's because I *really* want to keep making out with you. Please?"

"Okay, post it," Sarawat says, eyes dragging over Tine's chest, his throat, his mouth, like the old bet is the last thing on his mind right now.

Tine posts it and drops the phone off the side of the bed. It's not too far up in his priorities either, for all that it's been hanging over him for weeks.

"Done. Now make out with your boyfriend." His entire body is one big ball of emotions and impulses: heart doing loop-de-loops in his chest, breath fluttering, arousal sloshing around and mixing with anticipation. No more waiting around and hoping for conditions to be perfect anymore; he can *demand* makeouts now. It's incredible.

Sarawat must be feeling the same way, because he rolls them over and plants his elbow next to Tine's ear and more or less attacks his mouth. Tine giggles into it, giddy, and then stops being able to make any noise at all when Sarawat plants his other hand, the one not in a brace, squarely on Tine's pec. It's warm through the thin material of Tine's shirt, and when he squeezes, Tine groans.

The way he gets hot all over, pleasure flashing through his body, that can't be related to what Sarawat just did, can it? He's not a girl, he doesn't have boobs in the *having boobs* sense. There's nothing there to really...do anything with...

Sarawat does it again, gives a firm meaty squeeze as his tongue moves in Tine's mouth, his fingers five distinct points of pressure. It sends a jolt right to Tine's dick, and he squirms. Sarawat's hand eases off, just kind of fondly stroking him until his thumb finds his nipple, and Tine's conviction that Sarawat had just been toying with him on this too, bringing up the topic again and again solely to see Tine get uncomfortable, is fading fast.

Tine breaks the kiss, letting Sarawat's wet mouth trail across his cheek instead. "Is that why you wanted to grab them?" The echoes of whatever Sarawat set off when he did it are still rippling through him, making him high and giddy.

"What?" Sarawat pulls back too, blinking. His eyes land on his hand on Tine's chest and he kind of shakes his head at it, like he doesn't know how it got there. "Uh, no." He swallows. "They just look really. Firm. And nice. And so I wanted to—" he squeezes again, in demonstration, and Tine lets out a high giggle that trails off into a whine.

"Okay, well," he starts, and then a great idea hits him and he shimmies out of his shirt, not mistaking the way Sarawat's gaze lands on his bared chest as soon as it's exposed. He scoots back down the bed and settles between Sarawat's arms for easy access. "If you wanted, you can do that more."

Sarawat hisses out a breath that sounds a lot like, "*Fuck*," and drags his fingers across Tine's skin just hard enough not to tickle before squeezing again. Then he thumbs Tine's nipple and shit, if he thought it went to his dick before when Sarawat was just groping him through his shirt, that was nothing.

"How—" he gasps, and Sarawat grins. He does it again, then pays some attention to the other side, clumsy and off-center because he's down to only one usable hand. Tine doesn't know how he'll survive once Sarawat is back to two hands again. He'll probably just die of groping which is fine, that's a perfectly okay way to go, actually, if it feels like this.

"Kiss me," he says, once it seems like Sarawat has looked long enough for now.

Sarawat kisses Tine hungrily, picking right up where they left off, and it sends a happy, vicious thrill through Tine that he can just *demand* kisses now. He hopes Sarawat realizes he



can too, soon, so Tine can return the favor. Sarawat makes a soft noise and rolls on top of Tine, slotting their legs together. Tine instinctively tries to press back into the mattress so it won't be so obvious how hard he is, but then he remembers Sarawat saying *we can get each other off* and experimentally rolls his hips up into Sarawat's warm weight instead.

"Yeah," Sarawat says, half on a groan, and pushes back. He's hard again too, Tine realizes, and as he's processing that information, Sarawat shifts his weight so his good hand is free and starts running his hand up and down Tine's side, sending little shimmer-tingles dancing across his skin. At some point, Tine had looped his arms around Sarawat's neck, and he dares to trail one down Sarawat's back now, touching for the sake of touching. The other hand, he buries in the hair at the base of Sarawat's skull, tugging a bit when Sarawat makes an encouraging sound.

There's a bare strip across Tine's front where his shorts are riding low and Sarawat's shirt is bunching up that he finds himself paying a disproportionate amount of attention to. They're both only half dressed, practically naked, but this is the only place where he can feel Sarawat's skin hot against his. He pushes his hand up under the hem of Sarawat's shirt, and that's a bit better, but he still wants—

"Can I take my shorts off," he says, when it gets so *almost* isn't good enough.

Sarawat pauses where he's sucking a kiss into the side of Tine's neck. "Yeah."

"Can you help, I mean," Tine clarifies. Both him and his shorts are well and truly trapped under Sarawat, there's no way he's getting them off unless Sarawat moves. Regrettably.

Sarawat rolls to the side enough that Tine can wriggle out of his shorts, and as soon as he has them off, Sarawat rolls back on top of him and oh, that's—that's his dick, rubbing up against Tine's dick. Involuntarily, Tine presses up into it, the obscene hot hardness of him, that intoxicating drag. Tine fists his hands in the back of Sarawat's shirt, which is starting to soak through with sweat. It would be nice if he had taken it off. It would be nice if he had any idea where the lotion had gone.

On the other hand, if they're any more bare to each other, if this feels any better, Tine genuinely might not survive. It's already so much more than he knows what to do with; he feels an urgency thrilling through his nerves, the need to go faster, get there right now *right now*.

"Can we just," Tine says.

"Yeah," Sarawat agrees, rutting down into the groove of Tine's hip. He tries to get a hand between them, belatedly realizes it's the one with the brace when the plastic clonks against Tine's hipbone, and buries an embarrassed laugh against Tine's shoulder.

It barely interrupts the rhythm, even as Tine pets Sarawat's neck consolingly. Just moving together like this feels so good, rubbing his dick into Sarawat's abs, the friction between the close press of their bodies, smearing pre-come around. Tine gets a hand on Sarawat's ass, maybe to pull him even closer, but he ends up just hanging on, entranced by the supple skin and the way the muscles under his hand bunch as Sarawat moves. Heat and arousal coil

together in Tine's lower body, pulling his balls tight, spiking the sensation into high definition. He pushes up against Sarawat and comes, arching and jerking out of rhythm for long, helpless moments before he collapses back on the bed.

"Fuck," Sarawat says. He bites Tine's shoulder and leaves his mouth there, hot and open. He's still hard, but he's stilled his hips so he doesn't keep grinding against Tine's dick as it goes soft and over-sensitive, which Tine thinks is the most considerate thing he's ever done as Tine's boyfriend. His *boyfriend*. He can feel the dopey grin that's making its way across his face and feels about zero percent embarrassed about it.

"Can I come on your boobs?" Sarawat asks, looking up just in time to see what Tine's face is doing. His face attempts to do the same thing, but he mostly ends up looking horny. Tine thinks it's cute.

"Shit," Tine says, because he hadn't imagined people *said* stuff like that in real life, and then, "Yeah, yes, do it, yeah." He stretches his arms above his head to make a better target.

Sarawat gets on his knees—for a minute it looks like he's trying for his hands and knees, but is foiled by the wrist brace, which is too bad because he's so far away now—and gets a hand on his dick and then tilts his head like he's a surveyor at a building site. "Can you flex?" he asks, and the request is so shameless that it circles right back around to adorable and Tine finds himself giggling even as he brings his arms down and flexes as directed.

"Like that?"

Sarawat's eyes are big and dark. He licks his lips. "Yeah," he says, as he starts to move his hand on his cock.

Which, shit, wasn't that how they had got here in the first place? "Let me help," Tine says, reaching up to tangle his fingers with Sarawat's on his dick. Tine barely even gets up to speed before Sarawat starts coming, making a mess of their hands and then Tine's chest, when Sarawat bends over him.

He collapses onto his side when he finishes, eyes glassy, still holding Tine's hand. Tine squeezes his fingers, even though they're all gross and covered in come, and Sarawat smiles. He sits up enough to peel off his shirt and roughly wipe both of them off, then collapses onto the bed again. It looks like he could fall asleep any moment.

"I have one more thing to add to the list," Tine says.

Sarawat yawns. "List?"

"All the things we can do if I'm your boyfriend," Tine reminds him. Sarawat's face does a thing where it goes all soft and luminous.

"Yeah?"

Tine swallows. "I think we should sleep together. Right now, obviously, but also as much as we can."

"Oh," Sarawat says. He does what he's best at, which is invade Tine's space and manhandle him until they're spooned together. Tine hums happily. "Me too," Sarawat says softly, near Tine's ear.

"Good," Tine says. This time it's his turn to yawn.

"I might actually, um. Have a plan to make that easier. Sleeping together. If you wanted."

Tine snuggles back into his boyfriend's arms. "Tell me in the morning, yeah?"

Sarawat nuzzles his neck, which does funny things to his insides and might have gotten him ready for round three if he weren't suddenly so sleepy. "Okay," he says.

It's only a minute or two longer before Tine feels himself slipping down into sleep, lulled by the rhythm of Sarawat's breathing. Any other time he thinks he'd want to stay awake, to hold onto this moment, but there's no need. There will be plenty of others.

## End Notes

My twitter is @bitterchord\_, come yell about these very stupid and in love boys with me!

## Works inspired by this one

[【翻訳】hard times, baby\\_;](#) by [Azusa\\_s](#)

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