

Palindrome

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Palindrome

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Summary

Hawks doesn't realize just how much he needs Endeavor, or why it feels like he's still racing time.

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A character study of Hawks with flashbacks and inner thoughts, heavy on the Endhawks, heavy on the hurt

Notes

This is somewhat detached from canon, I didn't write it with any timeline in mind.

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

It starts with one feather that he doesn't even know is there, at first. Then two feathers—four, eight, ten. They grow like uneven weeds from his shoulder blades and everyone is smiling about it. Where did these wings come from, Keigo? No one knows, it's a miracle, he's going to be so *special*. His mother cries because she's proud of him, but Keigo didn't do a thing.

His father is even happier. "Honey, this is good. Oh, this is *good*," he tells his wife. The phone is already in his hand, and his eyes are wild with ideas.

Keigo waits for the *good* his father talked about to come—and even now he's still waiting for it.

Sixteen feathers. Keigo is ten years old. People tell him to fly, but he can't carry himself in the air like they want him to and his face is scattered with band-aids from falling. Maybe he needs more feathers, or maybe he really is stupid. His wings are suddenly a disappointment but it's all his fault—he needs to try harder. *Don't be lazy*, his father says. *No breaks, and no taking it easy*.

He doesn't have a hero, yet.

Thirty-two feathers, now. Keigo can float like a hummingbird if he concentrates, but everyone just urges him to fly. Time trials, flight trials, day after day after day. He doesn't go to school anymore because it'd be a waste, a distraction. His mother is prouder when he's in the air than when he can do his time-tables in less than a minute, or when he starts reading books faster than he can find new ones. Isn't that what they wanted from him? *Faster*, so fast that he's gasping for air trying to race himself.

He feels like he's running out of time.

"I bought you something," his mother tells him after his training, one day. There are forty-four feathers on his back, smooth and distinguished. They're coming in slower now—Keigo thought he'd be punished for not doing better, but instead he gets this gift. He clutches it tightly in his hands before he even knows what it is.

His mother smiles at the plush doll. "Do you like it?"

Keigo recognizes the hero from billboards and shop windows from when he's taken through the city. Endeavor. A real hero, like he has to be. He rolls his thumb over the cartoonish flames. They're red like his wings, and he can almost feel the heat if he squints and imagines it hard enough. He feels it even more that night, clutching it to his cheek, driving the bad-dream villains away like a real hero would help him do.

And the next day he falls out of the sky and breaks his arm.

Time runs out like it promised it would.

He never does get it back.

"Hawks?!" The voice snaps him out of his daze, and he sits up from the grass he was lying on—limbs spread like a snow angel in the park. He must've fallen asleep. He can afford to dream every once in a while, now.

Hawks crosses his legs and shoots a big smile. "What's up, kid?"

"Um..." The young boy gulps and turns his face away while he thrusts a picture in Hawks' direction. Poor kid, his nerves must be on fire. Hawks cures any anxieties with a laugh and takes the picture from him, one of those bite-sized posters they'd included in *Quirk* magazine this week. He admires the image for a second too long. "Got a pen?"

The kid blushes so hard it looks like he might faint.

"Don't worry 'bout it," Hawks pulls out a little inkwell from the inside pocket of his jacket, popping the cork open. He'd learned this trick pretty quickly. A feather floats around his shoulder and dips itself in the ink, just like magic. The boy watches Hawks sign his name on the bottom corner, hands-free. The stars in his eyes are enough to keep Hawks humble.

He hands off the poster and the kid scurries away, already too excited to tell his friends about it, the group waiting by a park bench for the bravest of them to return. *I met Hawks!* He'll say, and those stars in his eyes will get so bright they'll turn contagious. *Look, he signed his name! He's so cool! He was born to be a hero, he's a prodigy, just like his parents told him he had to be. Just like the men in black whispered about. They were right, weren't they? Look at you, Keigo. You're so loved.*

Hawks looks up at the sky, now. He'd lost count of his feathers a long time ago. He doesn't want it in his head. It'd be so easy to use his mind-link and count them, but his obsessions would come back with it and he'd be stuck on the numbers all over again, racing himself half to death.

The ink goes back into his jacket and he starts walking. Thinking. After a block he's running instead, going so fast that his soles hit the pavement like gunshots, and it's a feeling so unlike flying that it reminds him he has a choice, now.

But he's a prodigy

But he's a hero.

There's nothing else lifting him.

He ends up at the beach when the sun is close to setting. It's as far as he can go without resorting to his wings—which he's pretending aren't there, right now. It's a small comfort left over from the game he always liked to play at night. Kids play pretend all the time; I'm a dragon, I'm a princess, I'm a hero.

Hawks pretended he never grew wings. He'd tell his feathers to get *away* from him and they'd listen, obediently stripped from his back while he forced them under his bed, because that's where all the bad things lived. Monsters. He'd feel their link itching at the back of his mind, and he'd clutch his doll so close he'd start to sweat where the fabric pressed against his skin. But his hero always kept him safe.

And he'd wake up with his feathers against his back again, like they couldn't stay away from him.

The sand gets colder against his legs as the sun sets on the water. He laughs at himself, "What the fuck are you doing?" Saying it out loud makes him feel better. So does falling back onto the beach like he did in the park grass, only this time he can create shapes that'll stay. He moves his arms up and down and makes a sand-angel. And then he lets out a breath, incredulous, and messes up everything he's made.

His real wings are floating behind him like they're on some invisible hanger, waiting for him to put them on again. That one feather is still black on the tip, too, but it's buried in the rest as the wind ruffles through them. They're more impatient than he is.

It's like they want him to do something.

Hawks sits up again. He grabs handfuls of sand and squeezes it through his fingers. Stupid bird, flightless bird, all by himself on the beach. This view isn't calm like it's supposed to be. Sunsets are meant for couples, or friends, or a family sitting down on a blanket, watching it set together and putting their hands on his shoulder. Smiling into his hair because he's loved.

He's loved, isn't he?

He's loved.

He's loved.

And suddenly his phone is in his hand before he even knows who he's dialing.

"Hawks?" It gets easier to breathe with his voice on the other line. He picked up for once—*shocking*.

Hawks bites his index nail and gets right to it, trying not to sound like he needed this call. "Hey, you seem like you aren't doing anything important. Come to that Ramen stand with me."

There's a sigh from Endeavor that means he knows this game all-too-well. "And what exactly makes you think I'm not busy? I have paperwork to do from this morning."

"Now that just sounds like an excuse."

"It is an excuse. Because I'm *busy*."

Hawks falls back into the sand with the phone against his ear, feeling a little more like himself. With a wave of his hand, a group of feathers clump above him and wait to be told what to do, so eager. He conducts them around in the air like notes. "Are you hungry enough for a break?"

"No." Endeavor is sounding awfully impatient, but he could always hang up. He's done it before.

"Take-out?"

"No."

Hawks stops moving his hand. The feathers stop mid-air with him, and he notices the sky getting dimmer behind them. It's almost dark; It's dark and Hawks is reaching so far that it's a wonder Endeavor doesn't see how hard he's trying.

Hawks hangs up on a promise to be there soon.

He flies there instead of running—and he's *fast*, flapping his numberless feathers, happy to be useful to him again. He lands with a thud and has to quickly guess Endeavor's order on a

whim. They've never eaten it together before, he can only imagine what the hero likes; Ramen with extra beef and extra sprouts. Light on the scallions. No egg.

And Endeavor's top-story window sounds like the best place to meet him.

He's so absorbed in his work that he doesn't notice Hawks at first, even though he casts a shadow through the window, and peeks in with his hands cupped around his eyes. Endeavor lied to him. The paperwork doesn't look that important. It's nearly 7pm—shouldn't he be home, in that big, expensive house of his? Isn't his office so awfully empty?

Hawks taps on the glass, and Endeavor makes his way over to unlock the window, looking as stoic as ever. It makes Hawks' feathers start to get jittery. For once he doesn't know what to say—he's an uninvited guest, hopping in through a window that he has to push open himself.

"Ah..." Is the best Hawks can do, thrusting the meal toward Endeavor while the hero sits back down at his desk. He gives Hawks a look before taking it. He doesn't say a word afterward, either, until he opens the lid and his brows knit together.

"No egg?"

Hawks finds enough of his voice to laugh. "You can steal mine if you're that broken-up about it."

Endeavor waves the offer away. He starts eating without comment, stabbing the noodles with his chopsticks like they'd done something to offend him. Hawks makes himself comfortable on one of the couches in front of the desk, and then he starts talking out loud.

It begins with his day and trails off into whatever he can think of: a new photoshoot, the villain merchandise he bought to wear ironically—and then the public apology he had to make. He doesn't realize half of what he says, so desperate to be heard for once. He tells Endeavor about a new movie coming out, and then the weather and the rain, the way he can't sleep. All the dreams he has about dying.

It takes him a moment to realize that Endeavor is staring.

"What?" Hawks wonders, pushing his bowl away. He barely touched it at all. This was never about the food, anyway.

Endeavor squints. "Nothing."

Something heavy settles between them. Hawks doesn't like how it feels, or how the sky is black outside the window now, and he'll have to fly home in the dark. He wonders how easy it would be to get Endeavor to offer him a ride.

"You know, you never asked why I was in town," Hawks says.

Endeavor leans back in his chair and plays along for once. "Why?"

Hawks smiles. "There's that park in the middle of the city, the one with a stone garden and a pond? You all take it for granted. It has more cherry blossom trees than my whole patrol route back home."

"I didn't realize you enjoyed nature so much."

"I have eyes, don't I?" Hawks wonders. "Don't you?"

Then he gets up from the couch and makes his way to Endeavor's desk, ignoring the expression he makes when Hawks pulls himself up onto it. He's facing the window, the city lights. Endeavor's eyes are on his back like he doesn't know what to make of him. Funny — Hawks feels the same way.

"Thank you for dinner," Endeavor says after a moment. Took him long enough to swallow his pride.

"Mm," he hums back. The heavy feeling from before is gone without a trace or explanation. Things are easy again. Hawks isn't sitting here torn in half on the inside, and he isn't seeking Endeavor out because he's scared at night like he did as a child. It's different now, it'll never be the same. They've met in the middle. This Endeavor is real, and Hawks wants to touch him for a whole new reason.

He spins around on the desk to face Endeavor directly. It takes a second to puzzle out the expression on his face, how pale he suddenly is.

"What's that look?" Hawks tilts his head. "Did I do somethin'?"

Endeavor gets quiet. "It's been a long day."

"Here," Hawks offers, faster than he can stop it. His body moves all on its own again, needing something it doesn't deserve yet. It takes him closer and tells him to make Endeavor his own, even if it only ends up lasting for a moment. Hawks needs to talk more, talk till he's hoarse and his throat dries up and then touch Endeavor like he's still his only hero. Touch every inch he can reach.

Hawks pulls Endeavor by the wrist so his chair rolls closer, and he settles in-between Hawks' legs that hang off the desk. "You shouldn't be here so late, no one's giving you medals for paperwork," he teases him. And then he rests Endeavor's hand on his thigh and pulls at his fingers until they crack, rolls the joints between his thumbs.

Endeavor is silent in a way that could mean anything; that he hates Hawks. That he doesn't. That he's so angry that he can't even speak, or he thinks it feels good, and the last thing he'll ever do is admit it.

Hawks kneads into Endeavor's palm, feeling warmth curling down his back and twisting into his spine. The fire isn't even around Endeavor's face right now, so why is it so hot? Why does it *hurt* to be near? It's the cruelest placebo Hawks has ever swallowed.

It's only when Hawks moves his hand up Endeavor's forearm that he meets resistance.

"Stop. *Stop* it. You don't need to *do* anything." Endeavor tugs his arm away and leaves Hawks wanting. His hand is tingling in his wake from the heat, from the feeling of Endeavor's calloused palm that bears all his hard years of hero work. Hawks is dizzy, he's in a state so far from reason that it feels like he'll never touch down again.

"I want to," Hawks' voice is so quiet. Wants to *what*? Play pretend again? Endeavor isn't his doll anymore, there's no storybook ending to this where they sit here and confess deep, dark secrets in an office meant for a hero, and watch the sun rise up outside the window pane. They won't become what Hawks needs. He's grasping for something that doesn't exist—he isn't fast enough, or good enough, and Endeavor pulls away like Hawks had been good-for-nothing from the start.

"Hawks..."

But that's not his name. It's not his fucking name, now or forever. Hawks is the mask that was stapled to his skin when he had a hundred feathers, and it bleeds anytime he tries to split away from it now.

He gives Endeavor a look, begging, racing. He puts so much of himself into that one little glance that Endeavor has to see, he has to realize what Hawks means when he uses the word *want*, because sometimes it doesn't feel optional.

"I want to," he can't help but repeat it. He wraps his hand around Endeavor's tie and tugs the knot loose, feeling messy and numb. All Hawks needs to do is slide forward and he'd fall right onto his lap, flush against his chest for a taste of what real warmth feels like when the air doesn't distort it. But of course Endeavor shackles his wrist before he can do anything so stupid.

"Get off my fucking desk."

Hawks blinks like an alien the face of rejection. He wanted it so badly— isn't that enough? Can't it ever be enough?

The heat on his skin melts away, and just as quickly that heavy feeling comes back, worse than before, worse than anything he's felt for months. He doesn't know how to lift it. "Sorry," Hawks says, doing as he's told and getting off his *fucking* desk. Endeavor gets up from his chair, too.

"I'm going home, and you need to be anywhere else but here."

Endeavor is blunt and leaves no room for Hawks' apology, already stomping to the window to force it open wide. The night air rushes in like something horrible. Hawks remembers why he's scared of the dark.

"I didn't mean to upset you."

But he meant to provoke him.

"You never mean it, do you? It's how you are, you push things too far—whatever it takes to get your way in the end. What did you expect would happen, Hawks? What did you *think*?"

Hawks feels like he's being scolded, treated like a child by the one person that could make it hurt this much. He's heard it from everyone else—everyone but Endeavor. The ache in Hawks' chest bottoms-out and he's sinking with no way up. He fucked up another good thing, another great expectation. It's his fault. It's still his world to ruin.

So he runs away from the storm he'd made.

He leaves out the same window he came in, taking off high enough that he disappears in the night and Endeavor can't watch where he goes. Endeavor, Endeavor— that's not his real name, either, but it wasn't forced on him like a cure. It wasn't all he could be.

Hawks isn't mad at him—**Enji**—he was right about everything. They never taught Hawks how to hold back, that would've gone against everything they were trying to make him.

But the hate he feels has to go somewhere.

So he closes his eyes and drifts through the sky, going back to a world where he's small and not yet heartbroken. Where he has a hundred feathers on his back - fifty on either side—and people tell him that it means he's getting stronger. But *people* doesn't include his parents, anymore. It's the men in black that tell him everything.

"Keigo," one of them says. It's the last time he ever hears his name. The man takes it away and brands him *Hawks*— a fierce bird of prey, solitary and fast—it represents what they're trying to make him.

Or maybe they chose whatever was catchiest.

But Hawks doesn't do things right, at first. He asks where his mother is. He asks when he's going back home. They're worried because he's slower than he was when they came to his house and watched him, and no amount of encouragement can change it now—he's already in the first stages of breaking.

So the men in black wake him up early one weekend and tell him they have a game to help his *transition*. He doesn't understand what it means but he has no choice but to trust them. They know what's best, his parents said so and his parents *love* him.

They don't call it a game once it starts, though, they call them tests.

Test one measures how high he can fly. The men in black tell him they think it's possible to touch the stars if he wants it badly enough. The idea makes Hawks' eyes grow wild and start sparkling, and things don't seem so bad with that on the horizon. Touch a star? Does that mean he gets to name it? He thinks about what he'd call it; Starry, Fireball, Keigo. Endeavor.

Test two comes next. It measures his speed in all directions, but the one they're most concerned about is distance. Once again they tell him something that gets his heart racing again, that he could beat the world record for the fastest time around the earth—and he could even do it without a plane. A hero *and* a record breaker. A prodigy. A miracle child. He has it all, doesn't he see?

And then there's the third test.

It starts different from the others. They wait until it's dark outside to start it, so dark and far from the city that light pollution doesn't radiate the sky for once. His eyes adjust quickly. But he doesn't get to use them for long.

"Your mother told us a story about you, Hawks." He flinches, the name still feels wrong. The hand on his shoulder does nothing to comfort him. "She played hide-and-seek with you, didn't she? And you always won within seconds. Why is that?"

All of Hawks' two-hundred feathers stand on end in fear. He doesn't like the sound of their hollow voices, this isn't fun anymore. "I dunno..." He wants to go back to test one again, trying to catch stars for himself.

"We're going to try something now. Your wings are very special, Hawks."

And the blindfold goes on.

It's dark.

It's dark.

It's so dark.

He's in his pitch-black bedroom all over again, hiding from monsters he's only just begun to recognize.

They teach him how to see with only his wings because he has to learn it, he's a prodigy, he's going to be a hero. Hawks shivers when they tell him; Keigo shrinks and never comes back. The feeling of the unknown is all around him in the form of disembodied voices from the men, giving him orders that he follows because it's all he has in his desperation for something concrete. Fly in a circle. Fly through the trees and dodge the branches, we'll patch up your cuts. Dodge what we throw at you. *Fight*, fight like your life depends on it because the real world will do more than just bruise you.

And then they do it again every day until they're satisfied with his progress. Test one, test two, test three—repeat, repeat, repeat. He hugs his doll so tightly at night that his arms ache, and more and more he's convinced that they lied to him about the stars.

Hawks opens his eyes. He's back, floating in the air above the city he keeps visiting, trying to make his home away from home. It's Enji's fault that he can't let go. Or it's that fear of the unknown again that's driven him into a corner like it always will. Like it's as much a part of him as his wings are, the force that makes him keep pulling at every thread of doubt until it unravels:

What's happening in that new class at UA?—Take one of the students as an intern, stay in the loop.

What's the League of Villains planning?—Become a double agent, live in the shadows with them so they'll tell you, even if it costs you your life.

What does Enji think of you?

Push it until you get the answer you asked for.

So Hawks can't just *leave it alone*. His ears ring with the ultimatum that Enji had given him, the way his words cut right through Hawks' ribs to open him up, wide and vulnerable. Expose his heart. Expose everything that's wrong with him. He's supposed to be a hero but here he is,

flying to Enji's home, so stubborn it hurts and acting like he'll be able to change both their minds. The wind rips across his skin. He doesn't know how long he was floating in the sky before, but the moon is still out.

He flies faster.

The adrenaline doesn't allow him to stop even when he lands on Enji's lawn. He walks toward the massive, stylized home that looks like Enji's trying to gloat about his fortune, but that's the furthest thing from the truth. Hawks knows him. Hawks wants to believe that he *knows* *him*.

It's the whole fucking reason that he can't fly home.

He shakes the wings off his back before stepping inside; doesn't need them now. Never did. They've done nothing but weigh him down, they're the rocks tied to his limbs while he walks into the ocean.

It doesn't take long for Enji to appear at the end of the hallway, still dressed in his nice button-up shirt. Hawks was making noise on purpose to draw him out—peeking in sliding doors, trailing the rings on his fingers against the walls, keeping his boots on inside. Enji seems angrier about that than anything. He glares at Hawks' shoes before his face.

"You broke into my home," he states calmly.

Enji is good at making him feel small. It's not a feeling that Hawks has ever gotten used to.

"No," Hawks corrects him. "But I would've, if the door wasn't already unlocked."

And then he waits for the inevitable—Enji telling him to get the fuck out, get the fuck away from him and his home. It's what Hawks expected from the start. It's what he needs to hear from Enji the most, in a way that makes all the blood rush to his forehead and drain from his fingers so fast they go dead.

But Enji doesn't.

So Hawks walks up to him, painfully aware of the sound of his boots and how stupid it was to leave them on, and even more so to leave his wings behind. It's like he wants a disaster. He wants to be scolded and told how wrong he is, how conceited, how young—how *special*. The number two hero at just twenty-two years old, squandering everything he'd been through by trusting his heart to someone he knows will turn it to ash.

He stops in front of Enji in the dark hallway of his home. Dark, dark, so *dark*— but Enji has never been his monster.

"You aren't telling me to leave?" Hawks asks, asking to be hurt again. He can take it this time. He'll band-aid what's broken and be all smiles in the public eye, no bad blood between them. All he wants is to finally crush that shred of hope in his throat once and for all, it's the only unknown left to solve for. Hawks has learned all the rest.

"Not yet. I can always change my mind," Enji replies, then he takes an audible breath. "Are your wings gone?"

He's too observant.

What else does he see?

Hawks makes up an excuse, "I left them outside, didn't want you to think I was here to win a fight."

It sounds like Enji stifles a laugh at his explanation. That's good, he isn't mad anymore. But it causes the hope in Hawks' throat to grow, and he's so swept up in it that he reaches out to place a hand on Enji's torso, running it up his chest. They're closer than they were in the office. They're so close that Hawks is swirling around in his warmth all over again, like Enji's been doing it on purpose.

Hawks doesn't want it to end. It suddenly feels like he's on the beach again, letting sand fall through his fingers in a hopeless bid to stop gravity. His wings are gone. All he knows is the sunset, the angel he'd made, the sound of Enji's voice on the phone, not trying hard enough to keep Hawks away.

Hawks closes his hand in Enji's shirt. He thinks of an idea that doubles as a nightmare.

"If I told you to do somethin', would you do it? Without asking me why?"

"I would."

Enji's reply stops his heart in its tracks, makes it harder to keep on breathing. *I would, I would, you know I would.* There wasn't a pause to think or an *it depends what it is*— or maybe there's an unspoken rule that he'll refuse if it's too much for him.

Hawks can't even look at him when he says it, too buried in his own head.

"Blindfold me."

Enji pauses, not like he's surprised but like he sees just how much of himself that Hawks had laid bare.

"I don't have anything to do it with."

"Yeah, you do," Hawks tells him. Reality shifts. He tugs at Enji's tie like he'd done in his office, only this time Enji lets him pull the knot all the way through and slide it off his neck. It weighs a thousand pounds. It coils around his wrist like a snake, and asks him where the angel's wings are, now. Special boy, pretty face. Prodigy since the first feather sprouted from his back like a weed—never a flower. They take too long to bloom. Numbers were all that mattered to the people who called him a miracle.

But Enji doesn't call him any of those things. He cups his hand around the back of Hawks' neck so gently that it's like an apology, and then he tips his head down, placing the fabric over his eyes. The knot Enji ties is tight against his scalp but not carelessly so.

"Hawks?" He asks, tipping Hawks' head back up with a finger under his chin.

Hawks shakes his head no.

He can't even see shadows it's so dark. Too dark, gripped by the unknown, the only thing he's still scared of. His fists clench at his waist and his wings tremble outside the house, anxious to be separated from him while his heart beats itself bloody. He's remembering everything he hates; he has two hundred feathers again and lives his life in sets—test one, test two, test three. Catch a star, race the earth, stop being so fucking afraid.

But it isn't just the darkness in front of him, it's Enji too. The heat from his chest never went away. The flames on his face are something Hawks can picture even behind his closed eyelids—they're red, red like his wings. Hellfire is why Enji's such a good hero that people make dolls in his image and give them to their sons.

Hawks reaches out into the blackness. He feels for Enji's throat, and then his nape, grabbing it and pulling him so close that they sweat where their skin is pressed together. Enji hums by his ear. Says his name like he's been repressing it.

And Hawks is scared.

Hawks is scared of being alone.

"I want you so badly I can't even think," he says, breathless from the truth of it all. The heat pouring from Enji's chest spikes in temperature.

"Don't say things like that to me."

"Why?"

"You don't mean it," Enji hopes. "There's something wrong with you tonight."

There's something wrong with you.

Hawks shakes his head again, again.

There's something wrong with you. You're obsessed with being a martyr. Your face is all over the country because you want to be adored, but you put a target on your back so big that not even your wings could stop the bullets. Prodigy. State-made hero. You want to suffer more than anyone else, and let the world reap the benefits when you're finally dead.

There's something so wrong with you.

Hawks breaks wide open. "I know there is, you don't think I know? Let me fuck up if it doesn't matter anyway," he begs. "Let me make a mistake with you."

"I can't." Enji tries to step back and Hawks tries even harder to provoke him, so Enji can stomp out that hope once and for all. Being unable to see Enji's eyes makes him braver.

"You're no angel, number one." Hawks is touching more of him, pulling him closer. He rubs his hip against Enji's crotch, his cock hard since he tied the blindfold. Maybe he was hard in his office, too, and that's the reason why he exploded. Hawks is off-limits. Isn't he?

"*Stop it.* You're just going to hurt yourself."

Good, good. Maybe then he'll listen. "I don't care. Hurt me."

"Don't you care about *anything*?" His fingers are on Hawks' jaw again, strong and angry and real. It's too hot, he could be on fire and Hawks wouldn't know until it's too late. The thought of burning at Enji's hand all of a sudden sounds so intimate.

"I care about this."

"Hawks..."

"No, no, don't *call* me that," he decides all at once. Enji's voice makes him ache—his very bones ache. "My name is Keigo, it's—"

Enji's mouth is on his neck before he can finish, taking what little sense he has left away. He moves his lips up Hawks' jawline, his cheeks, the fabric over his eyes. The blindfold is still on but somehow it stops mattering if he can see. Hawks doesn't need his feathers or his eyes, he doesn't need to know what Enji looks like when he picks him off the ground like he's made of nothing but air. Hawks crosses his ankles behind him and squeezes tight.

Enji starts walking with Hawks in his arms, the stubble of his chin rubbing at Hawks' throat. Going nowhere. Going somewhere else, somewhere unknown.

Hawks clutches his shirt in the nothingness. "Kiss me like you hate me."

He does a moment later, after Hawks' back hits a mattress and Enji growls his name so deep into his mouth that he chokes on it. Hawks grabs for him, clutches him like an escape. He feels his chest split open once again and leave his heart for the kindling. Nothing matters anymore. Enji touches him like he's apologizing for all the times he's been too gentle—the times he pretended like Hawks was too young, too stupid to know what he was asking for. It isn't his job to protect him anymore.

Hawks shrinks against the sheets. Enji must truly hate him, for how long he kisses him. He must have never hated someone so much.

The blindfold stays on.

The rest of his clothes come off.

And Enji gives him what he came for.

Hawks' eyes jolt open too soon. There was no nightmare to wake up from but a yell is dying in his throat anyway, and sweat is stuck to every inch of his skin. It feels like he was dropped onto the mattress from three feet in the air.

But he can see again, the room isn't pitch black behind a blindfold anymore. The tie must have slid down around his neck while he slept. He tugs to unstick it from his skin.

"Hawks?"

There's a rush in his throat when he hears his name, and then an ache that doesn't stop hurting once it begins. Hawks doesn't know what to do, now. He's never been here before. He'd woken up in Enji's bed and he should be so happy—he's so *loved*.

Because it's Enji.

It's Enji.

It's been Enji from the start.

"Hawks, tell me what happened," Enji asks, clearly sensing that something is wrong. He couldn't possibly know. To him, Hawks is still that hero pushing things too far and moving so fast that he makes his own world spin. He can't see the hole where Hawks' dreams once were, the time that Hawks never got back from when he spent his life clutching a doll too tightly, waiting for the day he turned eighteen when he'd mean something to himself again.

How do you explain something like that?

So Hawks tells him, "It's nothing."

And there's a soft ruffle from behind him when he says it. His wings are pressed against his shoulder blades again—they'd come back to him, loyal like he's their beloved. Hawks watches as they curl around the blankets and make themselves at home. Red, even in the dark. Red like his hero, the one who's wondering how badly he'd fucked him up.

Enji's voice is still rough with sleep. "It's just a dream," he says, like he knows exactly what's wrong. How could he? Hawks never talked to him about anything that mattered.

But he's right about it anyway.

"I need to go," he tells Enji, before either of them have a chance to object. He lets one of his feathers fall into the mess of sheets, suddenly unable to bear the thought of leaving no trace. He's playing pretend again. Pretend Enji wants him, pretend he fell into his bed the right way, and go on pretending tomorrow when both of them have nothing to call it but a mistake under duress.

"Hawks..." Enji tries again, and maybe Hawks would've stayed if he'd called him by his real name, the one he'd offered in such desperation to be heard—but Enji didn't.

So Hawks leaves. It's a long way home but he doesn't mind a dawn-lit flight. He has time to think about everything, and nothing, and about all the little in-betweens that he finds too much pleasure in, like new movies about heroes and watching the sun set alone from a perch.

He doesn't think about Enji yet. He wouldn't know where to start.

Back in his own bed he tucks in with his feathers. He mind snoozes to the tune of a story as he tries to fall back asleep again—but it's a short one. It's never been told.

Hawks is the only one who knows it.

It's about a woman with a quirk that lets her control the keratin in her body. Now that alone isn't enough to be a hero, she knows that, but everyone seems to want to remind her of how trivial her power is. It makes her sad at first, but then it just makes her angry. She tries to be happy with the small things it lets her do; grow her nails, heal over a bad sunburn, make her hair long enough to tie a noose with.

She marries a man who—every once in a while—would grow a feather or two from his scalp. It isn't so much a quirk as it is a nuisance. As a child he tried plucking them when it first started happening. It hurt just enough to get him to stop, so he got smarter about it. He took a pair of scissors and cut one off, except trimming it to the root hurt so badly that he ran crying to his parents, thinking that he'd accidentally cut his skin. He quickly learned to be kind to his feathers.

They have a child. Neither of their quirks are significant by themselves, but together they become the perfect storm for something beautiful. It's a miracle boy, a perfect boy—at least once his wings started growing in like weeds instead of flowers. He was going to save them one day. He was the solution to every problem they'd ever had.

And maybe he wasn't a prodigy, but he was unlucky enough to be called one.

So the world treats the child like he's special. It showers him in make-believe love that gets him addicted to the feeling, and then it takes away everything it'd given him except a little doll. It takes his childhood away so soon that sometimes it feels like he's still wandering. The men in black took the most—even more than his parents. They thought he'd been trained to stay loyal to them long after he turned eighteen, but they never quite realized the extent of his selfishness.

The story doesn't have an end yet. The child grew up but he's still selfish deep down, he's still chasing that feeling of pretend love like it's a substitute for what he's missing. Enji couldn't have known.

Enji is *good*, he's the reason Hawks is sane and the reason he isn't.

Enji is good.

Enji is good.

Maybe Hawks can be good, too.

He wakes up at noon with a number on his tongue, so surprised by its appearance that his limbs are weighted to the bed and it feels like sleep paralysis.

One thousand, two hundred, and twenty-two feathers. There haven't been new ones for a very long time. Hawks blinks at the ceiling, thinking, and his wings twitch against the bed. It's like he's both right here and a hundred miles away at the exact same time, split in two. It feels like he's moving. It feels like there's something warm touching him, like he's pressed against someone's skin so tightly that he's starting to sweat—

Hawks rubs the blush away from his cheeks. "What the fuck did you do?" he asks himself. Then again, "What the *fuck* did you do?"

It takes a moment to build up to it, but Hawks forces himself to sever the link to the feather he'd left in Enji's bed. It hurts him in more ways than he can count.

One thousand, two hundred, and twenty-one feathers, now. His wings will be uneven until it grows back in a month or two.

What a stupid thing to think about.

But he's still thinking about it hours later—the state of being uneven. Being made imperfect because of what Enji made him do, Enji, *Enji*, and Enji keeping that feather in his pocket like it meant something to him that Hawks can't even begin to comprehend.

He's back in the place he can't stay away from, on a bench instead of the beach this time, sitting under the largest cherry blossom tree in the city. People don't notice him yet—or they're just too afraid to be the first one to approach him. But he wouldn't mind giving out another autograph. The bottle of ink is still sitting in his pocket.

Eventually someone sits down on the bench while Hawks' eyes are closed and his head is tilted back to the sky. And it's warm, *oh*, it's *him*, it's that heavy, love-struck feeling. He almost doesn't want to open his eyes again. It'd be easier pretending he's asleep than to hear whatever Enji wants to say to him; that Hawks isn't special, isn't good, isn't a hero inside because there's something so deeply wrong with him.

Hawks makes sure to look straight ahead when he opens his eyes, so the sight of Enji doesn't destroy him all at once. They're sitting too close together. The outside of their thighs touch.

Hawks is still uneven.

He takes an overdue breath. "How'd you know I'd be here?"

"Does it surprise you that I pay attention?" Enji wonders. His voice doesn't sound angry, not yet. "The park with a rock garden and a pond. You could've mentioned the bridge, too, I

suppose."

Hawks smiles despite himself. "Yeah? I wouldn't want to make things easy for you."

"It wasn't.

Hawks clenches and unclenches his fist after, his leg rattling against the bench. "Enji," he begins, not bothering to correct himself while they're in public. "If you came here to say somethin', could you just say it? I'm a big proponent of ripping the band-aid."

And just like that his rib cage is split open again, displaying his heart and the black patches where its been burned—and it lays there, beating too fast, racing itself. It still has some of the hope that Enji hasn't crushed yet.

Hawks is quiet. He waits for Enji to finish the job once and for all. *Do it. Just do it already.*

Enji doesn't say anything.

Why?

Why? I messed up, didn't I? So scold me, yell at me, tell me to take life seriously for once. You have to hate me—you kissed me so hard last night that you have to hate me. You brought my feather just to throw it back in my face, so take it out. Let it die. Rip me apart for it. You're the only one I'll ever listen to.

Enji doesn't say anything.

Why?

Hawks' hand is clenched so tightly that his nails dig into his palm, and his knuckles go from dead-white to red when he finally stops tensing. Breathe. Breathe because the heartache isn't coming like Hawks wanted it to. It can't be real—reality can't be giving him something instead of taking it away.

And then Enji lets him rest his head on his steady shoulder, and Hawks thinks he might just die, anyway.

"Alright, then," Hawks says.

Why?

Why?

Why?

There is no answer. Enji lets him swirl in the great unknown, wondering what he did to not warrant a punishment, and wondering what it means for them now. He stops holding back because it doesn't seem to matter, anymore. "You wanna hear somethin' funny, number one? I don't know your favorite color. I don't think I know anything about you that the tabloids already don't."

Enji seems to tense up at his comment. It's okay, Hawks knows better than anyone: they all have their secrets.

And then finally Enji replies, "Red."

Something twists like rope in Hawks' stomach. "Don't be so predictable."

"Hmm," he grunts softly. Hawks thinks that's the end of it, but he's wrong. "Ask me another question, then."

Hawks is flushed to the tips of his ears. “Really?” He wonders. It sounds like Enji meant it. It sounds like he wants to start filling in the blanks. Hawks doesn’t know what to do with so much freedom; Enji, *Enji*, the real Enji. He could ask him something simple, like what Enji wants for dinner tonight, why he’s here, why he’s still keeping that feather in his pocket.

Or something complex, like how Enji grew up to be so fucking self-loved that all he has in his heart is pride—and how in the world he expects Hawks to just sit here, pressed against his skin, without wanting to kiss him.

Hawks asks him the next best thing, because it's a question he's never been able to answer himself.

“If you could name a star, what would you call it?”

Enji’s expression looks somber, almost. “I’m not sure,” he says.

So its left open-ended, for now. Hawks closes his eyes again, still resting his cheek against Enji’s shoulder, sweating on his nape, content to be too warm. His odd-feathered wings stretch out beside him and catch the sun while they can.

Hawks wonders if he’s still doing it right now: playing pretend.

But then Enji mutters his name to keep him from sleeping, lifting him right up from the dark, and Hawks decides that it’s okay if he is.

“Let me know if you ever find out.”

End Notes

Please let me know what you think if you could !!! This was my first time really exploring hawks tragically.

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