

# Acceptance

Von Kita

It was quiet, when the dust settled. So quiet, that for a moment Hagiwara feared the detonation had made him go deaf.

But then he heard the debris move under his feet as he stepped down the stairs, and small stones toppling down from the destroyed ceiling above.

He wasn't sure how he made it down the 19 floors, but when he stepped outside, the sun was bright and hurt in his eyes. There was so much noise, but it was kinda dull in his ears. He huffed, a breathless laugh.

Must be the adrenaline. The shock. Probably both. After all he didn't feel any pain, not yet.

Hagiwara shook his head. He felt a bit dizzy, but otherwise... fine? He looked around. "Matsuda!" It took him a moment to find him between all those people in their uniforms. "Ma-"

He tilted his head. Matsuda didn't seem to hear him. He was kneeling on the ground, gaze glued to the smoking skyscraper above. Of course! He probably thought that he-

"Oi, Jinpei-chan. Stop crying, ok? I'm here!" he said, a wide smile – or so he hoped – on his face as he approached him

"Hagiwara."

He could barely hear his voice over all the noises around them.

"Hagiwara."

Over and over he muttered his name, eyes still on the smoke.

"Hagi!"

Hagiwara frowned. Seemed like he was in shock, too. Was he actually crying?

"Hey, snap out of it! I'm here!" Hagiwara stepped in front of him, blocking the view.

"You said you'd treat me, you better not forget about that. Matsuda!"

But Matsuda didn't react. Didn't even look at him. Just stared right through him to that cursed building. And now that he was close enough, Hagiwara could see tears

running down his cheeks.

Something wasn't right, he realised. Something was very, very wrong.

Hagiwara turned around and looked up. That was a lot of smoke. Must've been a hell of an explosion. How did he make it out without a scratch?

Without a scratch?

Hagiwara looked at his hands. No scratch, no dust, no remains of the fire.

And before him on his knees, Matsuda was still crying silent tears, saying his name, pleading, praying, no, no, not him, not Hagi, no!

"I'm here!" Hagiwara said, more desperately, his voice now trembling. "I'm here, Matsuda! Look at me! Look at me! Jinpei!!" He crouched down and grabbed his shoulders, to shake some sense into him.

Or so he thought, as his hands went right through the other, making Hagiwara fight for balance for a moment.

"Wha-" He looked at his hands again, then at Matsuda. "No... no, no, no, that can't be...!" Trembling fingers touched Matsuda's wet cheeks, and when they did, Hagiwara could see them almost vanishing, like smoke from a cigarette. With wide eyes he stared, as he tried and tried again to cup Matsuda's face, like he had done countless times before, but he couldn't. Couldn't touch him, couldn't feel him.

Couldn't comfort him.

"Jinpei..." His voice was hoarse, heavy with tears now, just like Matsuda's. Realisation had hit him, harder than the detonation had.

He was dead. His body probably torn apart like the 20th floor of that building. And Matsuda? Matsuda had watched it, listened to everything from afar. Had witnessed his best friend's, his lover's death.

"I'm sorry," he whispered now, carefully wrapping his arms around him, without being able to hold him. "I'm sorry I made you cry."

It wasn't hard to accept his death. It was bound to happen at one point, even though Hagiwara had hoped he'd have a bit more time before that.

What was hard, was being stuck between worlds now and seeing Matsuda suffer because of him.

The next days were the hardest. Matsuda barely left his bed and cried a lot.

Hagiwara couldn't leave to the other side, so he stayed at his. He lay down by his side, hugging him from behind like he used to when he still could. He hoped that his presence might bring some relief to Matsuda, but like before, he wasn't able to touch him and Matsuda wasn't able to feel him.

His funeral came and seeing not just Matsuda, but Furuya, Morofushi, and Date cry silent tears for him... it hurt. Maybe even more than Chihaya's loud sobbing.

His friends managed to drag Matsuda along for a drink. They all needed it, but it was far from their usual, cheerful meetings. They told stories from the past, shedding tears again, until Matsuda left. He didn't say it, but Hagiwara could feel how much it took on him.

How much pain it brought him.

It also was the first day that Matsuda wrote him again. A text he'd never receive, as his phone was blown up, dust in the wind. But Hagiwara read it as Matsuda typed, his fingers slower than usual. It was a short text, but it brought both of them to tears.

"I miss you, asshole."

The next days he wrote more. How he was an idiot for not wearing his suit. How he should've run faster. How he shouldn't have left him!

Hagiwara read them all, knowing that he was right. He wondered, since that day, if he would've survived if he had worn that suit. If he could still be here with Matsuda, holding him, actually holding him. But it was no use. It was the past, and that couldn't be changed.

Still Hagiwara apologised. Told him each day that he was sorry to make him suffer.

More days passed and the crying stopped. Matsuda was still suffering, still writing him, but he wasn't crying anymore. Instead he was planning his revenge. He would find that guy and drag him to court. If he made it this far without killing him on the spot.

Hagiwara watched him carefully. He didn't like what he saw in his eyes. There was determination, but also something... else. Despair? Hopelessness. And anger. So much of it.

And with time, there was also guilt. More than once Matsuda wondered if it was his fault. If him asking Hagiwara to join the bomb squad was what brought his demise. If he still would've joined along with him if he hadn't asked him to.

"Yes!" Hagiwara replied each time, knowing that Matsuda wouldn't hear him. "Yes, I would've! Because someone would've needed to cool down your temper! To watch over you! To step on the brakes for you every now and then!"

How ironic that it was Matsuda who was still alive. Who scolded him for not wearing the protective suit.

"It's not your fault."

But Matsuda couldn't hear him.

Months passed, then a year, then two.

Matsuda didn't stop writing him, didn't stop grieving him. He also didn't stop trying to avenge him. He asked to be transferred to the special crimes department many times, but they wouldn't let him.

"Of course not," Hagiwara said, as Matsuda threw another dismissal letter in the bin. "Conflict of interest, what did you expect..."

But Matsuda couldn't hear him, just wrote him another text.

Four years had passed and Hagiwara still hadn't been able to leave to the other side. Not that he wanted to, really. He wanted to stay with Matsuda, even though it hurt, being so close to him, yet so far. But over time he had managed to touch him a few times. Hold him in the night, run his fingers along his cheek, and even kiss his neck once.

That time, Matsuda had felt it. All the other touches, he had noticed them, perceived them as a cold draught that made him shiver, but the kiss?

He had raised his hand to his neck and turned around, eyes wide and mouth open. For a moment he had seemed as if he wanted to say something, but in the end he had pressed his lips shut and looked away.

Hagiwara had stared at him in surprise, as for the blink of an eye Matsuda had looked right at him.

He tried many times again after that, but all Matsuda did was shiver, looking for the source of that annoying breath of wind.

And then they finally transferred him. But not to the special crimes department, but homicide. Matsuda wasn't happy about it, of course not. They did it to get him even further away from the bombs, the case four years ago, and most importantly, further away from avenging his dead friend.

He was assigned to Satou Miwako and Hagiwara had to admit that she handled him quite well. She didn't let him push her around and countered his big mouth rather professionally.

Hagiwara smiled from the backseat as Satou asked Matsuda if he was writing his girlfriend. Clever girl, he thought. Of course he had noticed how she had looked at him in those past few days. She was fond of him. Hagiwara couldn't blame her. Matsuda was, despite his rough attitude, easy to like.

"No, I'm writing to a bud. A close friend who doesn't receive them even if I send them."

Matsuda's smile hurt because Hagiwara could feel the pain behind it, hidden in his eyes behind dark shades.

"Since he blew up four years ago..."

Satou didn't ask further. She, too, probably could feel it.

Matsuda finished his text and Hagiwara read it from behind him. It stung a little, he had to admit, but on the other hand it gave him hope.

"She's a nice girl," he said, leaning on Matsuda's seat. "I wouldn't mind seeing you with her. Maybe she could make you move on."

He leant back, resting his head on the seat and staring at the ceiling. "Maybe then I could also finally move on," he mumbled, even though no one would hear him anyway.

Later that day they all met at his grave. They'd come together each year and Hagiwara felt like they finally were... a bit less sad about it. They smiled and joked with each other and Hagiwara smiled along with them.

But it didn't stay that peaceful. They got dragged into an incident in which they caught a bomber right in the act of placing their deadly device.

Hagiwara didn't have a pulse anymore, but if he did, it would've been up the roof by now. While Furuya followed the bomber, Matsuda was dismantling it with nimble fingers. Watching him made Hagiwara feel pride and excitement, but also fear. He was so good with it, always had been. There hadn't been a single thing that Matsuda hadn't been able to dismantle – and if necessary put together again – in minutes, but this thing was huge. Huge and dangerous and Matsuda wasn't wearing any protective clothing, just a suit and –

Hagiwara wanted to scream when the culprit came back, aiming their gun at Matsuda. Well, he DID scream, but nobody heard him.

"I'm having fun dismantling this bomb, so don't disrupt me, bastard!" Matsuda looked

like he was about to jump the bomber and Hagiwara tried to hold him back. He grabbed his sleeve, but neither him nor Matsuda had a chance to be surprised by it, as Date jumped in with the door of a car to catch the bullets - and rightfully scolded Matsuda for trying to attack someone with a gun when he himself was unarmed!

Hagiwara watched with relief how Morofushi and Furuya came to help, fought off the bomber and followed them upstairs.

They didn't catch them. Furuya barely made it out alive and the bomb was still ticking.

"We'll be waiting, Matsuda. Come back alive, ok?"

"I can't promise that."

These words stung. They stung worse than his tears four years ago. The thought of Matsuda dying here let Hagiwara tremble in fear.

But Matsuda was still Matsuda, ambitious and driven by his wish for revenge, so he stopped the timer just barely.

And then...

... it started counting again.

"Remote ignition..." Hagiwara whispered and put his hands on Matsuda's shoulders. "Run! Run, Jinpei!"

But Matsuda didn't move. He stared at the numbers, eyes wide, almost frozen. In shock? Fear? Hagiwara didn't know, but he knew he didn't want him to die!

"Move already!! Jinpei!!"

Matsuda twitched, as if someone had called out to him. "Hagi...?" An almost desperate smile found the way to his lips, as he pulled out the chewing gum and simply squeezed it into the device, stopping the two liquids from touching each other and forming an explosive.

One second passed, then two, then three. And just then Matsuda dared to breathe out in a huffed laugh. "Heh... I can't believe that worked." He smiled fondly. "Damn, Hagi... seems like you're still watching over me, huh?"

Hagiwara didn't respond. He just stared at him. "You heard me. Right now. You heard me calling you! Didn't you? Jinpei!"

But Matsuda didn't react this time.

Hagiwara followed him quietly for the rest of the day and then the day after. It was

That Day and Hagiwara knew that something was about to happen. He and Matsuda had come to the same conclusion with those weird faxes that had been sent to the homicide division for the past three years.

It was a countdown.

And just a few hours later, Matsuda stepped into gondola 72 of the big ferris wheel to defuse the bomb inside.

Hagiwara sat behind him, watching him closely, a wary smile on his lips. He didn't trust this. The bomb was too simple, there had to be a catch and -

"Brave police officer, I praise your courage and give you a reward. I'll give you a hint of the location of the other, bigger fireworks... it'll be displayed three seconds before the explosion. I wish you good luck..."

Hagiwara's eyes widened as he stood up to look over Matsuda's shoulder, reading the text on the display, while Matsuda told Satou about his conclusion that it must be a hospital.

"I'll contact you when I see the hint and know which hospital it is."

He hadn't felt warmth nor cold for the past four years, but Matsuda's words send an icy shiver down Hagiwara's back. "No. No, you can't be serious!"

But just from looking at his friend, he knew that he was. Matsuda leant back and lit up a cigarette, smiling at the big "No Smoking" sign next to him. "Just this time" he said and closed his eyes.

"Matsuda! Matsuda, no, stop this bullshit and defuse that bomb! Jinpei!"

Matsuda looked at his phone and started typing.

"No! No, Jinpei! You can't be serious! You can't! Jinpei!" He wrapped his hands around Matsuda's and forcefully pushed down the phone. "Look at me!!"

And Matsuda looked at him. There was only a hint of surprise in that soft expression on his face. "I'll join you in a bit, Hagi."

"What? You... no! No! I won't allow it!"

But Matsuda just leant over the bomb, a soft, but determined smile on his lips, as the hint started flickering on the display and he started typing.

"Matsuda! Hurry and defuse it! I beg you! Jinpei! Jinpei!! PLEASE!" He hugged him from behind, begging, pleading, but Matsuda didn't even try to dismantle it. He could've done it. Hagiwara knew, he could've done it if he wanted to! He was the best

he knew, he could've cut every wire needed to be cut in the remaining seconds, but...

But he didn't want to.

"You damn idiot...!"

It was quiet for a short moment before the world went white and loud.

"Let's go home, Hagi."