

Ever After

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Ever After

by [Nicolefrickle](#)

Summary

Hawks dies, Enji lives—although things are hardly ever so simple.

Notes

This is pretty much a love letter to canon Endhawks, please give it a chance!! I tagged vaguely because I worked real hard on making it an experience :")

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

His funeral is closed casket.

Not that Enji sees it firsthand—no one in their right mind expects him to be there and truthfully, he thinks it'd be worse if he went. The world is still watching him, they haven't yet decided where he stands. He feels their eyes but can't possibly know what they want him to say, or do, or what they *need* from their number one hero in the fallout. Closure? An apology? No apology at all?

He gives them nothing, because it's easier than figuring out what he needs, too.

And eight months later, Enji stands at his grave with flowers.

He hasn't visited often enough, he thinks. He should've made it a habit much sooner. There's a certain peace to standing here that he can't find anywhere else, not anymore—something about the way the graveyard is perched on a hill so high, on this precious land they've carved out for the sake of traditions. Like bringing a bundle of flowers for a ghost. Like wishing he could've brought more of himself with it.

And in the beginning the reason he didn't come was because he wasn't sure he'd return home whole again. But then he visited for the first time, and a second, and a third. Soon Enji realized that he was worrying about the wrong thing, that he was in pieces everywhere *else* but right here, at the foot of his headstone, trampling down the long grass so he could read Hawks' name and mouth it for the thousandth time too little. Then he'd stare at the mark in the stone between his birth and his death, because that dash connecting the years—Hawks lives right there. He'd made it into a home.

Enji might be the only one left to grace it. There aren't any mementos on his grave apart from another bundle of old, wilting roses, just like the ones Enji sends to Rei every month, renewing his guilt like a check-in. I'm still here, Enji thinks. As if there's anywhere else to be.

And as if it matters, anyway.

Hawks never did like flowers much.

Enji's ears start to ring as he stands there, visiting his number two hero, which he'll still call him even if they'd stripped his rank post-mortem. Ringing, ringing, around and around. The noise doesn't stop, it climbs louder until it reaches a fever-pitch that takes his flames and swells them up with it, and suddenly he's thrusting his hand into his pocket—fumbling for his phone—and clumsy like only Hawks had ever been successful in making him feel, because his favorite thing was catching Enji in his offbeats. And he was so *good* at it, too.

The ringing stops, and now Enji's phone is crushed against his ear so hard that it bends the cartilage. His flames snuff out against his sweat. He says goodbye to restraint and chokes the flowers he'd brought half to death.

There's a shuffle, a moment of silence. And then *finally* a greeting from the other end, one that comes so casually that anyone listening would think they'd only called to talk about the

weather—how it's been raining for days, and the ground is still wet under Enji's nice shoes and maybe that's why it feels like he's melting.

"Hey."

Just like that; so simple it can't possibly be real. So solid that Enji can't remember how it felt to be pieces.

"I didn't think you'd call," he says. The grip on both his phone and the flowers loosens, and Enji finds himself looking past the fence that surrounds the graveyard, expecting nothing but still compelled by some greater force to try.

"Where are you?"

And he's never gotten a straight answer before, but he's compelled to keep asking that, too.

"Close enough to see you brought a present." There's a pause. "Why'd you turn down the flames, number one? I'm sure Hawks would've wanted you to warm his grave."

Enji makes a noise of contention and his flames rise back up again, although he tells himself it was on purpose.

"You don't have to be so morbid."

"I'm dead, aren't I? What's the point if I can't have a little fun with it?"

Enji shifts on his feet. It shouldn't catch him off guard but it does, it does every time, and he knows that's why Hawks keeps saying it. Reminding Enji like clockwork. Haunting the hour they spend on the phone, like it doesn't bother Hawks at all—or if it ever had he'd buried it the same way they'd buried an empty coffin and called it the peace they needed. *Hawks is dead*; so why can't he say it? Maybe it's the way his voice rings in Enji's ear with shattering, in-person clarity. Or maybe it's the fact that this is just another offbeat Hawks had caught him in, and he *knows it*, and he won't let Enji go.

Greedy, Enji thinks. But he's a hypocrite when he thinks it, and somehow that's worse than anything else. He isn't thinking straight when he replies, "The point of it is you don't need to *be* here, anymore."

But maybe it wasn't the time to say it. Even if it's true.

"I've got nowhere else to go," Hawks smooths it over, like he's so good at. "So what's your excuse? The paparazzi are long gone, they don't care about getting pictures of you at a grave."

Enji's facade wavers. "You don't know that."

"Oh but I do, and I also know that they've stopped showin' this pretty face on the news weeks ago. Tragedy must not be good for ratings anymore." Hawks hums in thought. "*Is* it still a tragedy, or have they looped back around to poetic justice?"

"It doesn't matter what they say. No one has forgotten about you."

"Not yet."

There's something so *wrong* with his voice. Enji can't tell if Hawks says it because he wants it or because he doesn't. Before, surely, he would've rejected the notion as outright ridiculous—it couldn't be, not while Hawks lived his life behind camera lenses and adoring gazes. But Enji isn't sure of himself like he used to be, and maybe fading away has become something to hope for.

There's a placeholder noise on the other end. "You never answered my question. Why'd you come this time?" Hawks asks again, even though he hadn't really asked it in those words.

And Enji has an answer, but it's only half-formed and the second he tries to give it room to breathe, he has to swallow it back down like something dark and sick and altogether contrived. He doesn't want to be humored. He doesn't want Hawks to hear anything he has to say, even though Enji could hang up and save him but instead here he is, still holding the phone the same way he's holding the roses—like they're both made of gold.

"It doesn't matter," he settles for, furious at himself for not speaking his mind. "Why did you?"

Hawks brushes off the sincerity of the question altogether. "Haunting you just feels like the right way to spend my days, now, you know? Balancing out the universe, and all. You're the one who killed me."

Enji flinches.

"You don't-" But that sick feeling comes back again and he can't bear to swallow it down, this time. He has no more room in his heart for insincerity. Enji fists the bundle of roses again, squeezing so hard he catches his thumb on a leftover thorn and doesn't notice until it bites through him.

You're the one who killed me.

Enji keeps his voice steady, somehow. "You know that I had no other choice."

Hawks makes a noise that could mean anything. "I *do* know. But you could've looked a little sadder about offing me, at least," and he's so blasé about it that it cuts Enji worse than his anger ever could've. He bleeds from the thorn and heaves his chest, searching for air. Finding that it all smells like damp earth.

"You have no *idea* what was going through my head that day."

"So tell me."

But Enji can't even open his mouth, and not just because he doesn't know where in the world to begin. Sometimes that day exists and sometimes Enji doesn't want it to—can't let it exist or he'll become those scattered fucking pieces again, so through sheer force of will, it suddenly

never happened at all. But it's under his control. He has a system. Enji wouldn't be standing at a dead boy's grave if he felt, even for a moment, that it'd be the end of him, too.

"Alright," Hawks pushes through the silence, "if you wanna be all stubborn about it, let's play a game, then. Hot or cold."

Enji doesn't know where this is all coming from, just that he hates it. He hates the way Hawks has become unpredictable and flighty. It isn't charming anymore, not when Hawks isn't here in person leaning too close, wanting too much, catching his eyes. Leaving nothing up to interpretation.

"H-"

"Hot or cold," Hawks interrupts, then goes right for his jugular without any pretense of treating it like a game, which Enji could've never prepared himself for. "You hated me for lying to you."

Enji clenches his teeth, then speaks so slowly that the words have to drag themselves off his tongue. "I never hated you."

But Hawks doesn't believe his answer. Or even worse than that—he keeps it, grabs onto it and tucks it away so he can try to unpack his shallow words later, when Enji isn't there to set him straight about what he meant by it.

And then he keeps going. "Hot or cold. You pieced together all the awful fuckin' things I did while I was undercover, and that made it *easier*."

Enji is shaking his head like Hawks can see it. Maybe he can, or maybe he isn't looking, anyway.

"It didn't. Nothing could've made it easier."

This answer, though, Hawks doesn't accept without a fight.

"I'm the reason for your scar, don't be all high and mighty about it. That was all on me. You could've died when I led High-End to us."

It's true, and it's a horrible truth, but isn't it strange how it pales in comparison to everything Enji has done?

"Heroes are bound to get scars," he rationalizes, and then his voice dips lower, because somehow he hasn't said it before now.

"And you saved my life."

Hawks is quiet for a moment. Then quiet for so long that the empty space is large enough to send Enji reeling through it, uncertain, moving further and further away from Hawks' disembodied voice on the phone which is the only fucking thing he has, anymore. And now he's wondering, is this what Hawks has been harboring all this time while he pretended to want Enji back? Is it *hate*?

"Hot or cold," Hawks restarts, a little friendlier—even though his words don't match. "You'd still kill me all over again."

And then it's Enji's turn to be silent.

"You're burnin' up, Endeavor-san."

But this isn't a game anymore. Hot or cold doesn't even breach the surface. Enji feels the inexplicable urge to throw the roses down and set them on fire where they land, stain the gravestone ash-black, kick the sparks all over in a tantrum like he's twenty years old again learning that strength isn't the universal currency he thought it was. Still isn't, and somehow he still can't understand it. So now Enji wants to kick himself too, harder than the stone; he wouldn't want to break Hawks' grave when he feels so much more expendable.

At last he takes a breath to compose himself when he has every right to be angry. Because all the statements up to this point have been traps—but he'll keep falling for Hawks, every time.

"There was no other way—you think I haven't thought about it, too? That I haven't run through every god-forsaken moment trying to find the thread? You think I don't-"

But Enji stops himself, because exploring that train of thought out in the wild would send it spiraling off the tracks into oblivion.

"Don't what?"

Don't regret it, he finishes, in the safety of his head where all precious things go to die. That I don't hate myself. Or at least did for that month when you let me believe it was real—or maybe you just had more faith that I'd discover the truth sooner, and it's my own fault for believing that you'd betrayed me so easily without even fucking questioning it. Like I'd never even known you at all.

But all Enji says out loud is, "It doesn't matter, now."

"God, I wish it did."

Enji pulls the phone away so he doesn't snap at his words, so he'll be able to build up his walls again and become stable enough for the both of them. He can't bear the thought of shattering their fragile truce—or the fact that it's fragile to begin with. That they've become this fragile thing. If he doesn't change the subject, he's afraid that Hawks will keep pushing for an answer because he must know it for certain, now, how much Enji would do for him. How Enji wouldn't think twice if it meant something to Hawks, even something so small that he'd never know the difference.

Then Enji presses the phone against his ear once again, softly this time. Thinking that maybe it'll translate into words. "Tell me something else. Tell me that you're eating, that you aren't sleeping in an alley somewhere where they can find you."

He leaves it vague intentionally. *They* could mean a lot of different people; the Hero Commission, the villains who escaped the fight, or even fellow heroes-in-arms, the ones who

turned against Hawks after learning half-truths and didn't even let his body grow cold before crucifying him. *Poetic justice*, Hawks had called it, repeating the news personalities who don't matter; never would matter. And so everyone else became poets, and *us* became a word for Hawks and Enji alone.

Hawks is smart enough to see the diversion from before—it's not like Enji even tried to hide it. But maybe Hawks needs it too.

"Have a little faith in me, will you? Feels like I've been livin' on my own for ten years anyway. This is nothin', it's a walk in the park in comparison, and besides," there's a pause that's surely a smile—if Enji can still trust his instincts. "I have the number one hero on speed-dial."

Enji can hear his voice settling into every word, going back to the Hawks he knows, the Hawks that knows him and would never say something so wrong and strange as *you hated me*.

"Alright," Enji agrees. "I trust you."

Which he'd decided to do seven months ago; and before everything else, it was unconditional.

Hawks is quiet for a moment afterward. It almost seems like he's trying to wrap his head around something difficult, but Enji is just glad he's stopped playing his game because he couldn't take much more of it.

"Why didn't you think I'd call?" Hawks finally wonders. The way he asks it, it's clear that Enji's words had been bothering him this entire conversation, like a thorn that's worked its way out.

Enji replies, "I do every time," and before he can think better of it, "I'm only sure you're still alive when my phone's ringing."

And it isn't often that he manages to catch Hawks offbeat for once, so that hitch in his breath is a delicacy.

"Now who's being morbid?" Hawks mutters.

"Still you."

But Enji can't believe he'd *told* him that this phone call is a lifeline. That he comes here hoping like only a fool could hope, starving for Hawks' voice, keeping everything by-the-book so suspicion doesn't fall on him and pick him apart. In the end Enji isn't left with much. An hour that would look like mourning to anyone watching—and maybe it still is. A flower to place on his grave while Hawks teases him and asks for something better, like a take-out platter of *yakitori*, because Hawks never lived by the rules so *why should my ghost be any different?*

And he's right.

But Enji still brings flowers instead of anything else.

You're so stubborn.

It's Hawks' voice but it's coming from within Enji's head, now, from those words being drilled into him again and again, after Hawks said them so often Enji should've charged him for repeats.

And you're ridiculous, Enji would say back, just as guilty of repeating. But it was the truth too. Ridiculous boy. Ridiculous in the way he always trailed behind Enji to make him to look backward to speak; the way he'd pop in unannounced, uninvited, as if Enji should've been waiting for him all along; the way he walked with too-big steps he'd never grow into, laughed too much, forced Enji to meet him halfway, to come closer, to open wide. Ridiculous in the very way Hawks *flew*, which made anyone on the ground feel crippled, even Enji.

And ridiculous in the way he questioned everything. Not like the Socratic Method but something much worse, more refined than it had any right to be. The Hawks Method. He'd say something clever in the form of a question so that Enji *had* to answer it, forced to humor Hawks even though he knew exactly what he was doing—although sometimes Enji's mouth would still twitch, then even more rarely, it would stay. And it turns out that one-in-a-hundred-tries smile is the answer Hawks had been looking for all along.

So Enji knew how smart he was.

He should've realized, then, that Hawks wouldn't just betray every hero and person he once swore his life to—least of which, the one he went through all that trouble just to make smile.

And suddenly it's the week before the battle again, when nothing has been destroyed and no one is yet dead. Cherry blossom petals still hang on the trees like hostages, and Enji walks into his agency that morning to be told there's a package sitting on his desk. His eyes only, Burnin' remarks. It must be something of importance.

Except it isn't, not yet. It's the same book he'd already opened and furrowed his brows over once before, heart racing, flipping pages, connecting dots; but this copy isn't anything special. It doesn't come with a message or a return address, there's nothing left to decode, and Enji slips it into his drawer when it's clear it holds nothing else of value. He has a lot on his mind. That's a pitiful excuse, but he uses it. There's no time left for entertaining spam mail, and even less for playing games.

And when the petals finally start to fall, Enji makes sure that Hawks falls with them.

It's a month after the fight, now, when everything is beautiful because they'd won—with the exception of the number two hero who's become ugly, and traitorous, and cold. Enji stands at the gaping window in his office, looking outward. He isn't thinking. If he was it'd be about Hawks, so instead he remains hollow inside because it's easier than convincing himself that he'd hated the boy all along.

He doesn't know what sparks it. He can't remember why he sat down at his desk and opened up that drawer again, to stare at the packaged gift he'd written off as nothing special; from no one important. He rubs his thumb across the cover like it's a rarity and not a copy of a book he'd already read.

And then all at once he knows.

Enji's nearly-depleted heart stops, stutters, and restarts with a beat so wild you'd think he was fighting for it. The realization is devastating. But even more than that; it's smart, and planned, and *ridiculous*, which is the only reason he knows it's true. Enji doesn't need any convincing. It's taken him too long to figure it out, already—Hawks will tease him to no end for being so old and slow.

And Enji will listen to his voice and hear nothing else.

Clever boy, he thinks. His eyes are wet. His knuckles are still white from gripping the cover, and he's never quite felt relief like this, the kind that strikes his body so hard it ignites him.

And from that point onward he burns off a little piece of that relief every time Hawks calls him. Enji had told the truth, before: that sometimes it still feels like he's dead and it's so ironic, and so *unfunny* that he has to visit Hawks' grave to be reminded that he isn't.

Hawks is alive, and Enji had to fill in all the gaps himself. Like if it was a last resort, like what the League of Villains had threatened him with that was so terrible, what had snowballed so far out of control that Hawks couldn't stop it and the only way forward was to keep rolling until impact. Even now Enji doesn't know everything, but he respects him enough not to pry just like Hawks does for him.

The only thing he's absolutely sure of is that he'd killed Hawks' double, which means that either Twice was in on it from the beginning, or Hawks had used him. Does it matter which? Maybe, but not enough that Enji can't look past it. He's more concerned with those unforgivable moments that followed it, the start of the battle when their eyes met; angry, confused, standing on different sides. Standing on opposite ends of the fucking planet, when just two days ago Hawks had waved to him with a smile so big it nearly split his lips and bled his heart onto his collar.

The Hawks he'd seen then was a stranger, and that was the point. Because he *knew* Enji like no other—knew his quirk and his temper and all they're capable of combined, and Hawks needed to become that person no one could recognize so that Enji would yell, and hurt, and play into their bastardized game of cops and robbers until his fire exploded into a deep, unsettling blue.

No one doubted it when Hawks had simply melted away, erased, cremated, dying right there in Enji's flames. And if Enji couldn't even see the illusion himself how could the rest of the world? They trusted their number one hero, they couldn't possibly know how Hawks used Enji because he had to and because he could.

It wasn't really Hawks. That's true enough. But Enji didn't know, and he's never feared anything like he does asking Hawks if he expected Enji to realize it before or after he killed him.

It wasn't really Hawks, but no matter how strong the boy is and how he'd planned it from inception, it must've been an unspeakable thing to watch his hero come after him and murder

the copy right where he stood—rend the skin from his fucking bones until they'd both turned to liquid.

It wasn't real, and that still doesn't mean it was fake.

But they're real now, real as voices on the phone together, in the graveyard where one of them is supposed to be sleeping. *Morbid*, it's always so morbid. He wishes there was another way. He almost says so himself, but Hawks is a different sort of quiet now than the one Enji had reeled through or the one that became his thorn. It almost feels uncertain—if nothingness can even be interpreted.

And when Hawks breaks the silence, it turns out he isn't finished with his game.

"Hot, or cold." He begins anew, taking a deep breath and not speaking again until the air is done rushing out against the phone.

"You want to see me."

Something lurches forward against the back of Enji's ribs. It nearly breaks him, this dark and wounded thing, like a monster that's been sleeping inside him for decades breathing ash into his lungs. He hates it, and it hates him back unconditionally. Enji has to stall for a moment because the sky looks like it's spinning now and he can't think, or even feel, so he chooses instead to squat down—unsteady on his own two feet—and place the roses onto Hawks' grave where his name is etched into the stone.

Real name, he amends. But Enji hasn't mentioned it and Hawks hasn't offered, and so it stays there in the ground.

You want to see me.

Somehow Enji's whole voice sounds out-of-tune when he replies, "Only if you do."

Hawks laughs at him, exasperated. "I'm starting to think you don't know how this game works."

He knows how it works. It's just that Enji understands he's being an unforgivable kind of selfish right now, that he *knows* better, that he should've hung up a long time ago and it's a deep fault of his own that he can't. With every call and every minute that passes it's become clearer why Hawks is still here. Why he's keeping his haunting grounds instead of rising from the ashes somewhere else. Somewhere that deserves him.

But even the mere *thought* of hanging up and driving Hawks from him is painful, excruciating; it doesn't matter if it'd be good for him. Good for Enji. Because what the hell does Enji know about *good*?

It isn't his place to decide Hawks' fate, it never was until Hawks had made him.

Selfish, he chastises himself. Selfish about what he's doing, even if it's unintentional, and all because it's easier to keep Hawks talking than to cast rocks and make him leave. All because he doesn't want to look for a future without the boy who'd given his wings to Enji twice, the

last time with no promise of ever getting to use them freely again. Hawks had been grounded so irreversibly. He can't be himself, he can't be anything of the hero he once was, and yet-

You want to see me.

Hot or cold.

"Warm," Enji breathes, and his fire grows up towards the clouds.

It's too long afterward before Enji realizes that the constant static has gone away, and Hawks hadn't been on the other line for a minute, or longer. And maybe his first instinct should be to interpret it as rejection, but Hawks doesn't run away, he either goes out in a flash or not at all. He doesn't say anything without it having a purpose.

So Enji says goodbye to no one and leaves the grave behind, searching like he'd done at the very start, beyond the fence and then somewhere still inside it where Hawks could've been all along. The mausoleum on the outskirts. The ash trees all in a row.

It's there that Enji sees him, leaning against one with his arms in his pockets and his leg kicked back like he'd been just waiting to be noticed. Enji's stomach catapults itself into his throat. It's truly, unmistakably him—not some ghost. Not a crude double throwing itself at Enji with suicidal intentions and nothing left of the Hawks he knew. *Him*; the boy he'd give everything to; hadn't forgotten, never would forget. And also the boy he'd murdered because he had no choice, it was either him or let a billion people follow in his footsteps and watch them all turn to dust within the year.

Not like any of it matters now, when it's just them and old bones.

And Enji doesn't know what he should say to him, or how to *look* at him, even though they were just talking on the phone like one of them wasn't pretend-dead and the other hadn't not-pretend killed him. So he ends up saying nothing at all, and his feet keep carrying him forward on their own accord. He rides the breeze.

Hawks stands up straight and rubs the top of his head, nervous in a way he'd never been before around Enji. "It's the hair, isn't it?" He ruffles the short ends. "I knew I should've gone red."

And he looks uncomfortable about the admission, because it's no mystery why he'd thought about dyeing his hair *red* out of all the inconspicuous colors, even if he had chosen chestnut-brown in the end. The warmest brown. Brown like the earth, the very ground Enji had dug to plant roses.

Enji's breath is unsteady as he walks towards him. He's trying so hard to squeeze the tremble from his hands, but the sight of Hawks up close again is enough to keep him shaking, and those golden eyes cast a spark right through the gaps in Enji's ribs. It ricochets against his very bones, sets his guilt ablaze until it's been burned away and nothing painful lingers.

Hawks tilts his head. His bangs fall over his eyelashes, and he rocks on his feet, and he looks nothing like himself but Enji is so fond that it doesn't matter.

"Endeavor-san?" He asks, as if he's done something wrong.

They collide to make it right.

Enji snuffs out his flames so that he can embrace him in earnest, swallowing Hawks into his protective arms, solemn, barely breathing, taking him back whole. He's never felt so deprived of anything. They stand there under the ash tree long enough that the sun moves. Enji laces his hands into his ridiculous, light-brown hair and pulls his head close, holding him just like that: so warm, so solid and real that nothing could ever happen to him.

It's strange how Enji suddenly wants to borrow long-dead words that aren't his and tell him, *I am here*.

But instead Enji parts his hair and presses his lips against his forehead. The skin turns pink and Hawks smiles—until he doesn't, and his hands start to tremble the same way Enji's were before when nothing felt right. But Enji doesn't pull away from him yet, he can't possibly, not while he's imprinting this moment and wishing he could send this affection right through to Hawks' pretty mind. His clever mind that figured out a way to stay alive in all the world's chaos.

And all the world's chaos is still spinning around them, right now, and it'll keep spinning as long as Hawks is on the run outsmarting death and embracing his reaper. The only person who'd be relieved to see him alive is already here. *Us*. The rest would only try to kill him again or ask for answers they'd never be satisfied by, because they'd already decided where Hawks stands. *Them*.

Hawks has been stripped of everything, there's no such thing as turning the clock back to zero. Not for this.

Enji pulls away and looks at him.

And then he *truly* looks at him, and his relief drops right down into its own shallow grave.

"Hot. Or cold," Enji starts, so sure of his sudden realization that it aches like he'd heard it in his voice. "You came here to say goodbye to me."

Hawks holds back a noise that suffocates in his throat while he smiles, pretends, makes everything better like he's so good at doing. Enji allows him to take his hand and nuzzle against the side of it. It's a softness that doesn't match anything else, because Enji knows he's right.

Hawks answers just as Enji did before. "*Warm.*"

So they've landed somewhere in-between it all. They're visiting in this halfway-place where Enji is alive and Hawks is just barely dead, but still nothing matters because the world has allowed them to touch again and Enji could never repay it.

"Do you know where you're going?"

Enji asks because he can't pretend it isn't happening. He's too much of a realist for denial, even if he needs it, and even if later he'll regret not fighting for once.

"Not yet, not at all." Hawks laughs, like he's unbothered by the concept of being aimless. His smile pokes through again. "Maybe I should just wing it."

Enji hums in disapproval, "Don't be stupid, now."

Hawks looks down at his shoes, but it isn't because he'd been scolded. He rubs his cheek against Enji's hand again, his open palm, imprinting the moment just like Enji had done before, and it's on purpose that he's chosen this one—to catch both the good and the bad so that Hawks can immortalize him in grey.

Enji feels just as he did eight months ago, holding that copy of *Special Abilities: Liberation Front* when everything clicked and his heart chugged back to life as he stroked the cover. He looks at Hawks now with that same wonder, rubbing a thumb across his cheekbone like Enji hadn't just called him a name so he wouldn't spill his damned soul instead.

Hawks blinks at him. "You're supposed to be kind to spirits. It's bad luck to insult them."

So Enji is *kind* to his spirit. He pulls Hawks against his chest and warms his cold, pink lips with his own, sliding his hand to Hawks' waist and then under his shirt, drawing lines, digging in, reaching for his flesh and clothes and soft feathers. All the things that a ghost would have no use for, anyway.

Morbid, he thinks, kissing him over the graveyard.

More, he thinks, even louder, when Hawks squeezes his arms around his neck and Enji realizes that when he finally lets go, he might never get him back the same way.

Selfish, he thinks, loudest of all.

The look on Hawks' face is red and unreadable when he pulls away and tells Enji, all at once, "Italy."

There's something funny about the implication that Hawks only thought of it after Enji kissed him. The humor lasts as long as it takes to swallow, and catch his breath, and remember that it means he's leaving.

"Why?"

"It's a peninsula." Hawks waits for him to get it, and when he doesn't, "I like the beach. There'd be a lot of it to choose from."

Enji feels like he might turn to stone.

"You make it sound so simple."

"Maybe it will be," Hawks says. "But probably not."

"Mm. It's better if I don't know the specifics."

It takes all his strength to speak to Hawks like this, calm, stoic, a burning ache in his chest that grows and grows until it's a wonder smoke isn't pouring out of his nostrils. But he needs to be this person. He needs the kind of strength that moves buildings and downs planes, and it might not be that universal currency, but it's enough to buy Hawks a chance to live again.

Hawks fists his hands in Enji's shirt a little tighter.

"If I can't trust you, then what's the point of any of this?"

It startles him. But Hawks is right about it, *smart* about it, like with everything else.

And if Enji only closes his eyes he could see it all laid out; a paradise on the beach where no one knows his face, his name, the fact that he was the adored number two hero before he was doomed. *Italy*, Enji echoes until it sounds natural. Sounds like Hawks. Until he can imagine the appeal of night breezes coming off the ocean after it'd soaked in the sun all day, wringing out that warmth so Hawks can feel it, and fly in it, and maybe it'll make up for a country that hates him for being a victim.

Enji swallows and takes it back, instantly. Not a victim. It's the last thing Hawks would want to be called, and he'd be angry if he knew Enji'd thought it.

They look at each other. Enji can only say, "I hear it's beautiful."

Hawks' eyes flash back.

"Do you ever wonder why you never worked outside of Japan, like All Might did?"

And Enji knows that tone of voice, the way his lips quirked and the way he waits for Enji's answer. It's the Hawks Method in the flesh.

It works, it always does.

"No, I haven't."

"Really? I think it's a little weird, especially now with villain activity on the downtrend. I'm sure no one would miss you if you left for a bit, a few days." He tugs Enji's shirt. "If I'm being conservative."

Which he isn't—so a few days in Hawks-speak means something more like two whole weeks, and Enji will argue him down to seven days on principle, and then Hawks won't let it rest until it's sitting pretty at eight. Just to feel like he'd pulled one over on Enji and gotten away with it.

But that isn't for a while, now.

"I didn't realize you've been watching the stats."

"Force of habit, I guess. I just can't help myself."

And then Enji's one-in-a-hundred smile finally makes its appearance, because the Hawks Method is tried and true and Enji wouldn't dream of trying to fight it.

They say goodbye, right there under the ash tree.

Hawks thanks him for being a hero and apologizes for everything else, and although Enji is having none of it he lets Hawks make his peace anyway, because he wouldn't want him weighed down for his flight.

Watching him leave—standing in the shadow of his wings—he remembers so clearly what it was like in the hours after learning he was alive. Not knowing what to do, how to live with it, how to contact him if he even *wanted* Enji to, but ultimately coming to his grave on a feeble slice of hope that it's what Hawks was waiting for. He remembers the absolute terror of getting a phone call from an unknown number while some deep, twisted part of him knew it was Hawks. Just as it happened today.

"Hey," Hawks had said; so simply, just like that.

Then before Enji could even begin to craft a reply to the boy he'd murdered less than a month ago, Hawks interrupted him.

"Don't-" he'd stopped to catch up to his breath, like he'd just flown a hundred miles or more. "Don't say my name out loud. I don't wanna chance it."

Enji couldn't believe it was real. He'd been spinning out of his damn mind with fury, and *relief*, and a sort of desperation that he'd never quite allowed himself to feel before, even in the moment he'd struck Hawks down from the sky. Worst of all was the sensation of hearing Hawks' voice again, right there against his ear—apologetic like he didn't need to be, and not angry like he should've been—because he's always been too good to his hero.

So Enji caught his breath too, scanning the skyline.

"What should I call you, then?" he'd finally wondered.

Who are you now that I've taken everything?

And he remembers the way Hawks answered him, how his laugh had opened up into a sound so endless and light after everything he'd done, after he'd gone and tricked the whole world into thinking he'd burned to ashes only to rise up on the other side of it all:

"Free."

End Notes

Thank you for reading !!!! I have a million thoughts about enji & hawks' endgame after writing this... the idea of Hawks faking his death to finally be free of this life he never wanted, and at the same time making society better & easier for heroes like he did want... all at the expense of himself... I'm so emo.

Anyway the Italy thing is absolutely NOT a nod to Hannibal idk what you're talking about. But Enji visits him time and time again, and it's hard, and complicated, and he wouldn't trade it for the world.

Comments would mean a lot on this one <3

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