

# Diagnosis, Treatment, and Rehabilitation

## By Karina Eide

I've tried sooo many different ways of writing this story and they all have failed...Yeah...So you know what I decided to do? I'm forgetting my normal standards of writing and just trying to get it out. xD It'll fail, but that's life, right?

### Chapter 1: A Time to Die

The lights go out all around me  
One last candle to keep out the night and then the darkness surrounds me  
I know I'm alive, but I feel like I've died

#### -Beauty from Pain by Superchick

Sakuno hated the word "normal". The entire concept of normality didn't even make sense and yet people accepted it without batting an eye. How can you define what is normal? What is normal for one can be so different from what is normal for another person. Normal was entirely comparative. For something to be abnormal it must not be like a certain object which could be defined as normal.

She rapped her fingers softly across the desk in frustration. Time was being wasted ever single second she sat in that classroom and listened to the things that she had already heard a million times over. Of course the United States of America was not a part of the UK anymore, that was why they were another country! She glanced out the window aimlessly as she continued to listen to the teach drone about the splitting of the colonies.

It felt like forever, but she finally heard what she needed to. The shrill whistle escaped her phone and not a moment too soon. Sakuno shot up from her chair and gave a slight bow to her teacher before escaping the clustered room. She ignored the envious stares of her classmates as she escaped into the halls early. She pulled open her locker and quickly started packing her books into her bag for later on. "Math, History, and English... That's all then."

She flipped the canvas cover back on her bag and gave it a short pat before turning towards the stairs. "Yo girl. Shouldn't you be in class?" Sakuno clutched at her heart in shock from the sudden voice. She took in a deep breath before turning to face the boy behind her. The teen looked just as casual as ever. He was sloppily groomed with the gray mop for fair pulled back into a short ponytail and dull green eyes. "Iie, Niou-sempai. My sensei have excused me for the rest of the day, now may you excuse me? I'm going to be late."

Sakuno hardly waited for a reply as she turned to the stairs. She grabbed the railing before pulling herself up and over the side down to another flight of stairs. She really didn't have time to waste, her grandmother was busy enough with Seishun Gakuen and having to drive Sakuno every Monday hardly helped. The girl didn't even notice the skeptical eyes watching her depart the building. "Hn..."

-There is a man who waits for the tests -

"Ne, Sakuno-chan. Are you sure that you're ok at Rikkaidai? I'm sure I can have you transfer back to Seisgaku by the end of the week if you want." Sakuno sighed at the antics of her grandmother. Ryuuzaki Sumire had always been rather protective, but it was rather unneeded and sometimes annoying. She stared wistfully out the window as she watched the cars stream past. "Iie, obaa-san. I'm fine at Rikkaidai. I'm sorry if it is hard for you to drive to separate schools."

It was hard to miss the slight twitch her grandmother gave. "Don't worry, Sakuno-chan. You have nothing to apologize for." Words, they were just words. She watched the water gather upon the window gloomily as she remembered her old school. The first few years were fun, but things had changed since then and Seigaku lost a member of its soon to be freshman class.

The rest of the trip was silent, there was really nothing to say after all. What was done was done and there wasn't anything to change the past. After the car pulled to a stop, Ryuuzaki turned around to look at her granddaughter. "They're still asking about you, ya know? You didn't have to close contact with them. I betcha they would understand." The blank stare that came in reply wasn't unexpected, but still saddening in a way. "Alright, alright, I'm off your case. Come on, shoujo."

- To see if the cancer has spread yet, and then he asks-

"It could really depend, Ryuuzaki-san. We think we can schedule you in three weeks from now. Would that work for you?" Warm hazel eyes stared at Sakuno, well, they looked warm to most. To Sakuno they were disgusting, they were filled with pity. Pity was something she would never want and would never need. Pity was the world's way of saying, "My life is so much better than yours. I feel sorry for you."

"Hai, Tomio-sensei." Sakuno's eyes had long lost their cheerful spark. There was nothing to be happy for now was there?

Tomio sighed softly as he looked at the little girl. She was much too young to be going through this sort of ordeal. There was so much life left to be lived and it appeared there wouldn't be much time to live it. "One of the nurses will give you a package detailing what will go on. Your grandmother will be your primary provider I assume?"

Sakuno nodded in acknowledgment and left the room enveloped in silence. "That'll be all then, Ryuuzaki-san. You'll need to go off your current medicine two weeks before the surgery. We'll see you in three weeks then." The group rose from their chairs and trailed out of the room. The walls were suffocating. The walls were so stark and sterile. It was the kind of color that would be easy to paint over if any blood ever stained the walls. The color was so bright and yet at the same time depressing.

Sakuno sighed as she left the hospital. Time was moving by so fast and she wished that it would just stop. Forget the time space continuum, she wanted everything to stop hurting. It hurt knowing that she couldn't rely on anyone. She was alone.

"Yo, what are you doing here?"

- So why did I wait to live when it is time to die?-

Yukimura Seiichi's "cure" hadn't been all it was cracked up to be. Ten post-surgery he had been returned to the hospital for an emergency surgery for his lungs. The "God" had a developed a pneumothorax in his left lung. It started as shortness of breath, but they had

all said that it was because he was unfit due to extended bed rest. They had told him it would be fine and it would all go away soon. They didn't understand what he was feeling. It was the feeling of suffocation, but there was nothing doing the suffocation. He just couldn't breathe.

It took them long enough to get the hint. During tennis practice the tennis "god" passed out from lack of oxygen. They rushed him to the hospital and barely got him into the surgery room in time. It pained the regulars to see him back in the hospital, pale like a sheet with that blasted oxygen mask taped around his face. That was what the world was. Children were complainers and they should leave it to those that knew what they were doing.

Some said that was the day something changed within the regulars. It was the reason why they took no coach and no manager. Adults who could so carelessly put their friend in danger just couldn't be trusted. Despite this "truth", their friend was still placed under lock in key in the hospital. The pneumothorax had long been resolved, but other complications occurred due to the immune-suppression that came from it.

The 2009 swine flu pandemic reached and ravaged the hospital and caused the return of the once dormant acute panautonomic neuropathy within Yukimura. The new therapy given to the boy had high toxicity levels that could only be justified by the high mortality rate given to the illness. Yukimura had begun to stabilize over the past few weeks, but some part of him began to wonder if it was worth it if he would never get better. Stability wasn't a cure, and was a cure even in sight?

When Yukimura voiced his thoughts it worried the regulars. He was the "god", the undefeatable leader of Rikkaidai. It was impossible for him die, wasn't it? Yukimura was a person they couldn't lose, ever.

On the regular's weekly visit the last thing they expected to see was another yellow and black uniform. "Hmm? That's our new kohai, ne Yanagi?" The redhead peered over the Brazilian's shoulder to stare at the girl walking out the sliding glass doors.

"Ryuuzaki Sakuno. She's a transferee from Seishun Gakuen and was the manager of the tennis team while presiding there. Though I do wonder who she was visiting there... My data doesn't suggest that she had any ill relatives."

"She wasn't visiting." Eyes turned towards the fukubuchou with interest. "She has a tegaderm around her left arm."

Niou noticeably froze at his vice-captain's observation. So that was where she had gone during school. He casually sauntered up to Sakuno and said, "Yo, what are you doing here?"

**luffEhh. Let's see how this daily update stuff goes. xD And let's see if I can get over 10 reviews by the time this is over. |D Would be a miracle. /grows mushrooms in corner**

**Disclaimer: If I owned PoT I wouldn't be growing mushrooms now would I?**

## **Chapter 2: Fight with Herself**

And all that's left is to accept that it's over  
My dreams ran like sand through the fists that I made  
I try to keep warm, but I just grow colder  
I feel like I'm slipping away.

**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

The last thing Sakuno expected was the tennis regulars of Rikkaidai. The word that came to mind at the moment was something along the lines of 'crap'. "Ah, hello Niou-sempai. I just had a routine doctor's appointment today. And what are all of you doing here?" It wasn't exactly a lie, but not the entire truth. The visit was practically a routine for her, but it wasn't the classic doctor's visit. The thought of warping the truth still made her squirm despite how often she played around with what she said.

The way her sempai's eyes darkened was worrying, was he going to call her out on what she said? "We're visiting Yukimura-taichou." Yagyuu put a calming hand on his partner's shoulder and silently told him to get a hold of himself. He watched as Sakuno seemed to remember the blue haired teenager from all of those years ago. "He seemed fine at nationals, Yagyuu-sempai. Did something happen?"

Yagyuu constricted his partner's shoulder slightly in warning. She was unknowing stepping on a landmine within the team. "Complications arouse." He briefly replied and signaled that the conversation about Yukimura would end right then. He mouthed the word "later" before dropping his hand from his partner's shoulder. "We'll see you later at school, Ryuuzaki-san."

"About time!" The seaweed head pushed past the group and flew into the hospital promptly ignoring the complaints of the nurses. "We'll have to find him now... Blast Kirihara, he should know by now he has no sense of direction."

- She won't make a sound, alone in this fight with herself-

"Disgusting." Sakuno grunted as she stared at the glass of water before her. She had never known water to be an effective weapon of torture until about a year ago. She swiped the water from the table and took a sip. She popped in a small gray pill before swallowing it down. Sakuno fought the urge to gag at the grimy taste in her throat. No matter how often she had to take the stupid pills she could never get over the sickness she felt when swallowing them.

It was amazing to think that she just swallowed two hundred dollars and hated it. After paying thousands of dollars for them she would have thought they would have cared to improve the taste. Money, money, money, it was such a nuisance that everything ran off of money. It was even more troublesome that it was impossible to imagine a world running on anything but money.

There was no real way to fix the problem Sakuno and her family was in. That was how Ryuuzakis were, too proud to accept handouts from others. Her mother, Michiko, and her father, Tomio, were both doctors at Tokyo University Medical Hospital, but the paychecks couldn't cover everything. Sakuno had ears; she wasn't deaf to the problems of her family. The bill for the surgery would account to thirty thousand US dollars, at least a third of their yearly income.

It couldn't possibly help that this was the third surgery that year. Things just couldn't go right now could they? Financially, the Ryuuzakis were not poor, but they were scraping by. Two hundred dollars a pill and twenty eight pills in a bottle meant a nice five thousand six hundred dollar bill each month. Each dollar that it took to get her these pills only made her

feel that much worse. A description along the lines of “money-sucking” was how Sakuno would describe herself.

Her eyes glanced towards the clock. It was 7:20 and time to jet off to school. Sakuno quickly threw on her uniform and shot out towards the school.

-And the fears whispering if she stands she'll fall down-

Denial. It was a river in Africa and it was also what Sakuno was experiencing. She denied the fact that people could understand and want to help her. She denied that not all people would throw a pity party over her. She denied that her friends from Seishun Gakuen could ever look at her the same way after they knew the truth.

It would just hurt too much to see people change from friendly and kind to alienating and awkward. People just didn't know how to react to the news and the first thing they did was push away. It was a natural instinct when people were shocked, but it still hurt. It hurt a lot. Pain was just something Sakuno couldn't risk more of so she left without saying goodbye.

She had heard nothing of her ex-friends other than the fact they kept on pestering her grandmother about where she was. Sakuno sighed softly as she walked slowly towards homeroom. They would probably find her eventually. Rikkaidai and Seigaku both had competing tennis teams and Sakuno had no doubt that they would clash within the next few months.

Sakuno aimlessly stared out the window once more in class as she thought of the whole jumble called life. Running probably wasn't the wisest thing to do, but bravery wasn't a trait that Sakuno could call her own. She was startled out of her thoughts as the cutting ring of the bell sounded. Kids rushed up from their chairs and stormed quickly out the room, leaving a dazed Sakuno behind. “Ah.”

Sakuno shook her head to regain her senses before grabbing her bags and heading towards the door. “Ryuuzaki-san, a moment?” The teacher waved his book at her to grab her attention before walking over. “On behalf of the teachers, we just wanted to let you know we're supporting you. Just tell us if you feel like you can't complete all the schoolwork. We can always figure something out.” The man gave her a small smile and tapped her on the head with the book. “Good luck, Ryuuzaki-san.”

Sakuno smiled in return before leaving the room. She trotted out to the tennis clubroom and stuffed her bookbag in a small cubby. She quickly changed in one of the stalls and made her way out to the courts. The high school tennis team was very different from the middle school team's practice. Everyone had to push their weight, including first years, which effectively meant that they didn't pick up balls anymore.

Sakuno knew she wasn't an incredible tennis player by any meaning of the word, but she did have talent. After being a manager for a team that won nationals, Sakuno managed to create a style of tennis for herself. Sakuno was a baseliner with a focus upon accuracy and hitting the ball as close to the line as possible. Sakuno called it the Tip of the Spear. The second style she used was Edge of the Sword where she hit the ball towards the feet of opposing players and made it a nuisance to return. Lastly, there was Hilt of the Blade. Hilt of the Blade was Sakuno's weakest style since it focused upon hitting with enough spin that it caused the ball to fly out of control. Sakuno's Eastern Backhand grip allows for stronger control and spin, but too many tweaks have lost the spin that the grip used to hold. Tennis could be so complex at times.

Sakuno looked around the courts for her age group and immediately blended in to the crowd. Tennis was a sport Sakuno wasn't willing to let go of. Even if she was sick and spent most of her time in the hospital, Sakuno would never stop playing. Tennis had become a part of her and letting go of it would hurt just as much as letting go of Seishun Gakuen.

**LATE CHECK. I GOT A REVIEW. I am so happyyyyy~ /runs around in circles**

**I'M WALKING ON SUNSHINE~ /whacked over the head**

**Ow... Anyways.**

**LadyLight0105: I feel bad for Sakuno too. Q\_Q Sacrifice must be made for the story! I'm trying to keep this 100% realistic and everything in the story is based off of my life or people I know with cancer as well. I don't know if I have a pairing in mind for her quite yet, but I was thinking of YukimuraxSakuno or NiouxSakuno. I have plans for all the characters... BUAHAHAHAHA! /insert evil cackle**

**Ooo! And I got a favorite as well. /sings happy songs**

**Thank you, chivini!**

**I have a feeling my writing got even sloppier today... Probably because I wrote half of this with a migraine. /fistpump Fun stuff. I'll see you all tomorrow! :D**

**Thankies to Aquamarine Lacus and Oliviaaaox101 for adding this story to your favorites! 8D Many thanks also to fairylilac, tennis'sshadow, and Zemmno for adding DTR to your alerts~ I just read my own story on the itouch like how I normally read fanfictions... And realized that my updates seem really really short. O\_O To cure this I shall try to write at least 2k words in every update even if I stretch my mind to exploding.**

**Disclaimer: I own neither the songs nor the characters in this story. :D Save for the doctors though. They are all mine! /evil cackle**

## **Chapter 3: All the Lies**

After all this has passed, I still will remain  
After I've cried my last, there'll be beauty from pain  
Though it wont be today, someday I'll hope again  
And there'll be beauty from pain  
You will bring beauty from my pain  
**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

She could feel it begin to wear on her. Every time she swung that red racket she could feel herself rapidly tiring. Her face clenched; she couldn't just give up because of fatigue. She just couldn't give up on her only outlet. She mentally went over the endless list of side effects. Immuno suppression, bruising easily, fatigue, inability to concentrate, rashes, diarrhea, and vomiting. It had been enough work to reassure her family that tennis wasn't a heavy combat sport. If they saw her like this they would probably pull her without giving her time to argue.

She almost felt like crying; she really just couldn't do anything! The doors at the end of the hall were all slowly closing before her. The patter of feet behind her signaled the approach of the girl's coach. Sakuno inhaled deeply before simulating the relaxed breathing that most would have during the practice swings. She tried to keep calm as she felt the examining eyes of the coach look her over. The brunette only relaxed as the woman walked on from her aisle to check the rest of the girls and to bark out orders.

The teen slumped slightly and stretched herself once more before forcing herself back into drills. She repeated the mantra of "just one more" over and over until those words the only ones that filled her mind. She would get through this and at the end of the day she would succeed. Unbeknownst to her, a pair of eyes had seen the way the girl seemed to tire. Niou's eyes narrowed as he noticed the signs of fatigue: circles around the eyes, labored breath, unfocused eyes, and a slight quiver. He wasn't the trickster of Rikkaidai for nothing: he could read people like they were books. She obviously wasn't well and she knew it, that was the confusing thing. Girls by nature weren't as foolhardy as men to continue training to the point they could hurt themselves. They knew their limits, but this girl kept on pushing forward. It was audacious of her to be sure, but it was also foolish. Many things could be read through a person's posture, but one thing that Niou didn't expect to read was desperation. The look she gave made her seem like she was desperate to keep up with the group. Was tennis so important to her that she was willingly putting herself to the limit like that? "Niou-sempai! Where are you, Niou-sempai?" Niou cursed under his breath. Stupid Kirihara had to mess up his concentration.

Niou risked one last glance at the pig tailed girl before closing his eyes. He would have a little talk with her later. It wouldn't do him any good to have Seigaku breathing down his back, right? He assured himself that was why he felt the emotion called worry before vanishing into the school once more.

-I never really wanted you to see-

Beep. Beep. Beep. "Urusai." The weak voice whispered to no one as the incessant beeping continued in the room. What was the saying? 'Pain lets me know I'm alive'? The saying could never have been more true for him. He groaned weakly through the mask as he gazed around the room. Did they really call them painkillers? It was never a painkiller, it was just a pain duller. The pain never left and it had been his companion for a good two years now.

Sometimes he fancied that pain was alive and talked to him. Something had to be the cause of the words in his head after all. Was that the definition of insanity? The state of being seriously mentally ill. If he had the strength to laugh he would have; he did feel rightly insane after all. Strapped down to a bed with an air mask locked around his face, he looked like a right demon. It was strange being on morphine, like an out of body experience.

Yukimura felt like he was watching himself from a third person view. He was moving the controllers, but was never truly in the moment. "Yukimura-san? I'm here to administer another dosage." The brunette nurse poked her head through the sliding glass doors before heading into the stark room. She gave the sickly boy a glowing smile before walking over to the IV line dangling above his head. After replacing the old line and attaching a new medicine she left the room once more to leave the tennis player to himself.

He stared up at the ceiling. It was peppered with holes and water damage, almost depressing to look at. It was a strange thing about hospitals: they kept everything sterile, but never thought much about the patient's mind. There was nothing distracting in the room save for the tv they had latched onto the wall. The tv with the controller he was too weak to move around. Hanging on the wall, it seemed more like a torture device than entertainment.

When you are alone for hours upon hours on end, you begin thinking of strange things. Legacy, did he leave a legacy behind him? What impact would he have on the people

around him once he died? The scariest thing to imagine for the "god" was to vanish into the nothingness of history. To leave no impact on the world and see people pass by without remembering him, it was a scary thought. It was selfish, but nonetheless true. A small tear rolled down his face. He was scared. He didn't want to see the future and yet he wanted it all to stop.

-The screwed up side of me that I keep-

119. That was not good at all. Sakuno stared at the orange pulsometer on her finger as the numbers across the screen flashed a bright red. She calmed her breathing down before stuffing the pulsometer back in her bag. It wasn't at all good to have such a high number considering how fit she used to be. She lifted a hand up to her forehead to wipe away the sweat before leaving the changing rooms. What she didn't expect was a visit from a tennis regular.

"Niou-sempai. What are you doing here?" Sakuno flushed slightly as she realized how rude she appeared. "Gomen. I didn't mean to be rude..." She cut off slightly with a cringe. No matter how hard she tried; she was still horrendously awkward with strangers. She looked up at the gray haired boy nervously.

"You're ill aren't you?" It was like a dagger to the heart. How could he have known? Or was the question really, 'how much does he know'? Sakuno swallowed to keep her calm and looked at him directly in the eyes. "Iie, Niou-sempai. Why would you think that?" She could feel herself squirming as she lied through her teeth. This was a subject that he had to realize that she didn't want to even think about. She saw the amusement flicker through his eyes with much distaste. This was like a game to him.

"You look pale, Ryuuzaki-san." She could just imagine the game. But it took two people to play chess, and he didn't have her in checkmate just yet. "It must be your imagination, Niou-sempai. I am fine." She walked past the boy in an effort to escape, but to no avail. "Note the choice of wording." Sakuno froze as she realized her mistake. "Fine is synonymous to decent or mediocre. Fine does not mean you are well, Ryuuzaki-san." She flinched at the cold tone to his voice. It was the sound of a mother who just caught her child stealing cookies from the cookie jar. She heard the sound of his shoes as he walked back up to her side.

"Don't play around with your life, Ryuuzaki-san. If you're sick, pushing yourself will only make it worse. Go to the nurse." Sakuno bowed her head slightly and let her hair cover her face. Anger was what drove her now. She clenched her fists as she listened to him speak. He had no clue what he was talking about and it was irritating to listen to.

"It won't get better, so why should I care?" She murmured softly to herself. She gave a grunt of acceptance to fend off the trickster and pushed past him in a short sprint. The cancer was like a shadow hanging over her head. It was there wherever she went and she couldn't escape it, so why try?

-Locked inside of me so deep-

"You're doctors aren't you? Your job is to heal people, not to kill them dangit!" The nurses turned away as they heard the shriek from down the hall. What was going on was part of the business. No matter how much they all fought, they would always lose some.

"Calm down, Yukimura-san." Akihiro exhaled and looked at the woman before him. This was one of the problems with his job. When dealing in rare cases the rate of mortality was extremely high and the news was tough to break to the family. "YOU CAN'T TELL ME TO CALM DOWN!" A fist was slammed down onto the desk in front of the spectacled doctor.



The woman shook with fury. How dare they label her son as a lost case. She knew Seiichi was more than that. If these people wouldn't save him, she'd find others. This was her son, and they were obviously not going to protect him. She glared at the gray haired doctor before turning to leave the room. The floor shook with the force of the door slamming. She strode quickly past the shell-shocked hospital staff and into the room of her son. "Seiichi..." She froze for a moment at the sight of her son before walking up to the bedside and resting a hand on the side of his face. "You'll be better soon, love. Just stay strong for your mother and she'll get you out of this rat hole soon." She choked up as she stared at the blank eyes of her boy. He had so much more ahead of him. There was the whole world ahead of him; she knew it.

"You'll get better. I promise." She closed her blue eyes sadly and wept.

**I'm finally introducing Yukimura! I've referenced him, talked about him, but never really brought him in. I don't know a whole lot about Guillian Barre, but I'll try to keep it realistic. The end part is entirely plausible and it's one of my hospital pet peeves. -- I loathe it when doctors do things like, "Let's wait and see." Or "We can do this surgery, but you'll lose an entire lung and some other organs so you'll be an invalid forever."**

**NO. That is entirely stupid. If those doctors aren't gonna treat you well, get a second opinion. Don't just stop at the first coot even if he is well known and all that junk. Especially when doctors basically tell the patient, "You'll die in a few months." Patients are more likely to hurry themselves to death from the psychological stress of being told that. -- There are always options from medicines to surgeries. RAWR.**

**My rant is now over. The song was Cold by Crossfade. /nods**

**I need opinions! SakunoxNiou or SakunoxYukimura? Yukimura will get to meet her eventually, never ye fear. And sorry if I'm making this kinda angst. O3o I'm trying to bring parts of hospital life that people never think about together and it can come out a bit... Over the top. |D I'll talk to you all later! Ja ne~**

**Ack! I realized I didn't reply to LadyLight0105's review and it made me feel all guiltyyy. Q\_Q Good news is that it made me start this chapter on time so it will probably be more formulated... /crickets chirp**

**Good out of bad, right? 8D I will be sure to reply to reviews at the end of this chapter. /cowers low  
Disclaimer: I-I d-don't o-own P-p-prince of T-t-t-tennis. Don't hurt me. /runs**

## **Chapter 4: End of the Road**

My whole world is the pain inside me  
The best I can do is just get through the day  
When life before is only a memory  
I'll wonder why God lets me walk through this place  
**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

They said the prognosis for him was good. They said that 80% of the people diagnosed have a complete recovery within a year. Yet why was he still like this? He was strapped to a bed on life support with no end in sight. Yukimura Momo was not happy with this situation, not happy at all. She was a successful business person and knew well enough about how the real world worked.

If a person was bad at their job they were fired. If there was someone better in the business you seek them out. The medical world was no different. These doctors screwed up with her son for the past two years and she was not going to let it go on for a moment longer. She whipped away the tears on her face and marched out the hospital, intent on wreaking havoc.

She climbed into her car and quickly pulled out her cellphone. A woman with a mission is hard to stop; a woman with a mission and a cellphone on the other hand is impossible to stop. She stared at the blank screen for a moment before flying into action. She dialed a quick series of numbers before lifting the electronic to her ear. "Connect me to Matsuda Hiro-sensei of cardiac surgery."

"Please hold." Momo heard the familiar click as she was put on hold and subject to the horrendous thing they called music. She stared at the phone with mild disgust until she heard the sound of human life coming through the cell. "Hello, this is Matsuda-san. Who is this?"

She almost sighed at relief knowing that the torture was over. "Hello Matsuda-sensei. It's Momo-chan, remember?" She laughed a bit in memory of her school colleague. She was sure he was as short as ever with those terrifying glasses of his. He was a true medicinal terror in his own time. Her mind rested briefly over the fact that her laugh was probably the first in a good long while.

"Ahh, Momo-chan! It's great to hear from you! Though I do suppose if you are calling by my office phone something has happened, hm? Ack!" The sound of collapsing stacks of paper filled the phone. It was worrying what Momo was going to ask Matsuda to do, but he really was not helping the situation. Was his coordination honestly as good as everyone proclaimed him to be?

When the rustling of paper ended over the line Momo took it as her cue to continue. "You know of my son, Seiichi, right Matsuda-sensei?" She paused briefly to recollect her thoughts before saying, "I need your professional opinion on him. He's just... He has acute panautonomic neuropathy and I don't know what to do. He's been stuck in that blasted hospital for two years now and the doctors keep on telling me that there is nothing else to do. I know that's not true, dangit!"

She gripped the phone tightly to her ear as she spoke. It always hurt to think about her son and the people that were so willing to leave him to die. She just couldn't let that happen to him. She knew Matsuda was the head of the Cardio-Thoracic Surgery Association. If anyone knew what to do; it would be him. She bit her lip as she heard Matsuda whisper calming words to her. "How about I meet you somewhere and we can talk about it in person? It sounds like there's a lot to say. You know that I'll always be there to help, Momo-chan."

"Arigatou, Matsuda-sensei. Arigatou." Perhaps there would be hope for her son yet. "Would noontime at the coffee shop down in Tokyo Village work for you? Tomorrow I mean..." "Eh? Sure, Momo-chan. I'll have Riku-san reschedule tomorrow for me." She smiled as she heard the muffled argument between the surgeon and his secretary. "Thank you..."

- Keep holding on, never letting go-

Time seemed to pass so slowly sometimes. The moment it seems to pass slowest is when you want it to go quickly. Time just didn't seem to realize the inner conflicts it was sparking because of its pace. She wasn't quite sure what she wanted. She knew she either wanted time to speed up and get everything over with or she wanted time to halt and make the surgery never come.

Sakuno found herself staring at the ceiling often these days. It wasn't that she was really bored, but she couldn't say that she knew what to do with herself. Sure, she was able to

force herself to do her work, but then what? She broke contact from the freshman quartet when she left for Rikkaidai and her quiet personality wasn't exactly conducive to making new friends. Even if she did have people to talk to, Sakuno wasn't sure she'd contact them. Everything around her felt as if it was in a haze. Running after being zapped with a stun gun would probably be easier than thinking at that moment. She cringed as she heard her cell phone ring from its place on the bed. She mindlessly patted around the bed until she finally found the electronic. She flipped open the cover and spoke, "Hello?"

"Nya! She's there! Hurray!" Sakuno practically jumped when she heard the voice. What made it worse was that she could have sworn she heard the sound of falling books in the background. "Eiji-sempai? How did you get this number?" It had only been a few months since she had last seen the boy, but she could already tell he had changed. His voice was deeper, but it still retained that springing quality she had always appreciated. "Ryuuzaki-sensei called me to the back of the clubhouse after school, nya! She finally gave me your number and said that I should call you! She also said not to tell any of the other regulars I have your number and I'll be sure to do that, nya!" Sakuno giggled at the antics of her sempai. She did miss Eiji over the past few months and was certainly glad that she was able to talk to him. It definitely explained the skittish way her grandmother had talked to her earlier that day.

Her brown eyes softened as she clung to the phone. "Say, Sakuno-chan. Why'd you transfer out?" She frowned slightly as he asked this and tried to formulate what on earth she could say. Eiji was not renowned for being able to keep secrets, but lying to him would be different than just leaving people in the dark.

She had read a book that said something along the lines of "keeping things pent up causes stress and depression". So would it be better to have someone to talk to? Her mind briefly remembered the gray haired Rikkaidai regular she had brushed by just two hours ago. She sighed at the thought and looked at the phone before speaking once more, "It's complicated."

She paused at the silence from the talkative neko until she finally heard, "NYA! That was cool, Sakuno-chan! Are you a spy? Spies always say that it's complicated!" Needless to say, Sakuno was concerned for her excitable companion. How was she going to explain her way out of this one?

"Eiji-sempai, I'm not a spy. Um... Can we meet sometime? It's easier to talk in person than over the phone."

- We're not far from the end of the road-

"Momo-chan!" The bluenette froze for a moment at the familiar voice. Matsuda really hadn't changed a bit since she had last seen him. She strolled over to the booth and slid across from the black haired doctor. "Heh... It's been awhile hasn't it? I wish I could have seen you under better circumstances."

Momo nodded politely in agreement. "I'm glad you came to hear me out though, sensei. I didn't know what else to do from this point." She smiled weakly and looked up at the blocky glassed man. "I know you're busy so I'll get straight to the point."

She took in a deep breath before continuing, "Seiichi has previously had Guillian Barre though it was of a weaker and more common variety. We used a surgical cure, but then he developed complications... Namely the pneumothorax and the swine flu of 2009. He relapsed into acute panautonomic neuropathy and has been in the hospital for the past two years. He's taken nearly a dozen experimental drugs and physical therapy has failed to help him at all. All normal cures seem to have failed and the doctors aren't willing to try

anything else. Akihiro-sensei told me yesterday that essentially my son will be dead within a few months."

She looked at Matsuda solemnly, "I know of the research you've been doing, sensei. Do you think the new variant surgery would work for Seiichi?" Matsuda leaned his head on his fists as he listened to her talk. He sucked in all of the information and quickly began processing what could be done for the boy. It was true that he had recently developed a surgical procedure to "edit" nerve function.

He had originally trained as a cardiac surgeon, but his wife was a neurosurgeon and a good one of her own right. He had seen new technology develop over time which could potentially change the formatting of the nerve cells in the brain. "Momo-chan. You have to realize that the surgery is new. We can't say that anything will work. The brain is a very delicate thing and that is why it is hard to develop new technology for it. Would you be willing to risk your son on something like this?"

Momo almost scoffed at the way he was talking. "Matsuda-sensei, they gave my son a few months at best. You'd be giving him a chance and either he can lay down and die or fight to try and get better. I'm not going to stop and just let him leave this world without a fight." "That's my Momo-chan."

**LadyLight0105: Sorry for replying latee. D8 And it seems like NiouxSakuno is really popular! He is set up in an easier situation to pair up with Sakuno. It looks like I might go with him. xD And thanks for the compliment. =D**

**Zemmno: I totally agree with you there. My Mom social networks with a lot of the cancer families and I hear a lot about who she meets. Since she's a doctor she's really helped families push forward with their treatment when doctors say to give up. It drives me nuts when people give in.**

**Aquamarine Lacus: Heyy, Raku~ And I'm doing well. xD I'm only on neopets and I think that's where I'll stay for awhile. It's just relaxed and chat friendly on there~ How bout you?**

**paranoia syndrome: Aww, thankies! I'm just hoping all my doctor OCs wont confuse everyone. xD I don't think there were any doctors set up in canon though. ;3;**

**GethinPathIsolator: I totally agree with you about strength. : ( Being stuck in an inpatient facility is really the pits. It's worse if you're immobile and it's awful how sometimes they don't even bother painting the walls. And I'm glad you like the story! : D**

**Emumoon, GethinPathIsolator, kaykay692, paranoia syndrome, thank you for alerting DTR! ;D I'm shocked at how well this story has been received. /sniffles**

**I'm so proud. You guys almost gave me a heart attack when I woke up this morning and I saw I had 150 more views than when I went to bed. xDD Fun stuff. I'll talk to you all soon!**

**Yay~ This has already become my most alerted story! /fire in her eyes**

**I'm super excited and pumped to write this now. xD I'm multitasking with a lot of stuff so I'm sorry if it comes out a bit jumbled. /strokes story gently**

**Also I realized I've been burning through lyrics. This means that I'll take two or three songs before I actually finish the story. Beauty from Pain will give me two or three more chapters then I'll move on to another one. I think each song will divide up the main parts to the story. This is still the introduction where we're meeting characters. ;3 Prepare for the climax~**

**Disclaimer: I don't own Prince of Tennis~ No siree, that's crazy talk!"**

## **Chapter 5: My Memories**

And though I can't understand why this happened  
I know that I will when I look back someday  
And see how you've brought beauty from ashes  
And me me as gold purified through these flames  
**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

Something was different about today. His eyes dully scanned the room as nurses scurried around like little mice. They were so quiet for some reason. They shouldn't have been so silent; he could see their mouths moving so quickly, but it seemed like no sound was coming out. His mind faintly remembered the yips he used to give his opponents, was this what it felt like? He clenched the muscles in his left arm in an attempt to move the limb. Why wasn't anything happening? He wanted to know why everything was so strange today. He tried to talk, but could only choke at the force of air rushing down his throat. He felt the calming hands of a nurse pushing him down onto the rough bed once more. He didn't like this, he didn't like it at all. He was "god" wasn't he? Why were they forcing him down like some sort of child? His eyes unfocused sporadically as he tried to see what was going on. He saw flashes of white and the shapes of people running around yelling at one another. He caught whispers of the words "sedative" and "wrong dosage". He felt fear well up inside of him once more. What did they mean by sedative? What was this? He felt the leather straps fasten around him and pin him down to the bed. Much good it would do anyways, he couldn't even move.

Yukimura was afraid. Fear, that was the only way to describe how he felt now. He didn't understand the world around him, but he did know something wasn't right. His head hurt. It hurt to think; heck, it hurt just to exist. "Yukimura-san. Yukimura-san, calm down." His eyes swerved to look at the source of the voice. The man seemed strangely familiar, who was he? A strike of pain hit him again and he flinched.

His breath came out in a rasp as the man made calming noises to try and relax his patient. "You'll be alright, Yukimura-san. Just calm down." Yukimura faced the man blankly and willed him to explain what was going on. There was no reply. Instead all he felt was the feeling of falling, falling into the black once more.

The shapes in his sight soon changed to mere colors and wisps of people. He closed his eyes and collapsed back onto his bed with a soft thump.

Akihiro ran his hand through his head and stared at the teenager that laid limply upon the bed. How was he going to explain this one? It wouldn't go over very well to walk up and say mistakes happen. Not in this boy's situation. The attending had already finished his residency and there really was no excuse for this. He exited the room and rapidly made his way back to his office.

He closed the door with a slam and dropped himself into the leather backed chair. He needed to think about this one. The boy had obviously reacted to the drug overdose and it appeared that amnesia was a side effect. He could probably pass it off as a side ailment due to the continuous administration of painkillers into the boy's system.

That boy, Yukimura, was certainly low on luck these days. Akihiro looked towards the papers scattered across his desk. The official documents for transferal to the Osaka hospital had just been submitted earlier in the day. It saddened him slightly at the thought of the boy's mother. She seemed to be determined to keep him alive. She just didn't understand that medically there was nothing left for them to do.

Yukimura was already living on borrowed time and it was a miracle he had lasted as long as he did. He knew that there was nothing to do. It was time to let go. He had seen enough cases in his time to know that it was impossible to win them all. Seeing someone with such a will to continue on was almost depressing. The boy wouldn't live longer than three months and that was pushing it even then. It was time to give up.

-All of my memories keep you near-

"It's all over. They took out the primary from my pelvis, but it already spread to my lungs. We know of a nodule in my heart as well, Sempai." Her fingers clenched on the metal table and she forced the despair out of her voice. "I'm going through surgery in three weeks to remove the tumor in my heart. I should be fine." The emphasis there was on 'should'. Heart surgeries were always rather tentative and to be honest, all the scans in the world wouldn't help. Surgeons didn't know what to expect until they got in to take a look. They told her of multiple scenarios, where they could end up with her losing an entire lobe of her lung. It would practically force her to quit tennis completely. She hoped it wouldn't end up like that, but her heart had more importance over anything else. There was also the risk of the tumor already being attached onto the wall of her heart. That was a completely different can of worms. She sighed and closed her eyes softly.

"There aren't any specific medicines I can take that would work. My cancer type is too rare, and even rarer in children. Most studies won't allow children to take the experimental drugs yet." Her hand snaked up to her neck as she fingered the bump that remained from her last arterial line. "Surgery is the best route for me, but they warned me that I have a limited amount of surgeries left in me. My body can't sustain itself with so little lung." She knew it was a lot to dump on her sempai and she kept on sneaking furtive glances towards the redhead. Eiji was solemn than she had ever known him to be. The curious spark from him had left and was instead replaced by a concerned friend. It was a side she had rarely seen in the neko, but it was almost comforting.

"Why didn't you tell us, Sakuno-chan?" She flinched slightly at the hurt in his voice. It was different than what she had expected though. Whenever she thought of how she would break it to those around her, it all ended in one way. Disgust. Well hidden to be sure, but that disgust was always there.

No one ever wanted to be seen walking with someone in a wheelchair or someone who was missing a limb. It was gross to be around someone like that. People only wanted to be around others who were proclaimed "normal". The thought of rejection frightened her. She wanted to be worth their friendship and with so large a fault she felt inadequate and was sure they'd feel the same way. This was why she didn't understand when Eiji pulled her into a hug.

"We're your friends, Sakuno-chan. We'll always be there for you." The look in his eyes was much like a beaten dog. She gave him a weak smile and hugged her sempai back lightly. Oishi may have been the mother hen, but Eiji was the sibling that always made everyone happy and comforted them when they felt down. The feeling of being accepted was so sweet. She wasn't being pushed away like a broken toy, it really was already to be scarred wasn't it?

The complex had grown months ago. From the simple question, "Nee-chan. What's that on your back? It's so gross." A scar, purple and deformed, marred across her back. The child was young, but it hurt. The question was phrased so bluntly that it sliced through all pretenses of calm that Sakuno had retained till that point. Her family wondered why she

refused to go swimming after that. It wasn't the water that she feared, it was the eyes of everyone there. The judging looks they sent once they saw the deformity. The looks when they saw she was different.

The innocence of the hug made her want to cry, and so she did. She let the floodgates open and the tears that she held back pour out. It was the reassurance she had been pining for all that time. To have someone say that it didn't matter if she was scarred or damaged until she was broken, it was wonderful.

She didn't care that everyone was looking at her now; she needed to cry and she was going to cry. No one would have a say against that.

-In silent moments imagine you'd be here-

Niou sipped his coffee before setting beverage back upon the ornamented table. He had enough of the clubhouse and practice, therefore he skipped it. Sitting and just having a drink was so much nicer for once. It even allowed him to puzzle out the few questions that were floating around his mind. Namely the brown haired one of the female gender. Niou couldn't say he understood his kouhai. People from Seigaku tended to be strongly school advocating and not many people transferred from different schools during the gap from junior high to high school. From what Yanagi had mentioned, she was even the manager of the tennis team. Those brats were hardly the types to let go the ones they considered their own. During the off season he remembered when they tried to scout Echizen to little success. They had been practically mobbed by the regulars and had been thrown out in the blink of an eye.

He recalled their last conversation earlier that day where she had referenced her ailing health. What he did confirm from her was that she was sick. She let too much slip in her wording and was obviously an unpracticed liar. It wasn't the fact that she was sick that worried Niou. It was what she whispered at the end. "It won't get better, so why should I care?"

It sounded that whatever she had, it was terminal. So essentially she was thinking that she probably didn't have much longer to live. It was a case unnaturally like Yukimura... Except Yukimura was slightly more subtle with his words. Niou knew that only Sanada and Yanagi understood what their taichou meant when he said "The seasons change so quickly. It feels like winter is coming too soon, doesn't it?" Those words were one of the last once they had received from their taichou before he fell too ill to speak coherently.

"Mama? Why is the girl crying?" Niou arched an eyebrow before looking for this 'crying girl'. He saw the hunched form of a teenage girl crying into the chest of a boy. Recognition flickered in his eyes when he realized the boy as Eiji Kikumaru and the girl as Ryuuzaki Sakuno. He cursed his laziness for once as he knew he was still in Rikkaidai uniform. It would be nearly impossible to near them without attracting attention.

When you are unable to sneak up to someone, the next best thing is to burst in loudly so everyone notices. Niou drank the last drops from his coffee before tossing the empty container in a bin. He turned and headed to the table where the two still sat. "Yo, Eiji-san. And are you ok, Ryuuzaki-san?" He assured himself that it was curiosity of the resemblance between her and Yukimura that propelled him to ask about her wellbeing. There was no other reason for him to be curious, was there?

Niou smirked as the girl whipped around to stare at him in shock. Poor girl probably had the daylight's scared right out of her. It was so much fun pushing buttons to see reactions. The face she made clearly made it all worth it just then. What surprised him was the cold look that Eiji sent him. He had never known the boy as the type to resort to intimidation. He seemed to be more of the sunshine and rainbows type.

"I-I'm fine, Niou-sempai." He watched as the girl hastily whipped away her tears and attempted to calm herself. His smirk fell away into a small frown. What was with all of the sickly types? Did they have some sort of masochist fetish? It seemed to run in the genetics. He reached out a hand and patted her softly on the head, "Keep note of that. I'm your sempai, y'know? I'm supposed to watch out for all my little kouhais."

He turned away from the table and threw a card over his shoulder and back towards her. He watched as she caught the small card and gave a nod for a goodbye and left through the doors to the jangling of a bell.

**My updates seem to occur later and later each time I do them... |D I'm still barely on time. /phew I've been getting my dad to play halo and gears of war with me again so I'm excited for that~ It seems that the consensus is leaning towards Niou. I'll keep my eyes open until chapter 7 which I estimate to be the end of part one. After that I'll decide a pairing and hop to it. =)**  
**Hime: I'm trying to keep it really realistic about the reactions they both take. They're both combinations of multiple people I know so all the events that happen to them are all real life events. Unfortunately for them, I crammed all the crappy lives together to make one big mess. :D And I'll take that into account with YukimuraxSakuno. /ponders They'll be meeting each other soon enough~ Thanks for reviewing!**  
**And also thanks Snowmiddy for adding DTR to alerts! :D I hope you enjoy the story!**  
**p.s. I hit the 10k word mark for this story. /fistpump**

**Chaos sure isn't fun isn't it? :D Just kidding, it really really isn't. Anyways, I need a few opinions from y'all. Like how realistic should I make this? I've kept it straight down the line, but when it comes to the surgeries, how much do you wanna hear? Do you want the days to pass realistically slow after surgery? It would be like how it is in real life, but to be honest it really sucks coming out of surgery. |D It would probably be filled with little angst moments.**  
**I'd also like your opinion on my pacing in the story. I'm planning on a wee bit of a time skip after I end part one. I'm doing all the days right now, but after five chapters I've gone through... Three days? Should I make the days go by faster and more events occur? Help is much appreciated. xD Thanks all~**  
**Disclaimer: Of course I don't own Prince of Tennis. O\_o Why would I be writing this if I did own it? I'd be off in my little hole drawing the next manga strip!**

## **Chapter 6: Turns Disaster**

After all this has passed, I still will remain  
After I've cried my last, there'll be beauty from pain  
Though it won't be today, someday I'll hope again  
And there'll be beauty from pain  
You will bring beauty from my pain  
**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

"He's transferring to Osaka University Medical Hospital? Why?" The snap of a popped bubblegum bubble cracked through the silence in the clubhouse. The Rikkaidai regulars eagerly waited for their data specialist to retell the news he was currently receiving. "Then



why haven't they tried it before?" He paused for a moment and waited for the woman to respond.

Yanagi was always confident in his data. The only thing that ever truly scared him was when something was unknown. No one knew what the results would be and normally the odds were not highly leaning towards success. If it hasn't been tried before, chances are it will be risky. The third demon didn't like the risk factor, especially when it was their buchou's life at risk. The chance of failure just seemed too high and it scared him.

When Yukimura's mother told him that Seiichi would be put through an experimental brain surgery, he was stunned. If the word 'experimental' hadn't set off alarms, they all went off on high alert when he found it was a neurosurgery. Yanagi had taken it upon himself to read up on all possible treatments for Guillian Barre and neurosurgery was definitely not on the list of common treatments. Doubt was clouding his mind and he knew it.

That was when he heard the words, "They were going to let him die. I'd rather he have a chance with the surgery than to let him go like this." That was a total game changer. Yanagi chewed a pencil lightly as he thought. He ignored the worried looks his friends gave him; they knew him well enough to see that he was stressed. A stressed Yanagi meant one out of two things. One, Yukimura was about to die. Or secondly, that Yukimura had already died.

It scared them, seeing the data player fumbling over what to do. It was something that never happened. It was one of the reasons why Yanagi was the only regular who had never had a surprise party thrown for him.

"Thanks for letting us know, Yukimura-san. Can you send us the address when he has moved in? Thank you. Goodbye." Yanagi snapped the phone shut and looked at the eyes focused upon him. He let out a tired sigh before taking a seat on one of the boxes scattered around the room. Yanagi felt sad looking at his comrades. It was something about the eyes. Their eyes were too old for only being teenagers. Their eyes were the eyes of those that had seen the world and wished it to the depths of hell.

"Yukimura-buchou is being transferred to the Osaka Medical Hospital in a few days. They have him prepared for a surgery in the next few weeks. The date is tentative currently, but they expect to have it soon." He paused for a moment to let them process the information. "You mentioned about something being untried. Elaborate." Yanagi kept up the mask, but he internally cringed. Sanada had caught that had he? Fukubuchou had always been a bit too keen for his own good. It couldn't have hurt him to ask questions after Kiri-hara had left now could it?

"Yukimura-buchou is being transferred to have an experimental neurosurgery. In theory it should work, but no guarantees have been made." Silence echoed in the room. Not even Kiri-hara made a noise. The gravity of the situation sank in for most of them and they could see the words that had been left unsaid. If it came down to an experiment... Yukimura really was dying.

"Buchou..." Kiri-hara buried his face in his palms. He had really tried to play ignorant for all this time. It had been easier to imagine all of this had never happened. The fact was so clear that their buchou was dying. It hurt, it hurt because there was nothing he could do to help. Yukimura had spent all of his time helping all of the regulars in hundreds of ways, but when it came right down to it there was nothing they could do in return. Why. Why was there nothing they could do? He clenched his eyes shut to stop the tears. He felt a comforting hand on his shoulder and let out a shuddering breath. He looked up to see the worried face of Jackal. It was stupid. It was plain to see the Brazilian was holding

himself together by a thread. Some blasted notion about staying strong for others. It was then Kirihara broke. He cried. He cried for Yukimura and he cried for all of them, sorry lot that they were.

-I can stop the pain if I will it all away-

She did feel better after meeting Eiji. It was one burden that had been lifted off her shoulders. One of many, but at least she felt as if she was one step closer. She exited the class as the bell rung and snaked her way through the halls and down to the courts. She sighed as she realized she had left her clothes in her tennis locker. She made her way over to the clubhouse and peered in through the small window.

Her eyes narrowed in confusion as she looked at the male tennis regulars. They looked so defeated. It was an expression Sakuno never thought she would see on their faces. She didn't want to see it. When Seigaku had beaten Rikkaidai at Nationals, Rikkaidai barreled on through and continued to practice and improve. She had thought nothing could really take down their fierce determination. But to see them all gloomily huddled in the clubhouse, it was awful.

She contemplated her options. She could go in and snag her uniform, but it would obviously interrupt the moment. They did appear like they could use the distraction, but it would be so strange... It was obviously a solemn moment and Sakuno didn't want to pry. She would be a hypocrite if she did. Maybe if she dashed madly in and out without leaving time to talk it would be ok. She nodded to herself and put her hand on the door. She threw open the door and flew inside, grabbed her clothing and was out like a shot. She ignored the blank looks shot at her as she fled to the girls changing rooms. Once she arrived, she promptly collapsed in an empty stall and gasped for air. Her lungs were definitely not what they used to be.

-Don't turn away. Don't try to hide-

"What have you done?" She was seething. It took all the dignity she had to not slug the man in the face. Momo was not a happy lady. She reached out and threw the metal canister of pens across the room and into the wall. She slammed her fist down on the table and hissed, "Is my son some kind of toy to you, Akihiro-san? You shouldn't be in this profession if you can't keep close enough reign on your attendings. I'm glad to get out of this rat hole and to get my son into safe hands."

Akihiro looked at the fallen pencils with morbid fixation. He was loathe to be in this situation and cursed the incompetent that allowed her to realize the mistake. "I assure you, ma'am. I do take my position seriously, but mistakes do happen. If you cannot control yourself then I must please ask you to leave the premises before you cause any more damage." He fixed her with a piercing glare and he stood up from his desk. He soon found himself sitting once more as a hand shoved him back into his chair. "Sit down." Akihiro felt his blood run cold at the tone she was using. He let a hand reach under his desk and hover over the button implanted into the wood. He didn't want to push it unless absolutely necessary. In all of his career they had told him that there were chances of being assaulted, but never did they warn him about angry mothers. They were in an entirely different class than the average unruly boy.

"Do you even have a word in your defense or do you only have excuses? Mistakes don't just happen in this business, Akihiro-san. You of all people should realize that a mistake here can cause death! Remind me just why I'm not filing papers to sue you at this moment." Momo couldn't even begin to describe how she felt at that moment. It felt

disgusting to be even in the same room at him. She couldn't remember ever respecting him and was disappointed in herself for ever trusting such a weak person.

"I must repeat that I was not the one to issue the orders. If you have a complaint then I refer you to the attending that issued the orders for him that week. A commander cannot be responsible for all the actions of his soldiers." Akihiro fired imaginary daggers at the irrational blue haired woman before him. This was a foolish argument and he was only this accepting because he knew what stress could do to a person. However, this was completely out of line and it would soon hinder his schedule.

"Don't think me blind, Akihiro-san. That attending was still green and you and I both know that his residency shouldn't have been up for another year. A true example of a corrupt system." She growled angrily at the man before her. "I want Seiichi out of this hospital by the end of the week. I don't care what strings you have to pull, but he's not going to stay here a moment longer than needed." She turned away and opened the door. She paused in the doorway and whispered over her shoulder, "I'll be sure to put in a bad word for you to all future clientele." She vanished through the doorway to leave an exasperated doctor behind.

**Thanks for reading once again!**

**Special thanks to eien.no.ame for adding me to alerts. :D**

**eien.no.ame: I'm awful at writing summaries. xD I wonder if I should change it to make it relate slightly more to the story? I don't know how to write it though. Gahh. D: I don't do at all well with word limits. And thanks a lot for the compliment. 8D And I might as well make it official because it seems that everyone supports NiouxSakuno. They have a better history so far anyways. \*-\***

**Zemmo: It's really surprising how often medication doses get messed up. O\_o My parents are doctors so luckily they caught my doctor's mess up or I would have gone double dose on an experimental drug. It's really irritating and scary when it happens. ;3; But Sakuno appreciates the well wishes. ;D**

**The song was Whisper by Evanescence. I'll talk to you all tomorrow! Reviews make me work faster and I would have finished and uploaded before dinner, but I had to host a short conference. /panic What I'm really saying is that I get lonely so review? /cheesy grin**

**How embarrassing! It has been brought to my attention that I accidentally labeled this story after Sumire rather than Sakuno. D: That certainly got a shock out of me. I changed it now so everything is prim and proper. xD I got no replies back about the time skip and how realistic to make it so I assume I can go full steam ahead? I'll probably make time go by faster and keep everything flat and realistic like I always have. /nods If I get a bit too into all of the terms you can tell me and I'll add explanations of everything at the bottom. =)**

## **Chapter 7: Just Children**

Here I am at the end of me  
Trying to hold to what I can't see  
I forgot how to hope  
The night's been so long  
I cling to your promise  
There will be a dawn  
**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

There were two people that infuriated him right now. A particular bluenette and that blasted attending that screwed up the dosage. Akihiro traced the rim of his mug as he

thought of the past few days. The attending hadn't been the one to write the dosage, but it was truly the fault of one of the interns assigned to the man. Akihiro had all the right in the world to end the hopefuls career right then. He let out a sigh. Interns were famous for their infamous prescriptions. He himself had caught at least a dozen lethal doses of medicine during his multiple year reign at the hospital.

It wasn't truly uncommon to see a newbie write up a patient for thrice the dosage that was recommended, but it was surprising to see an attending that missed the mistake. He rubbed his forehead with his disengaged hand. This was becoming a mess faster than he could solve it. Luckily the case would soon be out of his boundaries. Earlier that day he had sent off the papers to the transferal department to deal with.

With any luck Yukimura Seiichi would become a patient of the Osaka branch by Friday. He had given express orders that the boy be transferred as quickly as the team could fax the reports over. He sipped his green tea slowly and wished for once that his office was a bit closer to the exit. He needed a smoke. He knew the medical implications about smoking, but honestly didn't care a bit. Green tea had nothing on a good cigarette when tension was high.

The ringing out of his pager knocked him out of his disgruntled though. A hand slapped the switch to the communication systems and he said, "What is it?"

"The forms you submitted have been received. We faxed the file on Yukimura Seiichi to the Osaka University Medical Hospital. Is that all you require, Akihiro-san?" The clipped sound of the operator came through the speaker at an annoying tone, but to Akihiro no sound could have been more welcome. "That is all."

He flipped the switch back down before releasing a sigh of relief. It would be just a bit longer before he could get that nuisance out of his hair. Long and gone with any luck.

-It doesn't matter where we take this road-

The week had passed rather slowly. The days had come and gone, but they all seemed to last longer than they should have. Sakuno stared up at the ceiling and gloomily realized that it was the day she was supposed to go off her medicine. She hated the stuff, but that didn't mean she wanted the reminder of her impending surgery.

She had multiple surgeries before, but it never lessened the fear. She ran her hand through her hair in an attempt to calm herself. The worst thing that she could do was overthink the situation. The more she thought the more she became afraid. She chuckled weakly. It was some weird procedure the doctors always put her through. They wanted to make sure that she knew exactly what was going to happen to her before she signed the papers.

She hated hearing everything. The more she heard the more anxious she got. By the time he had reached the explanation of how he was going to stop her heart, Sakuno was on the verge of fainting. A heart bypass was it? No matter how many reassurances they gave her that it was entirely safe, Sakuno couldn't stop the little demon in her mind from blowing everything out of proportion.

Sakuno looked down at her chest warily, almost to confirm that her heart was still beating. The smooth skin that covered her chest would soon become marred like her back. They said that they'd try to keep the incision as low as possible to not show, but it was little consolation. Scars took years to disappear if they ever did. She didn't want to become a patchwork quilt, but also didn't want to die.

It was a small exchange, but Sakuno was becoming tired. She was tired of all the surgeries and all the treatments. She knew that she was lucky for lasting so long. The cut off rate for surviving dropped sharply before two years and she was already on her third after diagnosis. It didn't make her feel any better though.

Yes, she was so tired. Not just of her life, but she was getting tired of people. Envy was how she would describe the emotion. Going to school was almost depressing now. Hearing girls talk about idols and men about sports, it hurt a bit. Having people be so happy and so innocent. A part of her almost wished them to be sad just for the sake of sharing in pain. Misery loves company.

She couldn't hate them for having a simple life, but she could envy them. They were children, just children. She hoped they would stay that way for a long time because growing up hurt. They didn't know what they were getting into when they dreamed of becoming 'big kids'.

She sighed and rolled off her bed and onto the carpeted floor. She forced herself up from the ground and rested a palm across her forehead. She wobbled a bit from the dizziness that struck her, but shook it off and headed out of her room.

She waved to her grandmother before heading out the door to school. She hustled her way down the streets with her hand shielding her from the sunlight and hazily made her way towards her homeroom. She clutched at the doorway and closed her eyes for a moment. She wished away the black clouds that were beginning to cloud her vision and stepped into the room. It was almost second nature to make it back to her desk and she collapsed eagerly in the chair.

She had a premonition that that day would not turn out well. One premonition that was unfortunately fulfilled. Her vision never cleared. Thirty minutes into the class she raised her hand and signaled towards the door. Her teacher softened his eyes before giving her a nod of assent. Sakuno barely made it to the nurses office.

She collapsed outside the door weakly and clung to her head. She wheezed weakly and willed herself to get to the door. She needed to at least knock on it, that was all she had to do. She lashed out an arm against the wood with a thump. Her arm ached with the pain but it seemed so strangely dulled now. She just wanted to go to sleep. She faintly heard the gasp of the nurse before being pulled up to her feet. When on the receiving end of a migraine, the only thing that really helped was to sleep. Medicine did next to nothing when a migraine got up and running. She felt herself collapse upon the bed for a moment before she reached out to sleep.

-Cause I'm already gone-

Niou loathed brats. Notably the young ones that tended towards worshiping the regulars whenever they won a practice match. However, it was to be conceded that there were many variations of brats. It was rare to see Niou seek out one of these brats considering his infamous behavior. The pig-tailed one was neither in her homeroom or in the cafeteria for lunch, so where was she?

He mumbled angrily as he sauntered down the hall. The sound of an opening door caught his attention and he looked to see his kouhai exit from the nurses office. His eyes narrowed slightly in confusion. He slipped behind her and gave her a quick, "Yo. What were you doing in there?"

Niou was working on building his case. The girl was a bit of an enigma to him. What did worry him was how much like Yukimura she was acting. It was strangely reminiscent of the days before Yukimura collapsed and was brought back to the hospital. It worried him. He didn't ever want to see anything like that day ever again and if it meant that he'd have to force himself as a companion to this girl he would do it.

The way she looked at him was one resembling horror and fear. She looked like a windup toy that had been wound too tightly. "I was just a bit ill, sempai. Thanks for asking though. Are you going to the office as well?" She was playing keep away as usual. He stopped himself from sighing. It was so irritating to have people make martyrs out of themselves. "Yes, yes I'm sure." He felt silent as he carefully examined her. Her eyes were filled with ill-concealed guilt. Her hands were clenched together before her. Her face was scrunched into a worried expression. It made him feel bad for putting her in this situation, but nothing could be gained unless something was forgone.

"So, you going to tell me the real reason you go to the hospital every Monday?"

**That was so awful. I feel like crying. QQ I had no clue how to switch into this part. Everything will begin to connect in the next chapter which will end part one. I hope you guys are as excited as I am. \*-\* I've been waiting for this next chapter so I'll try making it a bit longer than usual.**

**Also any advice for revising the summary I have for the story would be helpful. I know it does a poor job of representing the story, but I don't know what to write with only 255 characters. :/ Also opinions on whether or not Seigaku should play a bigger part in the story? I've decided on NiouxSakuno, but Yukimura will still play a strong role as a friend, never fear. Thank you for reading! :D**

**Zemmo: Moms can get really assertive it's almost scary. O.O And I can't believe I messed up Sumire and Sakuno. D8 How embarrassing. /hides in corner Thanks for reminding me!**

**Aryaputra: Thanks so much for reminding me to change that! And the luck is super appreciated. xD**

**GethinPathIsolator: /twitch Should I be worried about being murdered now? D: Or should I worrying about giving you too much heart break? /hovers with finger on 911**

**The grand finale for part one! How exciting~ I was doing a lot of thinking for this one so I ended up beginning the write out late. /cringe I really loved all the possibilities with this chapter though and I hope you enjoy it as well!**

**Disclaimer: I don't own Prince of Tennis~ ;D If I did I would flaunt it every ten seconds which would be awkward...**

## **Chapter 8: I Still Will Remain**

After all this has passed, I still will remain  
After I've cried my last, there'll be beauty from pain  
Though it won't be today, someday I'll hope again  
And there'll be beauty from pain  
You will bring beauty from my pain  
**-Beauty from Pain by Superchick**

Sakuno didn't quite understand how she was in this position. She twitched nervously under the calculating stare of the trickster. She looked around the rooftop to check for other individuals and once she decided no one was around she decided to speak. "Cancer." The one word answer was all that needed to be said. She could see the gears turning in his mind.

"Prognosis?" He mumbled the words disgruntled. He was the one who asked for the information, but he had been rather wishing that it could have been something simple like a temporary flu. The next thing on his mind was survival. Anyone that knew anything knew that some cancers varied in mortality rate due to how common they were. Yukimura's situation was almost like the case of a rare cancer. A sickness so uncommon that it wasn't profitable to create medicines for a cure.

"Not too good. I've passed the normal death cut off, but it doesn't insure survival." Sakuno looked over the edge of the roof uncertainly. It was kind of strange telling him all this, but telling the truth was easier than lying. What was the saying? The truth is rarely pure and never simple. The corner of her mouth twitched in a small smile. That could never have been more true for her. She was so absorbed in her thoughts she didn't see him approach. He patted her head softly and sighed. "Idiot. People like you are just..." Why was it that the ones that were ill shut themselves off? Was it to hide themselves from others? Or was it just what Yukimura had told him? *We don't want to become a burden on others, you see. It hurts more to see someone else cry than to cry yourself. If you smile and pretend nothing is wrong, then they'll be fine. Just fine.*

It was probably some kind of martyr-fetish. The thought of hurting yourself to save others. The sacrificing of one to preserve the others. It was stupid. A needless burden when the only return would be the feelings of others, and how long would that last? It only hurts more in the end when people found out they were the cause of another's sadness. "selfish." Niou finished off his sentence softly. Sakuno was another example of being selfishly unselfish and it simply drove him mad. At the inquisitive look of confusion she gave him he decided to elaborate. "Don't think that secrets like that should be kept to oneself. It's selfish to think you're doing everyone else a favor by bundling yourself up and getting beaten down alone. It hurts to think you don't trust me, my little kohai."

Sakuno's eyes widened for a moment before softening. She hadn't really thought of that before. Ignorance was only blissful until you realized what it was you were missing. Had everything that she'd done for the past year been for nothing? Was she really just hurting others while her pride refused her weakness? She looked up towards Niou sadly and just looked at him. The look was all she needed to convey her message.

Sadness that could not be explained by merely words, guilt for everything she had done, and disappointment in herself for the mistakes she had made. She stood there in silence. Where could she move from that point? Should she apologize to the people from Seigaku? Or should she just let it be? Then again she also didn't want them to sympathize with her and feel like they had to force themselves to be normal for her sake...

"Come." Sakuno's eyes flickered up towards the boy ahead of her. "You haven't met Yukimura-taichou yet have you?"

-I'm thankful for every break in my heart-

Sakuno stepped off the rail line and trailed after her sempai. Every once and awhile she stopped to peer over the crowds to find him once more before dashing off after him. By the time she caught up she saw the uniformed boy waiting for her impatiently beside a bus. She gasped out apologies to which she received an eyeroll as a response. She felt herself dragged aboard the bus and dropped in one of the cushioned seats.

She looked towards the boy by her side curiously. It was no mystery that all of the regulars deeply respected Yukimura and they practically worshiped the ground he walked on. Due to

the fact Rikkaidai's tennis team had become so popular, they even classified where he was being kept during his medical stay. No one really knew how the bluenette was doing because no one saw him. Correction, no one except the regulars had seen him for the past two years.

"This is our stop." Sakuno sighed and got up from her chair and trailed after Niou. The saving grace of this was that the commute was primarily on transport so she could conserve her energy. Sakuno looked up at the silver placard that hung proudly over the hospital doors. She entered through the sliding glass entry way before pattering after Niou towards the elevators.

He pressed the button for the seventh floor and lazily leaned on the steel railing until they hit their destination. Niou exited the elevator and turned down the hallway towards the ICU. He grabbed his pass from his pocket and waved it at the receptionist before heading into the unit. He kept an eye on Sakuno as she took in all the sights and carefully directed her down the hall.

Niou didn't even bother to knock; he knew he would get no reply. He slid open the door and stepped inside of the room.

Blue hair draped over the stark white pillowcases. Pale skin made to look even paler in comparison to the dull blue gown. It saddened him to see his captain in such a state. Just lying there unconscious, it made him seem so weak.

Sakuno froze in the doorway as she stared at Yukimura. It was so different. When she had seen him three years ago he seemed like the unstoppable leader. She had heard of his illness, but it was nothing like this. She clenched a fist on the door as she stared at him. So this was why he had been gone for so long.

She walked into the room and up towards the numerous machines that were latched onto him. She rested a hand on the infusion machine as it slowly pumped more blood into his weak system. She gazed at her companion to see an emotion she never thought she'd see in his eyes. Helplessness. He felt weak and helpless. There was nothing for him to do but watch as his captain only drifted farther away every day.

"He tried to reassure us that he was fine. He didn't show any weaknesses, you know? It made us feel like fools when he went into... This state." Niou's voice cracked slightly as he recalled the memory. "Like we weren't good enough friends to share his pain. We all relied on him, yet when he needed it the most we couldn't be there for him. We really were crappy friends if we couldn't even help him when he had to deal with all of this."

Niou bowed his head and stared at the ground. He knew it hurt to experience the illness, but heck it hurt to watch others experience it as well. He let silence envelop the room before saying, "Don't make the same mistake. It hurts more than you know." Niou fell quiet before collapsing in one of the many chairs littered about the cramped room. He let a hand cover his face as he silently cried to himself.

Sakuno felt like she had just taken a dagger to the heart. Seeing the crying boy in the corner made some part of her melt. She didn't want to hurt anyone, but perhaps this was a mistake. She looked at the unconscious bluenette on the bed and whispered, "Thank you." She knew they were words he would never hear and if he did he would never understand. She thanked him for just existing and being there. "Get well soon. People out here need you."



She left the bedside and sat beside Niou. She bit her lip before reaching an arm around the boy. She pulled him to her side and gave him an awkward hug. Sakuno swallowed slightly before whispering sweet nothings into his ear. That it was ok to cry and that he should just let it all out. Everything would be alright soon.

-I'm thankful for every scar-

Matsuda twirled a pen around his fingers anxiously. His wife, Akiko, assured him that everything was all ready for the surgery and all they had to do was pick a time. It wasn't as if he didn't trust his wife, but he couldn't ever predict the future. Even "safe" surgeries had chances of something bad happening and this was Momo's child; he couldn't just tamper with him. The pen flipped out of his fingers and spiraled onto the ground and across the floor.

He sighed and leaned back into his chair, too busy to bother picking up the pen. He'd have to submit a date soon, but it was just so nerve wracking! He'd pioneered a new version of cardiac surgery, but he couldn't imagine the first surgery as being a friend's child. He groaned and stared at the laptop before him. The calendar was splayed across the screen just waiting for an appointment.

He clicked on the screen and wrote in the appointment for the Monday a week from then. His finger hovered over the enter key for a moment before pressing down and sending the order out to all of his staff. He exhaled sharply and rolled his chair away from his desk. It was done now, but it still didn't make him feel any better about it.

He pulled himself back to his desk and shot off a quick email to Momo and explained the situation. After sending it he collapsed with his head on the keyboard. There he was, a grown man who spent the first thirteen hours of the day stuck inside of a room performing surgeries and he still struggled with emailing his old colleagues.

He got up from his desk and walked out the door to his office. With any luck there would be some sort of crisis going on to distract his mind.

**MY MOUTH HURTS. /rolls around on the floor in pain**

**Blasted braces. Q\_Q I have overbite again so I'm stuck with them for even longer. D8 I do hope I get them out by my cousin's wedding. W\_W**

**This is the end of part one! The next chapter will be the day before the surgery! Exciting, hmm? ;D I'm also really bad at writing romance so any suggestions would be helpful. I don't expect them to become bffs at the snap of a finger though. /ponders**

**Iced Hearts: Aww, thanks. I feel bad since I was doing daily updates until yesterday when I was whacked with a lot of things to do. D: Thanks for reading though! :D**

**Eien.no.ame: You write really well considering English is not your first language! I would never have guessed! What is your first language? And I'll try to bring in Seigaku in a few chapters. I have some ideas of how they could be introduced. :D**

**Zemmno: I was wondering if someone would catch that! Yes, his brat. ;)**

**GethinPathIsolator: Thank you! :D**

**Raku: XD Glad to see you are still around, Raku.**

**Hey everyone! This is the start of part two and that means I time skipped! I don't think any of you noticed, but I planned the dates for Yukimura and Sakuno's surgeries both to be on the same date. I haven't had neurosurgery done to me, but I've had some friends who have so forgive me if I mess up the details. W\_W**

**In the story the date is now SUNDAY and it is the last day before the surgery. I will be introducing a few more OCs just because I need nurses to simulate how everything works in the hospital. They wont be major though and everything will run smoothly I hope. :D**

## **Chapter 9: Broken Crown**

I was sitting on my doorstep  
I hung up the phone and it fell out of my hand  
But I knew I had to do it  
And he wouldn't understand

**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

The night felt long. She stared up at the ceiling blankly with the only sound being the ticking of the secondhand. Excited wasn't quite the word she'd use to describe how she felt. Anxious might be the word or even paralyzed. Whatever it was, she couldn't sleep on the night she'd probably need it the most. She reached a hand up towards the ceiling and let it hang there.

She felt her stomach growl in hunger much to her disgruntlement. The hour where she was allowed to eat had passed long ago and she only had an hour longer to drink. She looked towards the clock that blinked the time. 11:30 PM, was it? She looked back towards the ceiling wearily as she drifted back into her thoughts. The room felt like a prison. Suffocating with its stark white walls, the hospital room lay like a blank slate before her. Sakuno's mind drifted back to earlier in the day when she checked in. The day was filled with 'excitement' and yet she still could not sleep. The cold MRI scanner took a good hour out of her day as she listened to the metallic clicking and whirring of the magnets inside the machine. Lying flat on her back hurt due to her body's imbalance with the missing lobes of her lung. Lying flat for an hour on the other hand, that was pure torture. Especially when the only entertainment they offered you was music that was barely audible over the machine's buzzing sound.

Mr.Bump and Mrs.Bump on the machine could only provide so much entertainment and distraction from the pain the machine gave her. Needless to say, Sakuno inched closed to insanity that day as her mind trailed the adventures of Mr.Bump against the evil Dr.Bump the Third. It only got worse from there. Forty-five minutes into the scan they pulled her out and kindly informed her that she needed this scan with contrast. Sakuno did not respond very well to that information. IVs were the bane of her medical existence, easily more annoying than a surgery. A surgery you had to buck up and deal with it and they at least doped you on pain killers, IVs on the other hand were much more painful. Not only do they stick you with a needle, but they practice the medical art of "fishing for a vein". She would explain it as the art of jabbing a needle around and hoping that blood come through.

They didn't always succeed either. The end result was on the fifth attempt, they finally hit red gold. She had long since begun to cry as they poked around inside of her arm. All the medicine in the world didn't make getting in needles any easier.

After they injected her with contrast through the IV, the rest of the scan went by quickly. Fortunately for her, the MRI was not the only exam she'd be taking that day. As soon as she redressed back into her clothes, Sakuno was hustled off to the ECHO lab for another test.

The ECHO wasn't nearly as bad, but it was still quite annoying. She spent the next forty minutes stuck on a bed as she felt a gelatinous ball-ended stick get shoved around her stomach and chest. Conventionally, patients normally let the doctors read the scans, but Sakuno had spent enough time around the hospital to begin to read the results herself. She stared at the screen and absorbed in the lights that flashed across the screen, signaling the blood flow in her heart. She noticed the large mass that bulged up and down in the screen and frowned. The nurse reassured her by saying that it didn't seem to be pushing up against the heart wall. That was all that could really be hoped for at that point. It felt weird to be staring at a picture of the inside of her heart. It just didn't feel normal. Sakuno leaned back into the rough bed they had provided her and waited. She was the first surgery of the day, but that didn't mean she felt any better. In six hours they'd come in and shuffle her out and into a hospital gown and send her out to anesthesia. The thought was rather worrisome. Strategically, a morning surgery was better for fasting, but it made the night tough. She groaned and whacked her head back on the sheets.

She was doing herself no favor by psyching herself out and she knew it. But that didn't mean she could stop herself. She felt herself slowly begin to fade out and let the darkness surround her in temporary slumber.

-I can't even breathe-

The murmur of the crowd around him was puzzling. Why were so many people here? His eyes glanced slowly around the room to see the dulled forms of people dashing back and forth shouting to one another. He felt the bed shake as the locks on the wheels were released. He grunted through his facial mask as the bed began rolling down a hallway. He cringed as he felt a pull on the IV on his left arm. He looked to see a nurse injecting a fluid down through one of the entrance tubes. He wanted to know what was going on, but could not manage to get the words out. He felt something warm around his hand and turned to see the hazy shape of his mother bending over him. Yukimura could see that she was trying to speak to him, but he just couldn't make out the words.

Everything felt so dulled. The world whirled around him as he lay there. Yukimura felt lost. The bed turned around a corner and Yukimura felt a blast of sterilized air rush at him. He shivered slightly at the cold sensation before frantically looking around the room. Men and women in sea foam green scrubs dragged him into the room. He felt himself being shifted from his bed over to a padded table.

His heart raced as he tried to figure out what was going on, but to no avail. He felt the mask around his face get pulled away and he tasted the foreign air in confusion. He felt the imprints of the straps still keenly on his face before a gloved hand put another cover over his mouth. The air yet again tasted different to his senses. It was strangely reminiscent of strawberry and lemon, but it tasted stale nevertheless.

He turned his head weakly away as they strapped the new mask around his face. He coughed feebly before listening to the soft cooing of his mother. The sound of her voice was the last thing he felt before he fell deep into the medicine induced sleep.

-It's like I'm looking from a distance, standing in the background-

It hurt. It really really hurt. It was dark too, and no matter how hard she tried to open her eyes she couldn't see. "Ryuuzaki-san, it's alright. I'm Suzuki Haruka. You can't see because of the fluid in your eyelids. Just calm down and try to scrunch up your eyes, it'll help get rid

of the excess." Sakuno breathed shakily before following the nurses instructions. She felt the cold dampness stream across her cheeks only to be wiped away by a soft towel. After repeating the sequence a few more times, Sakuno began to be able to see the outlines of objects. It took about ten minutes before Sakuno could say that she could open her eyes all the way and see clearly. She looked around the room and focused on the black haired nurse who was hunching over the bedside. The fifty year old bespectacled lady flashed a smile towards her young ward, "Don't try and talk, Ryuuzaki-san."

Sakuno stared at the lady before croaking, "Water." The nurse's eyes lit up in realization as she said, "Shh, sh, I'll go get some ice cubes. You might not be able to digest water yet." Sakuno's eyes trailed after the woman as she rushed out of the room for ice. Sakuno looked herself over as much as she could without moving. Her chest was lathered in yellow iodine and straight down her chest was a brown and green scar.

It was absolutely disgusting. Pushing up from her skin, it looked like mutated swamp green flesh. Plastic adhesive covered the incision and reflected the dim light of the room sullenly. Sakuno's eyes unfocused as she looked at the scar. She knew it would be visible for a long time yet and possibly for another three or four years. She would have sighed if she had the strength to, but her throat was just so sore.

The nurse walked back into the room and shook a small cup of ice in her hand. "Here, Ryuuzaki-san." She took a small spoon and slipped one of the icecubes down the girl's throat. Sakuno let the ice dissolve in her mouth before continuing her examination of the room. She noticed the transparent tube on her right side with a steady trickle of blood flowing through it. "You'll get it out in a few days." Sakuno looked back towards Suzuki with a grateful smile.

"So is there any pain? Nod if yes, shake your head if no." Sakuno gave a weak nod of her head before she saw the nurse hurry back to the station. She stared up at the ceiling again and drifted back to sleep to the music of the beeping machines to keep her company.

**Hey everyone! This was totally crammed with medical stuff. 3; But I got through the surgery part! You'll see how Yukimura responds to his surgery in the next chapter.(aren't I evil?) The Seigaku team will also make a cameo though the rest of Rikkaidai wont appear until the chapter after next. I tried explaining all the medical junk as I went so hopefully that worked. If not, look up echocardiograms and MRI scans. Anesthesia procedures differentiate depending on what kind of anesthesia you are allergic to, but generally this is how I've found it goes. And yes, on the MRI scanner at my hospital I've replayed the stories of Mr. and Mrs.Bump. o\_o I nearly went insane in that MRI scanner.**

**Jerui: I know my chapters are short. 3; I went back and read all my chapters on the itouch and they are not just short, but horrendously short. O\_o I'm wondering if I should continue updating daily or update twice a week with longer chapters. What would your opinion be on that? And yes, this will be Niousakuno.**

**GethinPathIsolator: Aw, thanks. =) And I can definitely relate there. I'll try to keep up. xD**

**Zemmno: Oops. /cringe A mistake escaped the typo checking I did I suppose. |D Thanks for letting me know! And I'm stuck on slurpies for now... I can't even open my mouth much because of these blasted rubber bands. --**

**Thanks for adding DTR to alerts, whoneedspenameswhenigothis, Iced Hearts, and jerui! And thanks to little firework for adding to favorites. 8D This story is officially my most alerted, favorite, and viewed story! /throws around confetti I feel so proud. /happy sniffles**

**Ja ne~**

**So... I'm basically updating quickly right now since I feel completely debilitated. I wake up, take Gatorade or I get a migraine, walk up the stairs, get nauseas, spend the next thirty minutes huddled in the bathroom sick. Then I get out take my nine morning pills and stare blankly ahead until noontime by when I remember I haven't done anything substantial with my day. YAY. Yeah, life stinks. Hopefully this medicine works because it's already given me a good two inches of white hair. |D And arthritis. I feel like an old person now. /hobbles about on crutch**

## **Chapter 10: Feeling**

So hard to see myself without him  
I felt a pierce of my heart break  
But when standing at a crossroad  
There's a choice you gotta make

**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

Akiko tore off her outer scrubs and dropped the bloody clothes into the dirty bin. "Gah!" She gave a quiet scream as she whacked her head soundly against the wall. Screw being mature now, it was time to freak out. She had always trained herself to hold off the fear until a time appeared where she could let it all out. That time was now.

Doctors were not always stoic and calm. In fact, Akiko found it was the reverse. She would describe herself as jittery and chaotic if she was given half the chance. Being a neurosurgeon may have been her daily job, but it never made it any less worrisome when she headed into surgery. Every morning she would go through her habitual ritual in an attempt to calm herself down before heading to the hospital. As she entered the surgical room, she always snapped into gear and donned her professional mask, but as she exited her mind always fizzled out.

Akiko took in deep calming breaths as she hovered by the wall. The surgery on that boy, Yukimura Seiichi, it had certainly been the scariest thing she had done in a long time. It took her nearly twice as long as she had originally planned for it was already 7:20pm. She dropped into her chair as back pain overtook her. Twelve hours in the ward did very little to help the back especially when she had to crouch over the boy the entire time. Repairing the nerves was just as difficult as she had predicted, if not more so. Luckily, it worked. She ran a hand through her blonde hair and slowly began to calm down. She felt excitement finally begin to bubble up in her chest. It worked, it worked, it really really worked. "Banzai!" She squealed happily and threw her hands up in the air. It was seven thirty, but that didn't mean there wasn't time to celebrate. She jumped out of her chair and bolted out of the dingy office. She felt like she had wings. What she had just done would change the lives of so many hopeless people, and it felt great. Her brown eyes perked up as she saw the scruffy hair of her counterpart. "Come-come, koi! No time to lose~" She latched her arm around his and promptly dragged him out of the hospital. She'd just saved someone's life for sure. There was the rehabilitation to go through, but he was going to survive. She loved the feeling.

-I will be the hope among the hopeless-

Momoshiro twitched. Sumire had told them to stay behind the clubhouse today because she had something to tell them. It was nerve-racking just waiting for her to come around. Namely because whenever she had something to say, she told them straight out. She rarely ever waited to call them out on something. It was a change in the norm and it was not at all welcome.

He looked over towards Kaidoh who was twiddling his thumbs in the corner. Momoshiro sighed, no one knew what was going on. Even Inui apparently had no clue. If the data master had no idea then it meant something big was going down. Eight heads turned at the

sound of the door creaking open. Sumire walked in slowly in her purple sweats before taking a spot on one of the benches lining the sides of the room.

"How to begin..." Her raspy voice sounded tired, as if she was laden with the world on her shoulders. "Sakuno-chan, she..." The regulars all were immediately brought to attention with news on their mysteriously departed kohai. After weeks of pestering the coach they would finally get their news though it would not at all be to their liking. "She went through a heart surgery earlier this morning. I was told she came out of the OR a few hours ago."

The operating room. It struck them all to the bone. What was their little friend doing in there? Momoshiro looked around the room at the faces of his comrades. Most were filled with sadness or shock, but there was one that looked resigned. Eiji sat with his face covered by his palm with a look of defeat on his face. It was then that everything clicked together for him. The headaches Eiji claimed to be getting, the tired looks, the weary walks, Eiji already knew about this.

Anger boiled inside of him. Eiji had been hiding Sakuno from them? Why? Why did he betray them? "EIJII-SEMPAI! KISAMA, why didn't you tell us about her? You knew didn't you!" It wasn't as much of a question as it was an accusation. Eiji shriveled in his corner and flinched at the angry yell. He couldn't face the looks they were all giving him. Instead he nodded, all the affirmation that they needed.

Momoshiro shot up from his chair and marched over to Eiji and dragged him up by the front of his uniform. "Why didn't you tell us anything? We've missed her too!" "Drop him, Momoshiro-san." Momoshiro grunted and dropped Eiji back onto the bench before harshly turning away. Tezuka stood up and signaled for Momoshiro to walk away from the downcast doubles player. "I'm sure Eiji-san has his reasons. For now let Ryuuzaki-sensei explain."

Sumire rubbed her forehead as she watched everything unfold in front of her. She had expected something like this to happen, but it didn't make it any easier. "Sakuno-chan wanted me to tell you, but didn't want to really tell you herself. She has cancer. Stay down." She shoved the green haired boy back into his seat before continuing, "She didn't want anyone to know. As she put it, she didn't want to become the person who when everyone sees her says, 'That's the sick girl, right?'. She thought the world of you all and didn't want to see that happen."

"We wouldn't have done that!" Momoshiro burst out.

"Don't deny that you haven't ever done something like that before, Momoshiro."

Heads turned to face the tensai. "That you haven't ever stared at someone in a wheelchair or someone who's missing an arm or a leg. It makes a person self-conscious." Fuji smiled his Cheshire cat smile that left the room silent. No one could contest the fact. It was true. When you saw someone different your eyes were always drawn to it. They had never thought of the feelings the person had when they did that.

"Che." Ryoma stared at the wall with venomous dislike. He wouldn't say it, but he missed the quietest of the freshman group. They all remembered how awful it was to figure out that Sakuno had transferred away that year. She left no reasons or address where she could be contacted at. They had no replies to their calls and texts. There was no trace of her.

They spent hours asking Sumire about where the little girl had gone, but to no avail. It made sense now, but it didn't make him feel any better for it. "So, when can we visit?" His golden eyes turned towards Inui with skepticism. Had the data master really just said that? "In two or three days when she's released from the ICU." Jaws dropped. It was going to be that easy to contact her? Tezuka was the first to regain his composure. He pushed his glasses up and said, "Instead of practice on Friday we'll go visit Ryuuzaki-san."

-Where there is conflict I will be peace-

It was strangely peaceful. He searched around the room slowly and took in the sights. A nurse bolted up from his chair and pressed a red button, summoning the attending on duty. A woman rushed into the room, blonde hair messily flying about as she pulled open the door. Her face noticeably relaxed once she looked at him. It made him confused, had he done anything?

Yukimura blinked blankly as the woman made her way over to the side of the bed. She hopped on the side of the bed and stared at him solemnly before flicking him with a manicured fingernail straight in the forehead. His face scrunched up in response and he sent her the coldest glare he could muster. "Ah! He responded! Tamaki-san, this is a great victory! Write it down, write it down!" She squealed happily. It was absolutely unbecoming of someone her age, but she couldn't help but feel excited.

The boy's file said he hadn't responded to outside forces for nearly eight months and here he was glaring at her. "I don't know how much you understand right now, Yukimura-kun, but I'm Matsuda Akiko. As of now I'm your personal doctor cause I performed your surgery last morning. You're my living and breathing pride and joy right now." She sighed dramatically and slipped off the bed. "You'll still have to keep on your air mask for now and we'll begin running some tests."

"What you're going to struggle with is muscle atrophy because you've been stationary for a good couple of years now." She whacked him harshly on his arm where his blood pressure cuff lay and flashed him a smile. "We'll fix you up soon enough though. For now just flick your eyes up and down for yes and flick them right to left for no, mmkay?" Yukimura warily moved his eyes up and down much to the delight of the young attending.

"Let me go grab my reflex hammer." Needless to say, Yukimura was lost. His head ached strongly and he felt similar to a sloth. It was nearly impossible to will himself to stay awake, much less move. He didn't even understand what she was talking about for the most part. Surgery? What surgery? From how she was talking he'd been in the hospital for a few years.

He'd definitely have to question her about what year it was. He opened his mouth and nearly choked on the air as it forced its way down his throat. Dangit, he couldn't even talk like this. Stupid pressurized mask. Akiko dived back into the room waving a small plastic stick with a rubber ball on the end. "Yukimura-kun, I'm going to be poking you to see if your body reacts, mmkay? I just have to see if all your nerves are responding correctly." The devious look in her eyes spoke differently and he groaned inwardly. She was going to have way too much fun doing this.

He hissed as the ball was brought down upon his right knee and he felt himself jolt from surprise. "Looks like that knee works! Now for the other one.."

-I will be the candle in the darkness-

"How's the pain?" Right to left. "Oh I forgot, no talking. Um... I take it that the pain is bad and you want more painkillers, right?" Up and down. "I'll put in an order for that then." She scribbled more notes onto her clipboard as she looked at her patient. Her eyes flickered back down to his file and she clicked her tongue in distaste. "Looks like the last hospital you were at gave you a wee bit of an overdose, eh. So I suppose we'll have to see what side affects you got from that."

Overdose? What did she mean by overdose? He felt his eye twitch in annoyance. "Looks like the muscles in your face are still in good condition!" She patted his arm and laughed at his annoyed response. It worried him though. He knew that she had touched his arm, but why did it feel so faint? It almost felt as if the wind brushed against him, it wasn't at all like when she touched his forehead.

She dug a photo out of her pocket and shoved it into his face. "Do you remember this kid?" His eyes narrowed in at the picture. There was a black haired boy with a cocky smile plastered across his face. His hair curled lightly and it vaguely reminded Yukimura of seaweed. He was dressed in a strange yellow and black uniform with the words Rikkai Daigaku Fuzoku inscribed on the hems. Something about the boy seemed familiar, but Yukimura just couldn't bring a name to mind.

He flicked his eyes to the side, signaling that he didn't know this fellow. "Ahh.." Her voice failed as she gave a disgruntled frown. "How about this one?" She held another picture before him, this one of two boys. The red head had his arms around a dark toned boy with sunglasses on. The redhead was blowing bubblegum and had a rather lazy expression on his face while the tanned one looked mildly annoyed at his friend. Yet again, Yukimura felt that he knew the two, but he couldn't recall the name.

His eyes flicked back and forth again though this time it was with noticeable uncertainty.

She clicked her tongue dissatisfied before pronouncing, "Looks like you have a bit of amnesia, Yukimura-kun. It shouldn't last forever, but it could take a couple of months before it comes back. It's a side effect from the extra dosage, it happens once and awhile." She sounded so blasé it irritated him. It couldn't have hurt her to sound the least bit sympathetic that he had just lost... How many years of his life? He didn't quite remember when he was born...

He huffed weakly in annoyance. "Don't worry, Yukimura-kun." She whacked him on the cuff again, "We'll get you right back into shape." She turned and flounced out the room, leaving a somewhat apprehensive Yukimura behind.

**Ok. This is longer by about 500 words so I know it is still really short. xD I was a bit unsure about posting this since it seemed so.. Happy. O\_o Hopefully that's ok. Anyways, I spent less time talking about the medicinal side of things and more on the emotions. Opinions on this? Also Jerui advised that I should update less frequently and instead make my chapters longer. Also more opinions? Should I do that and update biweekly or keep on updating daily, but with 2k-3k length chapters? Eine.no.ame: I kinda explained in this chapter, but during surgery they pump you full of fluids since you aren't getting any fluids yourself. And since you're stationary the entire time the fluid pools, namely in your eyelids. So when you wake up from surgery you normally look like a bloated fish and you can't even open your eyelids. It's really weird. O\_o**  
**Anonymous Folk: Are you kidding? I never get tired of reviews, especially ones with compliments. It helps boost ore-sama's ego. ;D /preens peacock feathers**  
**Iced Hearts: Aww, I'll miss you! I hope your school goes well. :3**  
**Jerui: I normally update daily just because, "Anyone with a mental disease can write. Work on the other hand.. You need a brain to do that." |D I've been foggily minded so I have no doubt I'll mess up in the end. I might take your advice and slow things down a bit. The phrases are song lyrics that I pull from what I used as inspiration for the chapter. xD Good luck with your thesis!**



Zemmno: Don't worry. xD I really appreciate you reviewing though. /hug

Started on this one a bit late, so I decided to update this a day late and instead try and make it longer. /crosses fingers

Disclaimer: I don't own the music nor the characters in this story. Well, I guess I own Akiko, Momo, and Matsuda. Oh and Tomio, Michiko, Saito, and Roman. |D

## Chapter 11: The Cost

I guess it's gonna have to hurt  
I guess I'm gonna have to cry  
And let go of some things I've loved to get to the other side  
**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

The gelatinous mixture jiggled back in forth on the spoon before shifting off and plopping onto the plastic plate. It was disgusting. Apparently it was called 'clam chowder'. She poked the mass curiously and watched as it flopped back and forth like jello. She sighed as she looked hopelessly at the gray substance; there was no way she was going to eat that thing. The hospital remained high at its standard of amazing inedible food.

Sakuno had regained some of her mobility in the past two days. She sighed as she remembered the awful experience of her first walk. It was only a bit after she had been released to nasal prongs instead of the fully fledged mask when Suzuki had barged in and told her it was time for the infamous therapy. Half delirious and entirely nauseous, they began sitting her up in bed only to have her begin retching. It was not a good experience to say the least.

Suzuki merely gave her nausea medicine and told her to buck up. Sakuno was sure her father would have said much of the same, being the workaholic that he was. Her mind briefly relayed back to the few visits her family had paid her in the ICU. Michiko and Tomio were good parents to be sure, but they were busy ones. They visited at odd hours around the day, but never stayed for longer than a half hour, leaving Sakuno alone for the majority of her day.

Her father had been adamant that by the second day post-surgery she would be walking around the ICU and he'd be there to see it. This only encouraged Suzuki to her 'strong motivation'. Not to mention that moving felt like hellfire. The parallel to moving her right arm was a jolt of snake venom. The snake reference came purely from the chest tube that was still stuck firmly in her side. She was supposed to be getting it taken out later that day, but it still proved to be a nuisance.

Chest tubes caused all sorts of problems including the inevitable backache. It was an ache that couldn't be taken away by the painkillers, thus giving Sakuno many sleepless nights. The lack of sleep was anything but healthy for the girl, but medicinal induced sleep was of little help as well. It would have to do for the meantime though.

Later on the second day, Sakuno managed to stabilize herself on her feet. She couldn't walk without her trolley for support and she still felt weak at the knees, but she could walk. Ishikawa Saito, the nurse practitioner, said that it was good... For a start. Despite the angelic look they produced, Sakuno knew the truth behind the mask. Nurses could be truly and willfully sadistic when it came to getting their patients back in shape and out of the hospital.

Suzuki at least had some shred of maternal protectiveness in her, but Saito on the other hand was devilishly cruel in comparison. Saito was the one primarily in charge of her schedule and had set up numerous hurdles for Sakuno to cross. Sakuno found herself trucking around the entire floor of the hospital once an hour which significantly chopped up her relaxation time.

Sakuno sighed as she pushed away her 'chowder' and stared at her DS which lay perfectly an inch away from easy reach. They were really beginning to test her patience. She had no doubt that Suzuki had placed it there to get Sakuno to try and sit up on her own. She put her right hand down on the bed and let her fingers pull the sheets slowly up until the red machine was in grasp.

Her hand wrapped around the DS as she sidled it up and onto her lap. Her arm use had been severely impaired post-surgery. She still couldn't force herself to lift her hands up a few inches without feeling pain shooting down her sides. They told her that she'd have to begin stretching again soon, but that she couldn't raise her arms over her head for a few weeks. Even worse, she couldn't carry anything over seven pounds for a few months! The extension of that meant that she couldn't carry her own book bag to school. Sakuno refused to have someone carting around her bags for her. She just refused to. There was a certain pride to her own independence where she could carry her own luggage. Unfortunately, not many saw it that way. Her mother had slowly begun to wear her down to the point that she felt that she'd have to submit soon.

As she was about to flip open the screen, she heard the door to her room slide open. Her eyes flickered away from her screen as the primary doctor and the hoard of interns marched into her room. "Ehh, hello Ryuuzaki-san. Doing well I see." His voice was filled with boredom. It wasn't exactly the most encouraging thing, but Saito told her he was just a lazy bum. She'd know being his husband and all.

Ishikawa Roman had as much personality as a sloth on sleepers. He was her surgeon and she had a fair amount of trust in him, but it always seemed to lessen when he was around. "Pain or anything?" He scratched his head and when he got no affirmative answer he scribbled down a few more notes. He sauntered over to her chest tube and bent down to examine the container. He tapped his pen on the side of the container and looked over the blood filled box with a critical eye.

"We can take it out now, Ryuuzaki-san. Would now work for you?"

"Hai, Ishikawa-sensei." She gave him a stiff nod before the interns rushed around in a flurry of activity. She could have sworn she saw them prepare everything faster than a blink of an eye. Multiple pairs of curious eyes huddled around her as they all tried to see what their sensei was doing. It made her kind of uncomfortable, but she had slowly grown used to it over her past surgeries. All they really wanted was to learn after all.

"When we tell you, exhale and then hold your breath. It's important you don't breathe in, alright, Ryuuzaki-san?" She nodded in confirmation and scrunched up her eyes as she felt them snip out the sutures tying her tube in place. It was strange because of the general anesthetic left over in the area. She could feel it, but not quite all of it. It made her want to shiver as she felt the small sutures being pulled out of her skin.

"In, out, and hold." A strangely serious tone in his voice appeared as he said the final word. She barely stopped herself from gasping as he pulled the long tube out. It couldn't have taken more than a few seconds, but it hurt. Not many could say that they knew the feeling

of having something inside of them pulled out. Unfortunately, Sakuno could say she had experienced it and she didn't like it at all. It felt like there was something stringy and clammy that slipped out of her and dropped to the floor. It just wasn't natural.

"Good job, Ryuuzaki-san." Roman placed gauze over the hole in her flesh and immediately sealed it with some tegaderm. "We'll keep an eye on that spot for a bit, eh?" He flipped his gloves off and into the trash. He patted her condescendingly on the head before saying, "We'll start taking you down on the pain medicine soon. You know all about the addictive nature of it I suppose?"

Of course she had heard all about it. It was a painkiller and most painkillers were addicting like morphine or oxycodon. In fact, she'd gone through minor withdrawal symptoms on her own and they were not fun at all.

"You should be out in a few days at the most. Minimum would be three and maximum would be seven. I'll be seeing you later." He gave a casual salute to her as he slipped out the door with his interns shuffling on behind him.

"I'm glad I have you all to myself again, Ryuuzaki-chan. Now that the tube is gone there is a whole other world open to you for walking." Sakuno froze. Saito's voice had that cruel tint in it as she smiled brightly at her patient. "Now let's talk about your new and improved schedule."

-I wish you were here-

He was... Bald. That was the first thing that struck him when he saw his face in the mirror. Yes, he was definitely not bald before. If the stubbles on his hair meant anything then he used to have blue hair. He sighed dejectedly at the mirror before slowly leaning himself back in bed. Recently he seemed to be meeting lots of strange revelations. He'd met his mother yesterday. She appeared to be a nice person, but mildly active when it came to hugging.

He mentally made a note to ask Akiko anything she knew about his mom. It was queer to be asking her such things considering he had evidentially lived with her for over a decade. His memory was playing all sorts of tricks on him now. For a while he had called Akiko, Timmi, for no real reason save for that he thought it was her name. He had also lost track of the days and thought it was Tuesday instead of Wednesday. It troubled him.

Being handicapped as he was, he felt that he was experiencing fairly normal life. Sometimes he phased out or forgot things, but it was pretty good considering. Akiko had taken the time to study her 'favorite patient' and read him his life story during one of their sessions. She had given him one of two options then. One, he could try and memorize as much as he could about his former life or two, come clean and say that he'd forgotten pretty much everyone and everything.

Both options were not that appealing to the boy. It felt awkward trying to memorize who he used to be, but it felt awful imagining telling all of his friends, former friends, that he no longer remembered them at all. Yukimura sighed dejectedly as he stared up at the ceiling. He'd have to make a choice soon. Apparently people were trying to schedule visits with him.

It was reassuring that he had regained some ability of speech as they trusted him enough to put him on nasal prongs. The blasted things itched, but at least it allowed him to talk. Well, the itching was a nightmare. Considering his complete lack of mobility other than

speaking, he couldn't scratch his itches. He loathed it to be perfectly honest and it was outside of his dignity to allow anyone else to scratch it for him.

He couldn't wait until he could move his hand again. Akiko had told him that it would be a few weeks before he would actually have any substantial muscle tissue. She said to feel free to begin with the great exercise of finger twitching. So far he had managed to move his left pinky, but it felt like such a meager victory. There was no reward out of being able to move the smallest finger on the hand you use the least.

He felt like it was kind of hopeless. Would he be able to proceed like this? Building up from ground zero it seemed. His eyes dulled as he stared aimlessly ahead. He knew this position wasn't a good one. It left him feeling rather lost. Up a creek without a paddle as it were. Sometimes he wished that it would all just be a dream. Right now it felt that no matter how hard he tried, he just lost ground. What was the point in trying to remember people if he just forgot them again later? It was a losing battle from the get-go and he knew it. And it made it that much harder for him to find the will to even try.

"Yukimura-kun!" The blonde doctor popped her head in the room with a smile plastered across her face. She sauntered in with her white lab coat swaying behind her before dropping into a rolling chair and scooting up towards him. "I assume very little has happened to you since I was last here? Nowhere to go after all." If he had enough muscles he would have twitched at that moment. The jab at his immobility was quite unnecessary. She remained oblivious to his displeasure and continued on, "We have some stuff to talk about today! Well, I'll be doing the talking and you'll be doing the listening for the most part... Anyways, I'm bringing in a physical therapist to help you get back on your feet. Plus I'll be kidnapping some of your old acquaintances to see if we can stimulate your mind a little bit. I have some of my victims outside for your pleasure. They've already been told a wee bit of the situation so don't worry about it, Yukimura-kun!" She whacked him again on the cuff while chirping in her annoying sing-song voice.

He sighed before murmuring his acceptance to his fate. It couldn't get very much worse than this could it? Hopefully whoever she brought in wasn't an emotional and bawling girl who claimed to be his former girlfriend. That would be something he definitely couldn't take.

"Come in, Sanada-san and Yanagi-san! The rest of you have to stay outside for a bit longer. Thankies!" She waved in two teens wearing that awful colored uniform that he had seen yesterday. They looked rather like serious bumblebees. If bumblebees could be serious that was... Yukimura contemplated the matter for a moment until he realized that it was completely rude to leave people hanging like that.

He mentally slapped himself in the face before looking up at the two boys again. The capped one looked at him with a worried expression. He was rather stiff and uncomfortable in the situation it appeared. The one with the bowl-haircut remained for the most part emotionless. It was disconcerting in a way, but he felt as if he knew the fellow. Somewhere in the back of his mind a little voice told him that he was performing an analysis. It was queer.

Akiko jabbed the teens and whispered loudly, "Say something! It's awkward with you all staring at one another." She cleared her throat before sitting down in the far corner of the room. "Now pretend I'm not here."

Easier said than done. "Hello, Sanada-san, Yanagi-san." Yukimura picked up the names from what Akiko cued to him earlier, but it didn't mean he knew which one was which. He did suspect the capped boy was Sanada, but he wasn't quite sure why. "Seiichi." Yukimura was sure he felt a twitch inside him. Crap. These were people he used to be really good friends with if they were on a first name basis. Sanada walked over to the bedside and put a firm hand on his friend's shoulder. It was a reassuring touch and it helped him calm down a bit. It was a gesture that conveyed more than words could have managed.

He gave a small smile back to the boy before looking towards the other one that remained at the end of his bed. They weren't at all talkative, but Seiichi rather liked that. It was calming and it made everything almost feel normal. "How do you feel?" The bowl-haired boy's tone was flat and it gave him the feeling of being interrogated.

"I'm quite alright. Thank you for asking." Yanagi raised an eyebrow. There was no way in the world he was feeling fine. The response reminded him so much of his friend. His eyes softened. Yukimura had always been a stubborn one when it came to showing weakness. It was an irritating trait, but it was what made him the invincible leader they all adored. His memories might have been gone, but Yukimura was still the same.

Some part of him felt happy. For so long he had talked to Yukimura and had never gotten a single response from the boy. He was still here. He was and that was all that mattered. "Good." The other part of him felt sad seeing his captain in such a sorry state. The purpling scar across his head bulged out from the pale shaved skin. Yanagi turned his gaze away and tried to focus on his friend, but always his eyes looked up at the scar.

"It's ok to look at it." Yanagi tilted his head in confusion. "If you're going to get used to something you have to be around it long enough. Get it over with and stop shifting around awkwardly all the way down there. It's making everyone uncomfortable." The light tone in his friend's voice made him smile. Even when he reprimanded them all he still kept spirits high.

"Right."

-The snow is getting colder-

"We can't keep this up."

"Don't you think I know that? But what else are we supposed to do? I can't just give up on him!"

A glass smashed upon the ground and shards flew across the room. "Shoot. I'm sorry, Haru... I just... I'm tired and old. I can't keep up with all of this... I just can't."

The man frowned slightly before pulling his wife into an embrace. "It's alright, Momo. I understand. Go to bed. We'll try and figure something out in the morning." The brave Yukimura Momo, the proud mother and terror to her enemies, fallen and broken was painful to see. Haru knew they couldn't keep all of this up. Seiichi's bills were only stacking up higher and higher and it was becoming completely unmanageable.

He and Momo both had well-paying jobs, but it wasn't enough. One hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Dollars, not yen. That was the cost of the experimental surgery. No matter how you looked at it, it was an exorbitant sum. They had already been working off

the hospital stay, but with this... It seemed like an immovable mountain had just appeared in their path.

He let Momo go and turned to sweep up the glass. It looked like he'd have to pull out yet another loan. "Kuso..."

**Zemmno: I'd cry if I killed Yukimura off. I'm fine leaving him mentally disabled and in a wheelchair, but I'm not quite mentally prepared to kill him. (no, that wasn't a foreshadow)**

**GethinPathIsolator: Oh! So that was you! xDD I wouldn't underestimate how mean I am though. Yukimura's future will always be uncertain... (buahahaha!)**

**Raku: I would have agreed with you except that I was talking about Maru, Jackal, and Kirihara. Q\_Q But yes, he would have forgotten Sanada too. /heartbroken Not really any better. I think since I last really talked to you I've had one heart surgery, two lung surgeries, and about six different medicinal drugs. |D Lots of stuff. Anyways, I have a limiter on my lung surgeries now since I don't have enough lung to sustain me. Just gotta hope the medicine works. If it spread I'll have to try lung transplants but technology is still super behind for those and prognosis wouldn't be too good. @\_@**

**So. Um. This chapter will fail. Probably because I've been in and hour of throwing up and diahorea since about four days ago. And I got 4 hours of sleep last night. YAY. /sarcasm**

**Disclaimer: If I owned Prince of Tennis... I'd be on my conquest for world domination!**

## Chapter 12: New Complaint

I guess it's gonna break me down  
Like falling when you try to fly  
It's sad, but sometimes moving on with the rest of your life  
Starts with goodbye

**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

"Well, that went well." Momoshiro cringed at the statement. It was dripping with sarcasm and it nearly hurt to hear it. Especially when it was all directed at him. His mind was filled with excuses he could give, but all of them seemed strangely pathetic even to himself.

"Anyone you have to say, Momoshiro-sempai?" He began writing his last will and testament.

Ryoma icily glared at his sempai as they headed away from the hospital. What on earth was his sempai thinking? Out of all the things to do, why in kami-sama's name did he react like that? Anyone with a brain should have realized that being hospitalized left people in a fragile mental status. Gawking at her scar and then blasting at her for hiding for so long did very little for their situation. They didn't even have a ride back because of his stupid behavior. Sumire kicked them all out of the hospital before telling them to walk back. He sighed uneasily as he looked back towards the building. She was so close and yet so far away now. He didn't doubt that she'd become a recluse again. Stalking Rikkaidai after her release was one option, but it didn't seem like a good one. He kicked an imaginary pebble before glaring at the sidewalk with venom. He wanted to be back in there talking to her, but no. It couldn't be that way for now.

*She shrunk back into the worn sheets, her pale skin barely standing out against the ghastly blue tones of her gown. Her face was turned away from them as she tried to hide from her former schoolmates. Ryoma stepped closer to her only to have her flinch back. His eyes drooped before he turned away. "We should go." They had already caused enough damage*

*for now. They had hoped the time they all reunited would be happier than this, but it seemed it was not to be.*

-Hey, wait, I got a new complaint-

She was dysfunctional. They had taught her that today. Sakuno stared blankly at the tear stained sheets on her lap. It was the word normal again. She was different, and therefore not good. Being acceptable to society meant you had to be normal and that was something she could never be. She didn't choose to be this way, but this how it would play out was it? But she couldn't see them again. Her mind raced into a frantic jumble at the thought of seeing the Seigaku regulars. No, she couldn't face them. The thought was terrifying. Being rejected once was enough, another time would be too much. She couldn't possibly do that. She quivered in place as she tried to clear away the thought.

She let the tears drip down her face. It hurt having them react like that. It really did. Being reminded of her scarred self hurt like a thousand knives. She was sure her sempai didn't try to damage her, but they did. It wasn't as much of what they said, but what they didn't say. It's the omissions that they had to be wary of. When they looked at her and daren't voice the words that were in their heads. Not even bothering to conceal what they felt. Some part of it was disappointment. They did look that way after all. Like they had expected more of her, but she just couldn't deliver. It was hopeless to try and pretend that everything would be normal, like how it was before. She was different now she supposed. And time wouldn't ever turn back. She had seen somewhere even in Tezuka's eyes that condescending look. She was some sort of malformation, diseased and broken. Subhuman. Those that were sick like her were defunct. There it was, that word normal again. If you weren't normal then you didn't belong. People stared, people judged, people mocked. The words they didn't say, the words that come out through how they acted around her, they burned. Sakuno sniffled as she moved her left hand up to cover her eyes. She didn't want to cry anymore.

Crying was a sign of weakness. She couldn't afford to be weak anymore. She didn't want to be a failure. She didn't want everything to fall apart because of her. Her friends, her family, was everything she did just going to hurt them in the end?

-Forever in debt to your priceless advice-

It worried Saito. Her young ward had become close to her over the past few days and seeing her like this was saddening. It started when those school brats came in and started acting like the idiots they were. She sighed, teenagers were so foolish at time. They were so unselfishly selfish and it drove her crazy. They came willing to try and cheer their friend, but they didn't know how to walk in another's shoes. What would Sakuno feel when they came in? Would she want to talk medical crap and about how strange she looked? Of course not.

She rubbed a hand against her forehead irritably. "Kami-sama help us all." She jerked up at feeling of being whacked across the head with a file. She looked to see her husband leaning across the counter above her with a concerned look on his face. They stared at each other for a few seconds in the test of wills until she finally gave in. "Stupid brats are stupid. That's it."

"No, it's not." Roman gave her another sound whack across the head before sighing.

"You do awful work when you're mad. Take your break now and tell me what's wrong." He was terribly blunt about it.

Saito exhaled sharply before saying, "I'm worried about Sakuno-chan. She reacted badly to the visit of her schoolmates. Her family isn't around enough to talk to her about it so she just keeps on holding it in. I can't stick around forever and I have other charges as well. Not sure what to do about it now."

Roman bounced his head side to side in thought. He definitely knew what she was talking about. Insensitivity was becoming a real problem in this day and age. "Do what you do best, koi." He turned around and slowly sauntered away before calling out his explanation, "Get in there and meddle in her business. I can't imagine that anything would stop you."

Saito's brow twitched with annoyance. He really was a jerk at times. He did have a point though. It would do no one any good if she just sat there and let her frustration brew. No one else would go help the pigtailed shortie so she would. Saito slammed her hands down on her desk before storming up and towards the room of her patient. She opened the glass barricade before marching in and sitting down by the sobbing girl.

Sakuno looked over at Saito sadly and was surprised when she felt a hand patting her head softly. It reminded her so much of Niou, strangely comforting in a way. Though she couldn't shake the feeling that she was being compared to a dog. She missed the boy. They'd grown rather close over the past few weeks. Though Marui called her "the brown blur", a nickname she didn't quite understand, she found the regulars much nicer than they appeared to be.

It was comforting to be around them. She felt like they were all the nicest sempai she could have ever asked for. Even Sanada had shown a flicker of kindness since she had begun to follow them after practice. She'd scored once against Jackal before getting pummeled into the ground, though it did earn some sort of weird respect. She never remembered being so relaxed around the Seigaku regulars. Maybe it was because she had practically given up hiding anything from the Rikkai boys?

If she had already told them about her cancer, then anything else was practically fair game. Nothing could have been more precious to her than that secret. Well, almost nothing. However, that was not the point. The point was that they had all become a sort of adoptive family. She found it strange that they had warmed up so quickly to her until Jackal said something after practice.

*"They see you like another Yukimura, Ryuuzaki-san. Don't make that face." Jackal sighed at the confused look he was sent by his companion. "It's just that... When one man falls, his friends come and help him up. We didn't do that for Yukimura. Instead he became a crutch for us." He rubbed a hand over the back of his head.*

*"You're just like him in a way. Not willing to accept help from others and instead trying to keep them happy." Jackal turned to look at his tennis partner as he shone his racket. "We don't want to have to see anyone go through what he did. We didn't even see that he was wasting away. So." He gave her a light hearted shove on the arm, "Feel free to talk to us, hm?"*

Was she a replacement for Yukimura? She didn't think so, but it was strange. She leaned into Saito's touch and swallowed her tears before willing herself off to sleep.

**Abrupt end... Awkward silence. Anyways, this chapter fails. I'm sorry I updated late and you ended up with an awful chapter. /cringe**



Review and give me inspiration again? ;D Because I seriously got hit with inspiration while watching american idol and unfortunately it wasn't quite for this story. /rambles

/makes SoS smoke signals

GethinPathIsolator: Hospitals drive me nuts. Try being in one for three weeks and only being able to eat bread, butter, cheese, and ham for breakfast. EVERYDAY. Oh and a hot dog EVERYDAY for dinner. It's enough to drive a girl crazy. D: I can't look at a hot dog without feeling sick to my stomach now. It's cursed me. xD Especially since I've had to stay at that hospital three times for three to four weeks each... Which means about 10 weeks of bread and butter torture. /shudders in remembrance

Raku: I know right? O\_O Meh scientists are working on it, but it's slow going. And yes, hospital clam chowder is like that. You should have seen the stuff they gave to me under the guise of chicken noodle soup. It was water with yellow clumps in it. I was told it was disintegrated chicken. -- Don't trust what they give you~

Phew! I'm so tired. @\_@ I just finished Model United Nations so excuse my lack of appearance. I had so much fun though... Security Council forever! HOORAH!

Also... I was writing an essay... And I figured out that my grammar really really sucks. O.o If any of you readers would like to beta and help me figure out the difference between a fragment and actual sentence it would be much appreciated... I turned off PMs since I'm tired of spam, but post in the review and I'll open them up? |D

## Chapter 13: Singing Herself to Sleep

I know there's a blue horizon  
Somewhere up ahead just waiting for me  
Getting there means living things behind  
Sometimes life's so bittersweet  
**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

The door was closed. It was completely closed. They couldn't open it again after coming so close. She was almost relieved at the fact. She no longer missed her friends, instead she felt afraid of them. Cringing at any mention of them. Nay, they didn't even deserve the name "friends" any longer. Former acquaintances was how they would be described from now on.

Sakuno stared out the window with a glassy look in her eyes. She was going to be released later in the afternoon with the consent of Roman, yet she didn't feel happy. At least when she was holed up in the hospital they would deny all visitors if she wished. At school there would be no such protection. Her eyes flickered closed as she contemplated what she would do next. Perhaps she could ask for help from the regulars? No, she couldn't place the burden on them.

It was something that didn't even remotely include them and she couldn't hide forever. She stood with her hands on the wheelchair to stabilize herself. Nurses shuffled down the hallway in the course of their duties, ignoring her as they went by. Saito had gotten reassigned yesterday because of Sakuno's quick recovery. The various person that helped her now were nameless and they hardly got involved with her. It was almost lonely without the forceful mothering that Saito gave her.

She let out a sigh before opening her eyes again and staring out over the city. The city was beautiful during the day as well as night. The twinkling of the lights mesmerized her as people went about, not even knowing that they were watched. She hummed softly to herself as she tried to calm herself. Despite everything that her nurses said, she still worried about her heart. It was silly and there was no problem with it now, they even

checked. However, she still superstitiously felt that if she worried too much something would go wrong.

Her lips parted as she murmured the lyrics to herself, "Come to me the moon is closer than your eyes. I can barely see through the cracks that shines out my scars. Sirens scream in vain. I have already died a million times inside. I surrender, shoot me down. No bullet could stop me now." The song helped numb her mind. She could distract her mind away from everything. To forget, just to forget. It was so calming. Her fingers gripped the plastic handles weakly as she let herself relax.

She exhaled sadly before casting one last look over the city before wheeling around to return down the hall. Her silent steps across the floor were masked by the soft footsies they had given to her. The treads helped her maintain her balance as she walked slowly down the hall. She slipped through the open door and turned beside her bed. She sat herself down upon the edge and prepared herself before swinging her legs upon the bed. She gasped as the pain in her chest struck.

All the pain medicine in the world would never completely eliminate the pain. She hissed as she regained her bearings. She was supposed to begin weaning herself off her medication over the next two weeks, but it never made it any easier. She already knew it would be tougher this time. Her allergies confined her to only using Oxycodon as an oral pain killer and unfortunately over her past surgery her body began to adapt to the medication. On her final week she had begun to experience withdrawal side effects. To be honest, it sucked. There was no other way for her to not feel like a drug addict as her body craved the mind numbing effects of the medicine. Sakuno leaned back into the bed slowly and listened to the mellow ticking of the clock. The second hand rotated slowly around the clock despite her wishes for it to go faster. So slow, it passed so slow.

Her gaze lingered on the clock as the door opened and shut. Roman looked at her with a calculating eye. In all respects the girl was ready to be released, but some part of him didn't feel quite comfortable with it. There was no way to stall the matter though. The man pulled up a chair to the bedside and sat on it with his arms resting on the back of the chair. "Sooo... How're you feeling?"

The conversational aspect of the job had always irked him. They trained him to be a surgeon, not some chatty secretary. Nevertheless, he found himself getting a sore throat more often than a sore back. He sighed internally at the thought. There were so many things doctors weren't told before they were shuffled off into their professions.

"I'm well, thank you." Sakuno gave him a kind smile. It was something that all patients did. If you didn't smile then they thought you were sick so even if you felt as if you were on the verge of throwing up, you didn't frown. Frowning was almost asking for a death sentence. A single frown could cost you a few thousand dollars if they checked you in for a few more days.

"Good, good..." Silence fell upon the room as he stared inquisitively at her. She was so strangely quiet now. He almost missed how spritely she used to be. Key word being almost. "We'll be able to release you today. Do you know when your family can pick you up?" "My grandmother can pick me up at 5pm." Sakuno's fingers twitched slightly. 5pm, right after tennis practice... She kept the smile plastered on her face and silently wished the man away. He was just going to bring up unpleasant thoughts.

"Alright then, Ryuuzaki-san. Better start packing then, hm?" He got up from the chair and ruffled her hair with a small smirk on his face. He strode towards the door and called back over his shoulder, "Hopefully we won't have to see you again." He winked before heading out the door and back into the frenzy of nurses.

She exhaled sharply in relief.

-She sits in her corner-

It was a losing battle now. The clock ticked in the background, music to keep him company through the long nights. Despite what they all thought, it was nearly impossible to sleep in the hospital. The honking of his blood pressure cuff warned him briefly before it filled with air, constricting his arm. He grunted softly before relaxing again. He should have been used to the blasted thing already. Every hour on the nose it would begin tightening once more and every time it woke him from his tentative slumber.

He stared blurrily up at the ceiling. His mind briefly wandered as he stared at the holed boards that covered his room. Supposedly it was a side effect, the dizziness that was. His mind still was recovering from the surgery and he found that he often had memory blips. Times when he didn't remember his own name or where he was. It was almost depressing at times. What was the purpose of going through the day if he would only forget it later? He didn't want to lose everything. A man is nothing without the people surrounding him. He is only lonely in an abyss of darkness. His... Team had come to visit him regularly now. He could vaguely see their faces in his mind, if only differentiated by their hair coloring. They seemed pleasant enough, but they weren't exactly what Yukimura would call his friends. They weren't **his** friends after all; they were the old Yukimura's friends.

He scoffed internally. Perhaps he could name his former self just so people could tell the difference between the two? From the bits and pieces he understood from their mannerisms, the old Yukimura was very different from who he was now. The old one was powerful and charismatic while he, he was a wretched boy unable to move his hands without help. It scared him sometimes when they came around. Even if they were kind, they expected things of him.

Their adoring eyes were one thing that they all shared. They looked up to the old him; it made Yukimura feel like he had to become someone he no longer was. He had apologized once. He said that he was sorry for taking Yukimura away from them. Of course they didn't understand. His eyes flickered shut. Those children wouldn't be able to understand what it meant and they probably would forget his words before they became able.

Reaching adulthood isn't just an age. Events happened to people that forced them to grow up quicker than others. In that respect, Yukimura was old. The Rikkaidai regulars appeared as mere children in his eyes, people he wanted to protect. They were too young to have to really experience the world. They may have thought they'd seen hardship, but they hadn't, not yet. Almost everyone has a moment in their life where they can really say they become adults. Some have it quickly, but Yukimura prayed that none of them would have to go through it for a long time.

So many children always wished they could become adults, but they didn't know what they were wishing for. Maybe he could tell them that someday, but perhaps not. Should he change them now or let them learn as time went by? It had been a thought that had often visited his mind over the past week. Perhaps he was underestimating them or even patronizing them. Yukimura looked out the window sadly.

The trees spiraled up past his room and provided a canopy that gave shadow to his room. Seeing the nature outside was one of the only ways he could tell he was still human. After being stuck in a cubby for so long, one could not help but lose shards of their humanity. They moved him out to the general floor earlier in the morning, but that past week had slowly worn him down. There was no natural sunlight. There were no plants. There was nothing natural in the entire dang ICU. Blasted kid down the hall with the allergies. He sighed and let his eyes drift back down to his hands. Time to do those exercises again.

-Singing herself to sleep-

Niou was rather bored now. There hadn't been anything interesting for the past week now that the braided one was in the hospital. He let out a clipped sigh as he sauntered slowly towards the school. Chances were they wouldn't care if he was late. He could slip in without them noticing after all.

Practice was noticeably sullen ever since they visited Yukimura at the hospital. Niou scratched the back of his head. What to do about the boy now? He obvious had some sort of amnesia, but he seemed to forget them whenever they visited. Kirihara had taken to practicing on his own after the fact that Yukimura had forgotten them wormed its way into his head. The seaweed head had always idolized their captain and being completely forgotten hit him hard. It hit them all hard.

Niou felt that he was the only one that wasn't in the middle of a mid-life crisis because of it. Heck, even Yanagi forgot his notebooks at last class. The fact being that Yukimura probably didn't forget them voluntarily seemed to escape them. People only see what they want to see after all. A flash of twin tails caught his attention and a small smirk lit his features. It looked like their little pet was back.

"Yo." He gave a mock salute to the girl though he had to hold back a snigger at the look of absolute surprise she had on her face. It was priceless. "Niou-sempai!"

**Sorry I've been gone for so long... But I have good news! I had scans a few days ago and my tumors shrunk a bit! /squeals Mind you, shrinking means they only shrunk about two milimeters, but they've never shrunk. Ever. Not in five years of cancer. I'M SO DANG HAPPY! 8D Now I'll shut up and get to reviews. ;D**

**Raku; I can't stand hot dogs either, but I had to. xD Basically it was that or pickled salad every day. O.o I chose hot dogs... Any day and everyday. xD**

**GethinPathIsolator: I love Rikkaidai too! Seigaku just can't compare at all. Pssh. Ryoma shouldn't have beat Seiichi. SEIICHI FOREVER! And... What do you mean I'm still sane? o\_O For totes I'm not.**

**Strange thing actually... I just wrote the epilogue. O\_O Don't ask how my mind works, bro. I know I haven't finished the chapters in between, but I know how it's all gonna pan out. |D**

**Disclaimer: I claim no ownership of the PoT world or the characters in it excluding my doctors and such~ ;D**

## Chapter 14: Understanding

I guess it's gonna have to hurt  
I guess I'm gonna have to cry  
And let go of some things I've loved to get to the other side

**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

She had definitely missed them, though they did tend to try her nerves more than she would have liked. "Brown Blur" Sakuno found herself wedged inside a car with the tennis

regulars as they drove off to visit their dear captain. Marui had insisted upon dragging Sakuno along for their religiously celebrated trip to see Yukimura. This of course meant that one more person than usual would be stuffed inside the already cramped car. It called for less than legal maneuvers.

After pulling straws, Kirihara and Jackal ended up cramming into the trunk of the air. Luckily the trunk was aired out into the center, but it was still strange listening to the pair squabble as they knocked into one another. Sakuno peered over the back of her chair at the two boys with wide eyes. The idea that something like this happened frequently was slightly mind boggling for a rule stickler like her. She had never pictured the regulars to be quite so rebellious.

"How are you feeling, Brown Blur?" Marui looked past Niou to see the brunette with an amused look on his face. Sometimes Sakuno was just like an open book. If she was confused everyone could practically sense it from a mile away.

"I'm ok. Thanks for asking, Marui-sempai." From in between them, Niou rolled his eyes.

Sakuno was a slow learner and it surprised him that she had not yet learned the fact that he would know if she wasn't telling the complete truth. The word she used was 'ok'. Ok did not mean that she was good. Ok meant that she was merely surviving, but not actually doing well. He pinched the bridge of his nose before adding on, "How are you really? Don't tell us what we want to hear unless it's completely true."

Sakuno was stunned. Normally the phrase 'how are you' was just a formality. She'd never really thought that they would really care how she was. It was just something used to get the conversation rolling. Slowly she'd been figuring out how much the regulars thought of her, but it was still strange being at the center of attention. She'd become so used to saying that she was fine and the conversation moved away to talking about Ryoma or the other Seigaku regulars. It was so strange to be talking about herself. She wasn't quite sure if she liked it.

"Just a bit tired. It's like this every day though, so don't worry, sempai." It was true. She woke up every day feeling like she had gotten run over by a truck and went to bed feeling exactly the same way. She never felt peppy and instead longed to sleep, though she couldn't. Her body felt like passing out, but her head kept on whirring into the night. Her pain medicine was known to have side effects like this and it was no surprise to anyone that she felt like this. However, that didn't mean she had to like it.

Niou bobbed his head up and down in satisfaction. He'd always get her to tell the truth eventually after a bit of prying. He wasn't quite sure why he always wanted to know the truth, but he did. That was all there was to it, right? He hardly even noticed the smirking face of his partner in front of him. Yagyuu wasn't nearly as mild mannered as he always came off as being. Inside he was chuckling at his clueless friend.

He'd been watching over the past weeks as the young girl had been dragged into their circle. Niou almost always had an eye looking towards the twin tailed girl and had grown a slightly motherly personality of his own. It was almost funny seeing the boy keeping an eye out for her and yet stepping around her when it came to any conversation. It was almost as if it was an intellectual sparring match., matches that Niou never lost.

The other regulars had noticed their trickster's attentive behavior as well and had all gathered after practice one day for some friendly betting. Yagyuu personally had bet on

Sakuno realizing her feelings first and confessing, but it was mostly because Niou had pride larger than a mountain. Yagyuu pushed his glasses up as he thought about it. Yes, Niou probably would try and talk himself out of loving before it ever got anywhere.

The van pulled into the parking lot and Sanada turned off the ignition. "Finally! Now get us out of here!" The trunk door was opened and Kirihara tumbled out in a mess of arms and legs. "Stupid short straw." The boy shoved himself up from the ground and stretched for a moment. He then turned towards the hospital and huffed in satisfaction. He was glad that he would finally get to see his captain again. It was a childish devotion, but Kirihara didn't really care.

Even if Yukimura forget them every single day, Kirihara would be sure to help him learn all over again because Yukimura was still Yukimura. They'd begun to see traces of him recovering and Kirihara knew that eventually his captain would get better. It was only a matter of time. He waltzed through the sliding glass doors and rode the elevator up with the regulars to the floor where Yukimura was. He slipped out the metal doors and flew down the hallways to see his friend.

He peered through the doorway to the room to see Yukimura staring angrily at his twitching fingers. Kirihara cursed softly. It would have made such a great picture of his taichou if only he had remembered to bring a camera. He dragged a chair from the side of the room and plopped himself down on it and stared at his friend.

The boy still looked pale as a sheet. It was deserved after all he hadn't been out into the sun, the real sun, for over two years now. Blue stubbles had begun to show on the top of his head as his hair slowly grew back. It had taken Kirihara awhile to get used to his captain looking like this, but there was no way he was going to let appearances distract him. Blue eyes flickered up towards Kirihara in surprise. Yukimura had been absorbed in his thoughts again and found himself caught unawares.

This boy had been visiting him quite frequently and Yukimura had catching onto the names slowly. He felt as if it was on the tip of his tongue before he said, "Hello Kirihara-san. Are you well?" He inwardly prayed that he was right. He felt himself relax as the boy burst into a happy smile and nodded vigorously.

"Hai! I'm really well, taichou! And you?" Yukimura was about to reply when Kirihara received a thwack on the head from his fukubuchou.

"Don't run in the hospital. You'll hurt someone." Sanada glared sharply down at his regular before giving Yukimura a warmer look. If warmth was possible for him. "It is good to see you, Yukimura-san." It hurt Sanada to go back to referring to him his friend with the formal honorific, but he knew that it made the boy feel comfortable. He knew it had to be disorienting to not remember anything and have to be taught everything again from ground zero.

"To you as well. And I am well, Kirihara-san. Just a bit tired and irritated. No matter how much progress I make, I can't seem to make myself pleased with regaining movement in four fingers." Yukimura's face scrunched slightly in annoyance. "I know it's supposed to take time, but it's so boring." Sanada let his face soften slightly as he looked at his former, no, even in this state Yukimura was still his best friend. It was true that Yukimura tended to be more verbal after his memory loss, but he still was the same as he had been before.

"A-ah. Anyways, we brought someone to meet you." Yagyuu leaned against the wall in his corner of the room. He had always disliked cramped spaces and hospital rooms were only meant to contain so many people at a single time.

Yukmira's ears pricked at this. Apparently he had never met this person before. It was curious since he could never remember them bringing anyone else before. Then again, his memory was admittedly awful.

The first thing he thought of when he saw her was that she was very short. It was true he had only seen Akiko and his mother who were both at least 5'10 and tall in their own right. To see someone so short was quite the jarring experience. The second thing that hit him was that she was probably the fourth girl he remembered ever seeing. Two nurses and the aforementioned women made up most of his female contact and she looked distinctly younger than all of them. It was very queer.

The braided girl shuffled up to the bedside and stood awkwardly by the bed while casting nervous looks to her companions for any possible guidance. Unfortunately, they didn't seem to get the message. Boys always managed to introduce themselves without having to go through inner turmoil. Sakuno didn't think it was fair.

"Hello! I'm Ryuuzaki Sakuno. Nice to meet you!" Her nerves ended up getting to her as the words came out in a stream, making it unintelligible save for her name. It was kind of cute actually.

"Pleasure to meet you. My name is Yukimura Seiichi." The words seem to help her relax a bit and she sat down in one of the neighboring chairs that had somehow coalesced around the bed. One of the things that struck him was how she didn't even take a second glance around the hospital room. She seemed strangely at home with the sounds of the blood pressure cuff and the bleeps of his heart monitor. She also didn't stare at his hair, or lack thereof, or at his nasal prongs. It pleasantly surprised him.

What happened next surprised him even more. The girl began to talk about what happened in her life and in the outside world. She didn't ask how he was feeling or what he had been doing all day. They were questions that no sick person really wanted to be asked. Sitting inside a hospital, how were they supposed to feel? What did it look like they had been doing for the past few hours? Probably nothing and that was exactly why the topics became so depressing.

After being pent up for so long inside of a hospital, people longed for information on the outside world. Sometimes it became depressing, but after a while people adapted. Hearing about everything helped distract the mind and it was always pleasant being able to talk to another person even if he didn't quite understand. One of the things he realized with his memory loss was that he was unable to judge people for their past actions. Akiko called him completely innocent in that respect. If someone had insulted him the day before, they could come back and he would be as welcoming as ever just because he had forgotten the incident.

He gave her a kind smile as she related about everything going on. School and otherwise. Time passed and the regulars thought it was about time to wrap up their meeting. They all gravitated out the door leaving Sakuno and Yukimura behind for another moment. "Thanks for being so patient with us, Yukimura-san. Demo..." Sakuno paused for a moment and contemplated how she should phrase it before blurting out, "I get the feeling that you don't want to bother people with venting though we all complain to you."

She looked up and saw the lost look in his eyes. It was so strange seeing him like that. So different from the face he had when the others were still in the room. "Mmm. It wouldn't have any purpose if they couldn't understand. They'd listen just to make me feel comfortable, but they wouldn't really get what I was saying."

"Are you sure about that?" Sakuno gazed at him with her warm brown eyes before saying, "I understand, Yukimura-san. I understand more than you'd think."

**Iced Hearts: Hey again! xD I've missed you! And the song lyrics actually were from Everything Burns! I'm so glad someone else knows the song! My grammar is a bit awkward since I tend to use pronouns to refer to things that I haven't mentioned and the like. /cringe You should have seen the beating my essay took when I got it back. ;3; There's a reason why I got a C+ in grammar when I was young.**

**Raku: XD I'm a picky eater too actually. I sent my Dad out to get food once and awhile, but I still had to have dinner and stuff at the hospital. ;3; I think I probably ate more crackers than I did full meals, but meh. @\_@ And I hate needles too. It's just that after you kick enough people and get strapped down to chairs often enough it isn't worth the effort of flailing about madly. XD**

**Zemmo: /holds up red 3ds happily :D Yay! I gave my Dad my old one which is... Pink. Pink is so manly. |D If Sakuno could read your review I'm sure she'd be really happy.**

## Chapter 15: Pride

I guess it's gonna break me down  
Like falling when you try to fly  
It's sad, but sometimes moving on with the rest of your life  
Starts with goodbye

**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

Something that most never understood about being sick with a rare illness is that there is a certain amount of pride involved. It's not what most people think when they think about pride. People don't boast about it or flaunt it about. They do hide it and that's a fact, however, there is still pride. It manifests itself in many different ways, but the most common way is through defiance. The idea that because they are afflicted with something rare builds up the thought that no one can relate to them.

Rarity breeds pride. That's just the way it works. A rare illness, a rare pet, a rare object, there's a particular pride invested into each of those things. People normally just don't see it. When people believe they are alone in the world because they have a rare sickness it not only brings pain to them, but to those around them as well. The phrase, "You can't possibly understand" is prevalent in most cases. But. But it closes people off from the people that could possibly understand. Rarity does not mean they are the only one.

Yukimura's eyes were glazed with confusion as he stared at the girl beside him. What did she mean? "I.." She broke off for a moment and made a face, trying to figure out how to word what she wanted to say. "I have cancer." There are some things that you expect to hear just by the way people look, but some things had a tendency to come out of left field. Normality, she looked too normal to have cancer didn't she?

People stereotype more than they'd like to believe. Army veterans have shaved hair and broad shoulders. Scientists have round rimmed glasses and frizzy hair. And people with cancer are bald and conventionally sit in a wheelchair. Sakuno didn't fit any of those conventions.



He doubted her for a moment until she pulled down on the scarf that she had wrapped around her neck. There it was, the bulging scar across her chest. It right in the center of her chest, impossible to hide except with a scarf. "I know it isn't really what you have, but just a bit. Maybe just a bit I understand." She let the scarf go back up to cover the mark and let a light blush adorn her cheeks. She wasn't used to being so open, especially to a partial stranger.

She watched warily as he blinked blankly at her. It was as if he had never thought that anyone else in the world could be ill. It was probably true. She remembered when she was first diagnosed that it was all about her. Was she comfortable, was she happy, was she ok? Why did it have to happen to her? All the time those around her talked about her and never about anyone else. She was the porcelain doll that they all coveted dearly. She didn't even recognize that there might be others that were in pain.

She gave him a small smile before waving quickly. She turned towards the door but was stopped as he asked, "Why do you smile?" She stared at the door for a few moments. Why did she smile? It was a question she had asked herself many times over the years. There were so many painful moments, but there were also happy ones. She was still alive, others could not say the same. Maybe she did it to confirm her existence or was it to make others feel better? No, that wasn't it.

She looked back at him before saying, "Because I know I have a future. Even if I don't know how far it goes, I still have one. If there are people with timers set for how long they have left to live, do I have a reason to really be sad? The chance to go on with my life is enough to keep me smiling." She smiled once more. This time it was more than just a twitch of the lips. She was glad to say the words and hoped that Yukimura would understand.

She trotted out the door and disappeared back into the crowds to catch up with the regulars.

-I swear I lived and learned-

If it was possible for her to glare she would have. Unfortunately for her, she wasn't the glaring type. She sighed woefully as she glanced over at the swaying leather bag beside her. She wanted to carry her own bag gosh darnit! It was the simple things that had been affecting her recently. Such as not being allowed to walk over a mile without someone who was able to carry her the rest of the way. Better yet, she wasn't able to carry anything over ten pounds. She heavily emphasized the ten pounds, but to the rest of the world it must have been ten divided by two.

From her book bag to the gallon of milk, Sakuno hadn't been able to carry anything heavier than a pencil for the past week and a half. It greatly irritated the young girl. What irritated her more was the fact that everyone seemed to think it was a good thing and that she was 'lucky'. Lucky was not the word she'd use to describe it. After being cooped up in a small room for ages, the last thing she wanted to be was helpless. Helplessness came in torrents it seemed.

"Give me the bag." She tried to put some sort of intimidating tone into her voice, but all she got was a scoff in return. She scowled at the trickster beside her and went back to staring at her book bag. "Why can't you accept someone's kindness for once in your life?"

The pat she received felt reminiscent of trying to find an off switch to turn off her complaints. She shoved the thought out of her mind and trailed behind him in a pout.

"Humor me. I don't think I can go on like this for another five weeks."

The sweet girl inside of her had become increasingly harsher over the past few days as she realized how protective her sempai were. After having her food fetched, doors opened for her, and eight glares sent at the poor sap who accidentally bumped in her during school break, she was nearing her breaking point. She was sure the girl didn't have a rude cell in her when they collided with one another, but the regulars obviously had other ideas.

"You'll survive it, Sakuno-san, trust me." If there was one consolatory thing about the entire ordeal, it was that she had successfully bargained for the right to have them call her by her first name. Sanada, Yanagi, and Yagyuu were still a bit slow on the uptake, but she was proud with the progress. They were like the hoard of protective brothers that she never had. She had never particularly wanted older brothers, but it was nice having them around anyways.

"Mou... Fine." She pouted a bit as they continued to walk down the street and towards the school. She looked at the boy beside her and let herself exhale softly.

Niου Masaharu, where to begin about him? He was always there for her. That and he had the irritating habit of prying to find out the complete and absolute truth. It might have just been curiosity on his part, but she felt attached to him now. It was strange if she didn't see him peering at her from the school roof or trailing behind her in the hallways. He was always there. She kind of liked it. It was comforting.

"You're going to visit us during practice I assume?" Sakuno hummed in response. Not only was the pressure on her chest too much for her to hit a ball back, but she still couldn't raise her arm above her chest level. She was continuing to stretch her arms out to try and eventually put her hands over her hands again, but she doubted she'd reach that point any time soon.

And for awhile they were silent. But, silence wasn't always a bad thing was it?

**Gomen for being slow. I've been sick as a dog. ;3; I'm going on thyroid hormones since I have deficiency. /sigh I took my first dose last night and woke up and promptly threw up twice. |D FUN STUFF AMIRIGHT? /faints**

**GethinPathIsolator: Agreed! Ryoma should have lost... Was the only time he ever lost that time when he played Tezuka? Geez. How unfair... Seiichi has so many more character possibilities! /eyes glitter with happiness I love all the ideas that you could use him in, but Ryoma? ... One trick pony. Meh, it's hard being a leader. It's worse when you're leader hormonal teenagers. ;3; /hardknocklife And aww. Thanks for the genius thing. /blushes**

**Raku: HOW WAS YOUR BIRTHDAY? /glomps I hope you had a great time, luff! And the 3ds is strange... My first thought when I got it was, "Have they shrunk these things?" LOL It's cool though! I can't wait for all the new games coming out though! /wants rune factory 4**

**Jaz-147: Thanks for reviewing! It helped remind me to update so even though it's kinda short and fail I'll get another chapter up by Saturday. Thanks for the reminder! \*-\***

**Reviews = Xana glows with happiness for approximately 2.8920 seconds. |D**

**Also I'm struggling on how to write romance so... "holds up: Romance for Dummies" I'll work on it.**

**I'm cutting off midsong after this because there's just a bunch of chorus. So this is a concluding chapter for the second part of this story. I have the next part mapped out and I doubt I'll have more than 5 chapters left. /nods**

**Disclaimer: Xana doesn't own the Prince of Tennis characters nor the lyrics posted in this chapter. She's forgotten to post who owns the songs so she'll try and remember from this point on.**

## Chapter 16: The Optimist

Time heals  
The wounds that you feel  
Somehow, right now  
**-Starts with Goodbye by Carrie Underwood**

They say that an optimist is a guy that has never had much experience. Perhaps it was true. The definition of an optimist was one who usually expects a favorable outcome. After being out in the real world, people learn to never expect anything good and instead prepare to receive the worst possible outcome from any situation. That way people can never be disappointed. They can only be pleasantly surprised, isn't that right?

So why do people argue otherwise? That you should always keep a bright outlook for the future, why is it preferred? Supposedly it is psychological. If everything seems bleak it will affect your output. But it hurts being disappointed so often. So what's the use of trying to become an optimist if all that you get out of it is sadness?

It is also said that the art of living is more like wrestling than dancing. It's true. Fighting through the days and fighting through the nights. It never really ends. As we toss in turn in our sleep we continue the battles of our everyday lives. Yet life goes on. It never waits for anyone no matter how much people plead. Life keeps its own schedule.

Yukimura looked out the window quietly. He'd managed to convince Akiko that he'd be fine in a wheelchair even if he couldn't move it about. There was something entrancing about looking over the city. People scurried across the road going about their daily lives. Cars shuffled around in the hustle and bustle of the world. Time just never stopped, not for anyone.

Some part of him knew there was something wrong with him. He was becoming apathetic. He had spent a lot of time thinking recently. Mostly he thought about what that girl had said. He couldn't remember exactly who she was, but the words stuck in his mind. She smiled because there was still life out ahead of her? It seemed so silly. Who ever said that life would make a person happy? What if all that lay ahead was grief?

Would she still smile then? If she had everything and then in a moment it was all taken away? If she thought she had defeated the plague and then it came back with a vengeance? Success was so fleeting it hurt more to have touched it than if he had never felt it at all. They all lauded the fact that he was awake, that he could communicate. He didn't feel remotely glad of the fact.

They could all clap their hands for joy and say that everything was proceeding nicely, but for him it was just a hollow victory. What good was it for him to be awake if all he could do was sit in bed like a little doll while people came to gawk at him? He was no better than a marionette. He wanted to be able to remember things. He wanted to be able to move. It annoyed him to see people do the things he could not. When they tilted their heads in confusion, or even when they shrugged their shoulders. It was all a taunt to him.

He could never be happy like this. In a world like this where could he find that happiness? The screech of wheels tore him out of his thoughts and his eyes fastened down towards the window once more. "Ah." The word softly left his mouth as he stared at the sight. Small flames flickered through the glass and metal hulks of wreckage blocked the street. He could faintly hear the sounds of screaming through the window, but he didn't feel anything. No shock, no sadness, there was nothing.

He faintly realized that someone had probably died. It didn't register within him. He felt a strange sort of bewilderment as he watched the small forms huddle around the wreckage. He turned back to look at the nurses in the hospital and his face softened. None of them had even noticed the accident and were running along to their duties.

Life always went on. Even if people died, it always went on. People seemed to be so ignorant of the sadness even if it seemed to be nearby. Apathy is a sort of living oblivion. He willed himself to conjure up some sort of emotion. Sadness, fear, any emotion would have been welcome. It would be something to confirm his existence. If one could not feel or even remember, then what would be left? Empty, it all seemed so empty.

"Yukimura-san!" His eyes flickered over to the side to see a girl heading swiftly towards him. He vaguely recognized her as the girl that had visited him a few days ago. The brunette did a sort of quick hobble as she stumbled towards him. She was not graceful in any definition of the word. He recognized the familiar twitch of pain in her face as she moved to sit herself on the ledge beside him.

He felt briefly uncomfortable as he tried to recall the girl's name until he saw the small nametag hanging from the bottom of her jacket. He quirked a brow. The tag wasn't from the Osaka hospital. They didn't employ a tagging system for their outpatients so it must have been from another facility. He felt glad that the other place decided to use tags as he read off her name. "How are you, Ryuuzaki-san?"

"I'm well enough. And how are you? Really, I mean. If you're going to say you're fine then don't bother." He coughed slightly as he tried to suppress an amused look. He thought for a moment. What was the answer? Apathy really wasn't a feeling. Technically it was being devoid of emotions, but how to explain it?

"I'm tired. Very tired." His eyelids fluttered shut and they both dropped into silence. Both of them knew what he really meant. He wasn't talking about being sleepy or exhaustion. He was tired of the world. He was tired of his immobility. He was tired of everything.

"Start searching." Sakuno paused for a moment then explained, "If you're tired of all of this, then search for something that makes you happy. It doesn't have to be walking about, you know. You could traverse the world and never find anything that made you happy. Is it the feeling when you make someone smile? Or could it be watching the sunset? If you're tired then you should try to find things in life that make you happy again. If you don't then nothing will ever change. You can't force yourself to feel joy."

She looked at the boy beside her and put a hand on his. "I can help you if you want. If you can't reach it, I'll get it for you." She smiled warmly at him. It was hard to explain why she was doing this. She didn't really know herself, but she had an inkling that it was because she didn't want anyone else to feel what she had.

There is nothing more painful than weariness of the world. When you are tired of the world, then everything seems black. Oh so very black. It's the wish that everything would just

fade to black. The feeling that you want to fall asleep and wake up somewhere else instead of going back to that world of pain.

She knew the feeling and it hurt. She thought that no one should have to ever experience that. She remembered the times she wished that there was someone there to comfort her during the lonely nights. The nights went slow because she knew there would be no relief, even during the day. If there was no safety in the morning then everything seemed even more depressing than before. Temporary relief was better than none at all. If she could provide it then she'd be willing to reach out beyond her comfort zone.

"You... Why?" Yukimura hung his head low as he stared at his lap. He looked at his pale hand and the one resting on top of it. He wondered if he even wanted help. He wasn't sure if he had already reached the point at which he didn't want to be saved. If giving up was already more alluring than escaping the depths in which he had fallen into, then it would have been a waste of time for her to even be around. Shame churned in his stomach. No matter if he had forgotten, he still had not changed. Yukimura had always wanted to be needed. He had raised the regulars so they would always adore him. The captain they had all looked up and relied on actually relied on them more than they would ever know. A part of him longed to be wanted. The worst thing in the world would be if he was told that he was a waste of space, useless. He had always secretly feared it, the time when the regulars moved on without him.

The thought of being helped was so foreign. He'd always grown up being the child that everyone adored. He was the bold leader, the one that needed no help. Being comforted like this made him feel guilty. He shouldn't have been weak enough to require assistance and yet he did. He wanted help and that was what killed him inside. He was lonely. "Because it hurts to be alone. I want to take away that loneliness." She removed her hand from his and gave him a light side hug before leaning back onto the ledge. "It gets better. Always remember that."

**Misstress Hydrangea: Aww, thank you! /blushes**

**GethinPathIsolator: I tried to think of a way to squeeze Niou into this chapter, but it all turned out awkward in my head. D: He shall return with 20% more head patting! And thanks. :)**

**Emliy02: xD I feel sorry for Niou. Being called cute isn't MANLY. Too bad, he's still cute. xD**

**Iced Hearts: Hey again. xD /edges away from Sanada scowl! And that's so cool about the chapter thing. XDD I feel kind of proud that... Wait a minute... /dramatic music plays. Thanks for the best wishes!**

**Jaz-147: Yes coach! /salutes**

**So this is the end of part 2. I'll get right to starting on part three. xD Unfortunately I have hypothyroid right now and it really doesn't do much for my mood or brain. I have the shakes actually. O\_O You know that thing where you try and hold still, but you can't and you shake uncontrollably? It makes you look like you're insane or mad, but it's really annoying. I keep on messing up how I type. GRR. Talk to you all soon! :D**

**Can anyone say car accident? Why yes I can! This whiplash hurts. Q\_Q It's my feeble excuse for updating late, but I hope y'all accept it.**

**Disclaimer: I don't own Prince of Tennis.**

## **Chapter 17: Fickle**

It's ok baby please don't cry  
This long journey is about to end  
**-Don't Cry by Park Bom**

And so the quest started. An eyebrow twitched as he stared at the blank sheet of paper before him. After a good hour of thinking he had come up with precisely nothing. That was not a good thing. Supposedly he was creating a list of things that would make him happy. Needless to say the list was not going so well. He tapped his pen on the paper as he tried to think. When it came right down to it, there wasn't that much that he really wanted. He was perfectly willing to complain for an hour or so about being bored, but when it came to figuring out what he wanted... Well that was a different story. It had been a week since the pigtailed girl had come to visit him and she had promised to be back a week later. Since the week had already passed and he had no clue what to do, it made him feel rather guilty. She had obviously gone out of her comfort zone to try and make him feel better. If he came up with nothing then it would seem like he wasn't putting in any effort. His head ached merely thinking about all of this rot.

He groaned in annoyance and let his eyes look back up towards the ceiling. It had been a few weeks since his surgery and things were definitely getting better. He didn't seem to have progressed very much physically. He could move around his left arm, but could barely feel anything from his fingers. Akiko told him that perhaps it was just a slow regenerative process, but somehow he doubted that. He'd seen enough from the faces of his nurses to tell otherwise.

His memory was improving though. In fact, if he had something to compare being normal to he was sure he'd be about that point. Names could be matched to images which was a huge improvement. He could even recall previous conversations enough to begin building relationships. That was one of the things he was completely thankful for. He didn't feel nearly as guilty as he had before after he consistently forgot who people were. While he was able to remember previous conversations, he still was unable to recall everything that happened before his memory loss. Akiko assured him he'd be able to remember it all soon enough, but it seemed like forever.

Admittedly, time went by very slowly in the hospital wing. The only way to really track the time was through the window on the side of his room. It was pleasant not being cooped up in the ICU even though he was still immobile. Nurses came around often enough to see how he was feeling. They made for pleasant conversation for the most part, but there was still a part of him that loathed their visits. Nurses made him feel like he was debilitated and senile. Sometimes Yukimura wondered if they hadn't better just throw him in a nursing home and get it all over with.

- If you wish upon a star-

"Masaharu-kun." Niou turned around to look at the girl beside him. The wind ruffled her hair as they sat atop the school building. It had become a habit to meet on the roof after school was over and Niou was rather glad for it, not that he'd mention it out loud.

"Why do you think people are so fickle?" Niou silently beckoned her to elaborate with an incline of his head. "The only one that is stopping a person from accomplishing their goals is themselves. We create blocks in our minds that prevent us from ever stepping forward. We tell ourselves that we can't do it and never venture any farther. Why do we do this to ourselves?"

"Mhmm. Maybe it's because we don't dare to hope. It's better to set low expectations and have them exceeded than to set high ones and have it all fail. You've felt that haven't you, girlie?" Niou patted Sakuno lightly on the head as a small smile lit his face.

"I guess I have. It's strange though. I can say all of this jargon, but I can't put it into action myself. Does it make me weak, do you think?" Sakuno's eyes glazed over as she stared out over the ledge. Two girls were chattering happily as they headed out of the school gates. It seemed so surreal to see them so happy like that. "Maybe I just haven't surrounded myself with happy enough people." The edge of her mouth twitched up as she turned around to her companion. "I mean, I couldn't call you a merry fellow now could I?"

Niou snorted in returned and tugged lightly on one of her pigtails. "Play nice now, girly. It would break my poor heart to be made fun of by you." Sarcasm was layered thick in his voice. He propped his head back in his hands before whirling back around to the door.

"You're going to see him today, right? You're going to be late."

-It doesn't matter who you are-

"Che." Yukimura rubbed his forehead. Blood pounded in his ears and the boy winced. His headaches had been getting worse recently. He had chronic migraines since he was a child, but they seemed to be coming more often recently.

"Yukimura-san?" A feminine voice asked from outside his door.

"Enter." Yukimura scrunched his face tightly before relaxing it back into its composed form.

"Hello Ryuuzaki-san, Niou-kun." He smiled pleasantly at the two before letting the grin fall away. Something just didn't feel right with his head. Perhaps he should have asked for his migraine medication. But he had just been taking so much of it recently that some part of him felt disgusted at the thought of taking even more.

"So? Anything I can do for you?" The brunette chirped happily. She dropped herself down into one of the chairs before scooting up to the bedside.

"Eh.. About that..." Yukimura mumbled softly. He bit his lip tightly. Dangit, his stomach felt like it was churning. His left hand felt around the bed for his call switched. The dratted thing had fallen off the bed again.

He clenched his fist lightly. He could ask Sakuno or Niou to pick it up for him, but then they would be worried for his health. He didn't really want to put them through that, but... His eyes fluttered shut as another bout of pain wracked his head.

"Yukimura-taichou?" Niou's eyes sharpened as he reached out to put a hand on his captain's shoulder. The teen limply shook under his hand. Something was off.

He snatched the dangling remote and quickly pushed the red button.

**It's not only short. It's not only slightly out of touch with previous chapters. But it's at least a chapter, right? I'm going to whip myself with a wet noodle so even if it sucks I'm going to finish this story! \*rampages\* Feel free to message me angry messages about Yukimura. |D Let's see if you can guess what's going on.**

**I did a bit more studying about brain related injuries so I'm trying to make it plausible. Don't shoot me though! I'm going to try and finish this story up within a week. So it may be badly written, but when my inspiration comes back I'll write it into fancier lingo. This is going to be the gist of it. Sorry, luffs. :S**

## Chapter 18: My Wish

Well I've been here all night and I'm watching you  
Breathe in and breathe out, is it really you or just a machine?

### **-Things Left Unsaid by Disciple**

Akiko quick walked down the hallways. Her pager rang continuously as she snaked her way down the corridors. Blast the rules of not being able to run in the hospital. What was going on now?

One of the nurses had just paged her from one of her patients in pediatrics saying that they needed the doctor immediately. They spoke vaguely of head trauma, but what did that mean? Had Seiichi fallen out of his bed? Was he hemorrhaging? Head trauma could mean any stupid thing and it was completely useless!

She headed into the emergency room with her hair swishing behind her. "What is going on?" She hissed out to the nearest nurse.

The man jumped for a moment before looking down at his clipboard. "A-ah. The patient was visiting with two of his friends when he passed out. One of the teens paged the nurses. We took Yukimura-san to the imaging center and we came up with that." Takahashi pointed at the scan on the wall.

Akiko cursed loudly as she marched over to the scan. "As you can see. It's ruptured cerebral aneurysm in the Circle of Willis. We called you over to perform surgery on him. Currently we have him anesthetized, but none of the onstaff surgeons were qualified." "Let me get into my scrubs." Akiko flew over to the changing room and changed into her blue scrubs in a flurry. Every moment would count for something like this. She knew the statistics. 25% die in a single day. Another 25% die in three months. And for those that survive, 25% will have a permanent disability. She said a silent prayer as she approached the surgery table. She'd need every bit of help she could get for this.

"Don't die, Yukimura-kun. You're stronger than this. Pull through it."

-That's making it seem that there could be hope-

Sakuno shook violently outside of the hospital room. It was something to hear that someone had fallen ill, but it was another thing to see it happen before her very eyes. An arm wrapped around her shoulder and she looked up to see the sympathetic eyes of Niou.

"He'll make it. Don't think otherwise." He whispered softly.

His eyes spoke volumes. The more he said it, the more he believed it. It was a sort of brainwashing to numb his mind away. Yukimura just looked as if he was getting, but now...

"B-but." She stammered out.

"Don't say any 'buts'!" Niou growled angrily. He jolted and caught himself before sighing. This will so accursedly irritating. "I'm sorry. Just have faith in him. He's our god isn't he? He can pull through this. He's been through things worse than this... Right?"



He sounded as if he wanted someone to reassure him that it would all be alright. If he could look into the future, he would try to see if Yukimura was alive. He was only a teen. It was too early for him to lose a friend. It was just too early...

-I could say to your face-

"Give me the guide wires! Faster!" Akiko waved around her hand impatiently before swiping away the implement from a nervous nurse.

She reached down into the area and hissed as she looked at all the damage. "Shoot. We're slow. Come on!" She dug into the area and placed the implements into their spaces before grabbing a Stent Graft. She shoved it into its place and groaned when the graft still allowed a trickle into the aneurysm sack. "Give me an extension, dangit!"

It was too full. She looked up at the blood that was being manually infused into the boy. Her eyes trailed back to the surgical area. He was bleeding out just as quickly as they were putting it in him. "Ma'am?" One of the nurses asked hesitantly.

"It's already too far gone, Shinozuka-san. Even if we put it in we'll only be buying another day of time. But..." Akiko bit her lip tightly. "The boy deserves to be able to say goodbye. Give me that."

-that if it weren't for you then there would be no grace-

Yukimura felt his head was a swirling mess. It hurt. His eyes kept on focusing in and out and the people in front of him kept duplicating and resizing. Was this what it felt like to die? A tear trickled down his cheek.

"Yukimura-kun..." A soft voice met his ears and the familiar brown hair met his eyes. "Sakuno-san..." He croaked out weakly. "I think I know what I want now." He swallowed away his tears before whispering out, "I want to live." All his life he'd lived for his tennis. He'd never lived for his family or his friends. What did he live for except to swing that racket and hit the little green ball?

He hadn't experienced *life*. For so long he had put off reaching out to others. He'd always thought that he'd do it later. What was the saying? Live for today and worry for tomorrow later? Yukimura guessed that he'd always assumed that there would be a tomorrow. There wouldn't be one anymore.

"But... If I can't live... No... I won't live now will I?" Something cold met the side of his cheeks. Was he crying? "Please, tell the team to live for me." In the end, it would be his last wish for Rikkaidai. If he couldn't lead his team in presence, then maybe he could lead them on in spirit.

"Please... Tell them." And then it all turned to black.

**Please... Don't kill me. ;3; I've had this planned for awhile now, but I don't want to be slaughtered by a bunch of angry reviewers. It's just that, this is the reality of the thing guys. As a gal with cancer, I know a lot of other people with cancer. I've watched a few live, but I've watched far too many die. Most people don't live two years after being diagnosed with cancer. You think it gets better and you're in remission, then it comes back in a fury and you don't last two months. : ( It's the circle of life I suppose.**

**The next chapter will be the epilogue. I love you guys!**

:D The grand finale is finally here, ne? ;) It's really short and mostly filled with lyrics, but I think it's a great conclusion. I hope you enjoyed reading **Diagnosis, Treatment, Rehabilitation!**

## **Chapter 19: Epilogue - Ever Ever After**

Storybook endings, fairy tales coming true  
Deep down inside we want to believe they still do  
In our secretest heart, it's our favorite part of the story  
Let's just admit we all want to make it too

Momoshiro went to college, but ended up becoming a tennis coach for Seishun Gakuen. Some part of him continued to feel guilty about how he acted a child and he became a beloved mentor in tennis and in his student's lives.

Takeshi took over his father's sushi shop and continued to serve following generations of tennis players. He ended up marrying one of the waitresses and had two children. He kept in touch with Momoshiro and continued with his passion for tennis in the off hours. Seishun Gakuen often saw the sushi maker near the courts giving some of the first years advice. Inui graduated along with Renji and went into experimental medicine. He directed his research towards cancer eradication and developed SR28947 in honor of the brown haired girl that he failed once before. Being the eccentric fellow everyone knows, it is hardly surprising he married a fellow scientist from another lab. He and Tammi remained childless, but close nevertheless.

Fuji graduated a year early from his medicinal college and went into practice at Osaka University Medical Hospital as a physical therapist. His patients know him as the "not-so-gentle encourager", but continue to adore him as a helpful mentor. When recalling him, the phrase "good, for a start" comes to mind.

Surprisingly, Tezuka was the only one of the regulars that followed his career in professional tennis. He remained dormant until he turned twenty three and then took the tennis world by storm. He remains the stoic captain the Seigaku regulars grew to respect, but ended up in a relationship with his hyperactive tennis rival, Mimi Laurens. It was something that no one expected and Tezuka soon found why love was supposed to be trying.

Kaidoh became a 'security consultant' for a major firm in Russia. No one has really heard from Kaidoh for the longest time, but when they do hear about him, they normally hear the words 'corporate espionage'.

Ryoma stood on the fence for the longest time trying to figure out whether or not to go into professional tennis. He eventually decided against it, surprising all of the regulars, because he decided to become a veterinarian after the death of Karupin. He developed new surgical sterilization and rehabilitation techniques after he realized the surprising amount of animal deaths by improper tools. Ryoma never married, but instead kept to himself and his studies.

Oishi and Kikumaru ended up sticking together through the years. They ended up becoming cooks for a five star restaurant in Central Tokyo and stunned the world with how they

created masterful food while putting on a show at the same time. Kikumaru always remembered his little twin tailed friend and in his energetic manner constantly sent invitations for Sakuno to visit.

Ever ever after  
If we just don't get it our own way  
Ever ever after  
It may only be a wish away

For every happy story, there will be a sad one. Ryuuzaki Sumire died soon after the marriage of her granddaughter. All the Seishun Gakuen regulars took days off to visit her funeral and to pay homage to their coach. Sumire had lived a satisfying life and was glad to have seen her granddaughter married and that everything had turned out well. In her final words she said, "Sakuno, there's only one life, ne? Don't spend your time crying over an old woman like me. Have fun."

Start a new fashion, wear your heart on your sleeve  
Sometimes you reach what's real just by making believe  
Unafraid, unashamed  
There is joy to be claimed in this world  
You even might wind up being glad to be you

Akiko ended up becoming world acclaimed after the development of nerve repairing surgeries. She travelled the world giving speeches and tutoring people as she went. After a few years she settled back down in Japan and created her own medical institute, Yuki no Hana Medical Institute, to continue to mentor those that wished to learn the procedure. Matsuda ended up helping his wife perfect her techniques and continued performing his own cardiac surgeries alongside her. He did nothing special that any other doctor wouldn't have done, but he felt there was a pride in knowing that he had helped change the world if not just by introducing Momo's son to his wife.

Roman continued performing cardiac surgeries until he eventually retired after hurting his back. He lived comfortably and ended up writing novels in his spare time. The books weren't amazingly popular, but those that read them said it changed their lives. He called them, "The Journey of a Thousand Miles: Saku Ryuu".

Saito worked hard as head nurse in the hospital and continued to change the lives of everyone around her. She pushed hard for changes in hospital procedure to make the patients more comfortable. She succeeded in getting sponge bathing after getting signatures from nearly two hundred thousand nurses from around the globe. She continued to keep contact with Sakuno and was dubbed the affectionate 'Aunt Saito'.

Ever ever after  
Though the world will tell you it's not smart

Marui became a Master of Ceremonies for high class sporting events and continued travelling along with his camera crew to seek out aspiring players. He became popular with his fans and even had his own type of bubblegum dedicated to him. He ended up marrying a golf player, Ryuuten Arina, and had twin boys.

Jackal created a nonprofit for the development of cheaper medicinal drugs in Africa and ended up saving millions of lives. His name became synonymous with quality charity that was entirely transparent with their funds. The deaths due to malaria went down drastically

after his foundation got in full swing. He married one of his advisors, Awiti later named Arjana.

Yagyuu became a real estate agent in the Tokyo district and was known for allowing generous payment mortgages at his own cost to allow people to get off the streets. He continued supporting charities for helping people get off the streets and providing them with new lives. When questioned about why he did this he replied, "No one thinks about how they feel. They deserve to be looked at just the same as the rest of us."

Kirihara continued into the professional tennis bloc and made his way through winning smaller tournaments rather than taking the bigtime shots. With any airtime he got, he always advocated the acknowledgement of less known illnesses such as sickle-cell anemia and Guillien Barre syndrome.

Yanagi followed Sadaharu into experimental medicine and developed treatments to help stabilize nerve damage and found ways to introduce hormones that would help regenerate damaged tissue. He never married, but ended up following through his work and saved many lives along the way.

Sanada followed a different career than most of his comrades. He ended up joining the military midway through college when he decided that the college career was not for him. He ended up becoming a naval commander for a few years before retiring once more to teach at the academy. He butchered his way through recruits and examined people for their strategic ability through war games.

Ever ever after  
The world can be yours if you let your heart  
Believe in ever after

Everyone honored Yukimura's passing. He was buried in his hometown under a small tree near the center. The Rikkaidai team never fully accepted his death. He remained their beloved captain that watched from above. Maybe if he wasn't god then he was an angel that would watch over them.

No wonder your heart feels it's flying  
Your head feels it's spinning  
Each happy ending's a brand new beginning  
Let yourself be enchanted, you just might break through

Sakuno went into complete remission of her cancer and became an author. She wrote medical dramas and helped the world realize what goes on within the white walls. She remained a strong supporter of experimental medicine and emotional support during stays. Though she became immersed in the world, she remained as sweet as ever. When she turned 25 she married Niou Masaharu.

Funny thing about Niou, he ended up becoming a poker player. His keen eyes and poker face allowed him to win a majority of his games. Along with his wife, he raised three children, Rima, Koko, and Kiseki. They ended up volunteering at hospitals to help cheer the patients and give them some happiness in their lives. They lived happily with each other

and are remembered to have said, "There may be dark days, but when you get through them there is light like nothing you have ever seen before."

To ever ever after  
Forever could even start today  
Ever ever after  
Maybe it's just one wish away  
Your ever ever after  
Oh, for ever ever after

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