Ghost of Christmas Past.

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1120.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
Category:	Slash (M/M)
Fandom:	Bungo Stray Dogs
Relationship:	Dazai Osamu/Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs)
Characters:	Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai Osamu (Bungou Stray Dogs)
Additional Tags:	Dazai Osamu (mentioned/hallucination), Port Mafia Boss Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs), Angst, Grief/Mourning, Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, Unreliable Narrator, Christmas Eve, Ambiguous Ending, Ghost Dazai Osamu, Bungou Stray Dogs: BEAST, Post-BEAST Light Novel (Bungou Stray Dogs), Nakahara Chuuya Needs a Hug (Bungou Stray Dogs), Nakahara Chuuya Needs Therapy (Bungou Stray Dogs), Emotional Nakahara Chuuya (Bungou Stray Dogs), Dazai is Haunting The Narrative, ya get me, eheheh, Is it a Christmas miracle or a psychotic break? (Yes), Heavy Angst
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-03 Words: 4,889 Chapters: 1/1

Ghost of Christmas Past.

by the_mackerel

Summary

[Set in the BEAST universe, roughly one year after Dazai's death.]
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Chuuya is alone on a snowy night, it's as simple as that. He knows Dazai is gone, he knows this is all a symptom of exhaustion and grief... or is it?
Chuuya doesn't know, and neither do I.
Is it a Christmas miracle or a psychotic break? (Yes)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Days just blend together, right? It's the most common symptom of a busy life after all, and nobody would dare say that Chuuya Nakahara isn't a busy man. Life demands; it always did and it always will: it devours energies, time and patience. Such is its price.

What the actual fuck… since when does he bother with such depressing thoughts? That sounds like a habit which belonged to someone else, like a virus he caught from someone else. A disease that has already reaped someone else.

Maybe it is the lack of sleep, or the lack of action that comes with the day itself: on the 24th of December everything stops, and so does the mafia. The problem is, he might have forgotten how to actually stop. So here he is, in the Boss's office. He's comfy in a big office chair, facing the same obnoxious mahogany desk he sees every day.

Even though time has passed, it clearly hasn't done its job right: despite everything, in the secluded privacy of his own head, not even there does Chuuya dare to think about this place, this room as his own office. It's the Boss's.

It's quite the brilliant loophole, fuck everyone who ever doubted Chuuya's intellect: yes, it's the Boss's office; yes, he is theoretically the boss, but those two words don't refer to the same person. He is the boss, after all. Not the Boss.

Yeah, it is stupid.

To heal, to manage, to move on… all of that requires effort and desire to do so, but healing only leaves scarring, at best, but if you keep the wound open then you can pretend the blade never left. And like often happens when you have too many thoughts festering without a verdict, restlessness prevails. It's everywhere, in Chuuya's gloved hands, it permeates his heartbeat and it drives his soles to push the chair back, its wheels muffled against the plush carpet.

A tower of reports dominates his desk, as it always does: the Port Mafia is a demanding beast, it devours everything one has to give… which is inescapable for the one currently wearing the crown. He lets out a weary sigh. There's some understanding peeking amidst his thoughts, just within reach, if only he were to— no, not today. Nor ever, thank you very much.

Ugh, he needs a fucking drink.

The thought has barely been forged, yet his hand already reaches for the wine bottle, a permanent resident of the desk's corner. Hesitation halts the familiar motion of leading it to his lips… today, perhaps Christmas Eve is worth using a glass. The carmine liquid sloshes slightly as he pours it, but the motion barely registers in his unfocused gaze. He's staring off into space, like an idiot. He used to be so much better at pouring wine, didn't he?

Tiny worries from another life, many from another guy.

He lifts the glass, now copiously filled, and gulps a greedy sip: enjoyment isn't a factor here. This is not a celebration; this is a medication for a wound which is doomed to never heal.

His walk to the window is slow, a shuffle of tired legs, the begrudging trudge of an exhausted man. He stops just short of it; the glass, mercifully, doesn't pay Chuuya back with his own reflection. Well, he does allow the window to act as such, as a fucking window, keeping the electrochromic glass transparent most of the time.

The bandaged asshole never did that, forcing the window to masquerade as a dark mirror due to whatever paranoid delusion must have plagued him. Snipers? Fucking snipers?! What a joke; like Dazai's biggest enemy wasn't Dazai himself.

What a pathetic coward he is… was.

With a groan, Chuuya rests his forehead against the glass. The chill seeping into his skin is a welcome respite from the frantic pace of his thoughts. It feels good, alright?

"Don't think too much, slug, your little brain cannot handle it; it'll explode~"

Yeah, he'd say something like that, wouldn't he?

Outside the window Yokohama sparkles: life nestles so many floors below, with neon lights and the unmistakable fumes of exhaust pipes, with the noises of a busy city and the smell of takeout fried chicken. That's how he imagines it, real life.

Life, down there on the street, on that very pavement…

Now, you see, Chuuya knows where that thought is going, he's used to it; it happens at least a dozen times a day. He spends most of his time trying to avoid going down that road, and the rest managing the organization.

He forces his gaze away from the street-level life, from the warmth of the mundane. A shroud of pale murkiness meets his eyes, and it takes him a second to process what that is… it's snow, just snow. From amidst the flurry, a single snowflake, a bit larger than the rest, dares to land right on the glass. It clings there for a moment, stealing some light from the street way below just to shimmer, ephemerally. Reaching for it is an impulse, a mindless gesture that leads his gloved hand to the cool surface of the glass, almost as if the barrier could fade, allowing him to steal that fleeting six-pointed gemstone from the sky itself.

Even if he did… ice melts, withers and disappears.

Exactly like people do.

Just like the bastard did.

Yet, there's only the phantom chill of the winter night bleeding through the black leather, reaching his palm; there's the dim office behind him, with that old desk lamp he refused to throw away, showering the polished wood with its sickly yellow light. That's it, that's Chuuya's life, devoid of such flowery bullshit.

The frost is persistent though, it clings onto him, leeching his warmth away from that single point of contact.

Snow makes everything quiet, did you know that? The real Dazai had said, his voice weary but enriched with his usual arrogance.

It’s just a memory, Chuuya knows it, but it’s just so damn vivid that he turns anyway.

”Snow makes everything quiet, did you know that? Due to its structure, it dampens the sounds.” A weary voice, feeble but enriched by a melodious pinch of grating arrogance, reaches Chuuya’s ears. “You should try going outside sometimes.”

Is he going crazy? Fucking amazing, really, just what he needs. Well, it’s just long-overdue, maybe… or it's just an echo, carried on the wind that brought that stupid storm.

“What?! How is tha–?!” Chuuya’s own voice boasts, his tone dripping with rightful rage. That’s not what he had asked about, that’s not relevant! And to think how hard the executive had tried to find a sneaky way to ask why the bastard looked like shit! And he does look awful indeed, it’s right before Chuuya’s eyes now: Dazai is slouched at the desk, bathed in a vaguely less sickly yellow light, but dark circles are painted on his gaunt face, a stubborn stubble is peeking on his jaw and a pervasive tremor taints the motion of his pen. The tremor worsens, permeating Dazai’s forearm, down to his fingertips; it’s enough to make the luxurious pen escape his grasp, clacking onto the desk’s surface. The sound resounds way too loudly in the silence, rippling waves that persevere a bit too long.

Dazai himself… he just stares at it; he makes no attempt to pick it up, as if the task itself is unfathomable: how could a mere man lift a mountain? Chuuya’s body reacts before his brain does. Half a step forward, his gloved fingers twitching: it’s the impulse to reach out, to help, to do it himself, to do something.

Whatever.

Despite the knot in his stomach, Chuuya shoves the dread further down, converting the physical sensation into the language he speaks best: rage. Rage, after all, coddles you, it protects you, it keeps everything consistent and permanent.

Rage doesn’t demand one to admit one’s own misdeeds.

Rage is kind, it doesn’t ask for awareness, nor does it ask for admissions.

“Of course you’re not even listening, you shitty bastard! Babbling about snow, of all things!” Chuuya’s voice is poisonous, but it cracks slightly. He punctuates the end of the sentence by picking the bloody fountain pen up and slamming it back down, at the centre of the document the boss had been working on.

Some ink spills from its tip, just a droplet or two, perfectly symbolic of absolutely nothing. With a huff, Chuuya focuses his gaze to the window. It’s open, it’s rare to see it as such, and indeed, it’s still snowing. Or rather, it was snowing that night. It’s funny, to look back at it, at

the dread: the physical feeling… it is the same the ginger usually gets when things are about to go to shit, the knack that something is terribly wrong.

It's a little thing, laced with the tang of decay.

The shitty Mackerel was right: snow does make the world quiet. The resulting silence, though, isn't peaceful now, just as it wasn't then: it's the lull of a pit where corpses rot.

In the past, it was Dazai rotting.

Who or what is rotting today?

Not me, duh, I'm the fucking boss now.

He's always been a good leader, the little executive boss. Leading differs from ruling, the former implies a loan of strength, a mutual subjection: his to the mafia, and the mafia to him. But it's a lie, isn't it? Both him and the bandaged bastard, albeit in different ways, had the tendency to allow their own servitude to shadow whatever benefit could be reaped by their position. Dazai used to be better at it. Or perhaps not.

The crown on Chuuya's head, for how much of a metaphor we can make it… it's big, heavy, but more importantly it doesn't fit: it slips down. That makes it a collar, doesn't it?!

"You truly are a guard dog, Chuuya, a very noisy and very red terrier. If only you had learnt to guard the house instead…"

Instead of what? That's something Chuuya wondered about for at least a couple of years, but it's not an impossible riddle. Completing and predicting the Mackerel's thoughts is an art form Chuuya has always been well-versed in, and now it's even easier: the bastard is not around to contradict him. Instead of… the man who lives inside. In retrospect, even that insult was yet another warning that he didn't catch, when it mattered.

Regardless, a crown makes a very uncomfortable collar, it pierces and irritates, it strains, there's no way to make it comfortable. Maybe that was Dazai's plan all along, a very elaborate fuck you, just for him. How very thoughtful.

Time is a feeble thing. Or perhaps alcohol, sleep-deprivation and a well-timed snowstorm are enough for the strongest man to hallucinate a bizarre blur of moments that never happened, moments that could have and… shards of memories.

In front of him there's only the glass and the snowy night sky behind it, the office is empty. He squeezes his eyes shut, muttering a surprisingly uncertain 'Fuck' under his breath. When he opens them though, the emptiness is no more.

Dazai is back in the Boss's chair, his chair, just as he was a moment ago, blabbering about snow. He's unbuttoning the collar of his pressed shirt, wincing as it pulls his skin forth, lifting the edges of a small wound. This must be one of the many times the bastard got hurt in an assassination attempt. There have been so many they all blurred together. Underneath the

collar there's a frankly insignificant wound, barely bleeding, but the purplish bruise spreading around it looks painful.

"Would you mind a little help?" that grating voice says, pulling Chuuya fully into that moment. The ginger moves, one step after another, retracing each motion with no real deliberation. He has no way to avoid this, it has already happened.

Kneeling by the chair, his gloved hands reach out to wipe away the blood with a handkerchief he isn't even properly aware of. The action is met with a sharp hiss. Chuuya didn't care then, and he cares even less now. There's a living pulse beneath the fabric; the blood seeping through the fibers is a vibrant hue… the instinct, if he could act, would be to press, or worse, to finish the job someone else has started.

To get revenge.

To scream.

To ask, perhaps.

Yet, memories don't allow for interference.

"I wonder if you'll miss this," Dazai mumbles; his one visible eye is fixated straight ahead, on the warped reflection on the dark window, looking but without truly seeing anything at all. The bastard is deep in his own fucked up tangle of thoughts.

"Miss what?! Cleaning up your messes?" Chuuya hears his own voice answer; yeah, he had said it, one year or so ago. For once, in retrospect, for once in his bloody life, perhaps Chuuya should have shut up right there. He should have taken a minute, or just a second to let the thought sink in, to read between the lines why the shitty Mackerel was talking about missing something.

But no, when does he ever? When does he ever think?!

At least he has an answer to Dazai's query now.

Maybe… he misses it.

Yeah.

Both the pulse and the warmth fade away, the sensation stubbornly escapes Chuuya's grasp. Around him the light seems to shift again; the flicker draws his eyes to a small potted Poinsettia, sitting against the far wall. A pop of colour, so offensive that he briefly wonders who dared to place it there.

There's no time to dwell on the thought, it slithers away. With yet another flicker of… well, rather than light, it's probable that reality itself is flickering in front of him, given that Chuuya finds himself right in front of the plant in the blink of an eye, poking one of the red leaves with a gloved finger.

He remembers being a bit suspicious of the sudden decor. It was a fleeting thought he didn't entertain, but admittedly… It was unusual for Dazai to embrace anything festive. Last year he did. Perhaps it was a clue Chuuya was too stupid to notice, back then; instead his voice blurts: "The fuck?! It's not even really poisonous, y'know."

"I wasn't planning on eating it," Dazai says, his voice flat, his pen stilling momentarily on the paper.

Rolling his eyes, Chuuya struts forth, grabbing the remote placed at the edge of the desk: the darkness of the office, in that moment, was annoying.

As the window clears, it unleashes a familiar view: oh, it's snowing even in this memory. Oh, it was that bizarre Christmas Eve, made so just by the ornamental plant and completely ordinary if one were to evaluate everything else.

The mafia doesn't take breaks or enjoy holidays. Hilariously, they've spent most festivities, begrudgingly, in each other's dreaded company. No gifts, no decorations (usually at least) and a drink or two: their unofficial festive tradition. It has happened every year since Dazai's ascension, hasn't it?

"Merry fuckin' Christmas to us, huh? Guess this is what we get for not havin' anythin' better to do," Chuuya finds himself muttering, under his breath, as he props himself against the desk's edge, crossing his arms over his chest yet throwing a quick glance at the other man.

The bastard finally lifts his head; he takes the view in with a humourless smile on his face and as he does so the greyish hues of the snow are momentarily caught in his eye.

"I guess so," is the only answer Chuuya gets back, not a proper acknowledgement nor a stark refusal. It's an answer that doesn't make sense, it's not coherent with the same man who, in one way or another, has allowed a Poinsettia to reside in his space.

"Perhaps… I would like to see the snow again," Dazai adds, almost like an afterthought: his voice is faint, devoid of its customary poise. He is clearly not speaking to Chuuya, or to the snow itself for that matter. Perhaps he was talking to the future, and definitely not about it.

It was a plea, one that went unheard; Chuuya grasps it in hindsight.

Regardless, the silence, with its melancholy, stretches a bit too long, Chuuya's very skin prickles. He needs to shatter it. Yesterday.

"Right. Snow. Great. Let's just skip to the getting shit-faced part, boss."

With the sound of his own voice ringing in his ears, Chuuya's eyes open. The snow is behind the glass, a couple of inches from his face.

He hasn't moved, he hasn't been close to the desk or kneeling at all.

There's no Poinsettia on the far wall.

There used to be, a year ago, but not today.

“Shit,” he snarls. Standing by the window, his reflection looks back at him: the usual deep navy suit, the choker, the hat. He is still himself, but he seems so pale, as if the frost has reached his skin too. Whatever the fuck that was, that jumping between memories and thoughts, it left a bitter taste in his mouth. Well, time to wash it away.

Chuuya spins away from the window, storming back at his desk. He doesn’t bother with a fresh glass, it wouldn’t be worth it, he just sloshes more wine into it. His grip is so tight, and his movements so jerky that some of it spills. He stares at it for a split second, the bottle still strangled in his grasp.

Why the hell not.

Quickly, knowing that if he were to linger he’d stop, Chuuya reaches for a second glass. He pours it more delicately, even if his hold is still aggressive. It’s not for himself, that glass is not for him.

It’s for the memory, for the bastard ghost in the room.

It’s stupid, isn’t it?

Somehow, somewhat, it soothes Chuuya a little, marginally alleviating the jitters which have been strangling him since that very morning.

The snow makes everything quiet.

Yet, the lull of a pit where corpses rot is not appropriate.

It has been, until now, but after pouring the wine the silence itself feels fuller, muted by a new sound.

A soft, gentle, exhale that is not Chuuya’s own.

Close.

Real… or realistic at least.

Chuuya doesn’t turn, his muscles are locked in a clamping clench. Every instinct is screaming that movement is a mistake, that it would shatter the palliative that his own actions have created. And for once, only this once, Chuuya is admitting that he does need it. Some reassurance, a moment of respite, perhaps a single second when everything isn’t shitty.

Though, another sound joins the first one: the characteristic crack of leather, as if someone has shifted on a chair Chuuya knows is empty.

Chuuya’s eyes don’t stray away from the two glasses of wine, wisely.

At the edge of his vision rests the edge of a black sleeve, with a cuff of white bandages. He expects for the glimpse to fade, to shimmer away like all of those other memories did, instead bony fingers reach for one of the glasses, wrapping around the stem and stealing it away.

The sound is real. It feels real.

A chuckle resonates, it's the prelude to a languid voice cutting through the silence.

"My, my. Pouring one for me, how very… sentimental of you, slug."

Sitting on his chair, wearing a faint curve on his face, here he is, the bastard himself. No blood adorns his shirt, and even the dark circles that permanently used to reside on Dazai's face are gone. In a way, that makes him look younger. Worse, it makes him look alive.

Of course Chuuya is momentarily frozen, how could he not? Out of the shitshow his mind has supplied him with during this night, this one is the worst of them all. The certainty of absurdity is no more. Questioning what's real and what isn't… oh, that's a very bad sign. Should Chuuya check in a bloody nut house as the morning comes? Should he resign the throne in favour of someone that is, at least, stable?

Fuck, he was more reliable even when he was rampaging the city out of frankly justified rage, right after burying the bastard.

But now, like this?

No, no, no…

The apparition, mocking little shit he is, raises his glass in a silent toast before taking a sip. Dazai is looking at him, but in a manner that makes Chuuya's breath itch, as if it finally dislodges from his throat. There's pity, that is clear, but also something akin to worry.

Yeah, that can be a clue that none of this is real. Pity, worry, regret… those never resided in the bastard's heart, which Chuuya doubted he had to begin with.

"Are you alright, Chuuya?" Dazai whispers, leaning a bit more on the desk and adjusting the now half-empty glass on it.

No, nope, no thanks. Such a question is a balm for a wound that Chuuya wants to fester. He doesn't answer, he cannot, a knot of screams tangled in his throat, strangling his cords. There's so much he could say, so much he should say. This thing, this moment, whatever it is, it's a precious chance: unlike the previous ones, Chuuya's volition is allowed, he can act, he's not retracting predetermined paths belonging to his own memories… but no, he is stuck.

He'll eventually regret this.

The golden lamplight catches the red wine as Dazai picks the glass up again. After a lazy swirl, that bandaged hand raises it between them in a clear invitation. At least that Chuuya can do; his right arm moves, out of habit, and his glass rises to meet the other in a gentle clink. It's such a pure chime, almost joyous, so out of place that Chuuya's eyes start to prickle in response.

Toasts are for celebrations, but what's there to celebrate? Chuuya's involuntary promotion? How unfit he is as a boss, unable to prevent the organisation from devouring him?

Unable to answer those queries, as he often does, Chuuya drinks. The wine is cool on his tongue, a tender acidic caress. The taste is real, too real. With a jolt, his gaze shoots up to the man and away from his now empty glass, just to see if that glimpse of reality has chased him away.

Osamu is still there; on his shoulders the burgundy scarf rests, the same Chuuya's been wearing for almost a year now. It's impossible, yet it is. A gloved hand reaches for it, but it stops in its tracks just to race back to Chuuya's lips: he bites the leather, pulling the glove away and letting it drop on the carpet.

Yeah, that's it: he reaches for the scarf once more, reaching it this time. The texture is the exact same, silky to the touch, but this one is pristine, unlike Chuuya's one.

You see, despite being involved in the fall, Dazai's scarf was relatively unscathed, but there, at the bottom edge, there has always been a splatter of blood. Blood on burgundy is not really all that visible, after all, but trying to remove it has almost driven Chuuya mad once again.

Pouring. Scrubbing. Rinsing.

Pouring. Scrubbing. Rinsing.

And the bitch is still there.

His hand still lingers on the scarf, expecting it to dissipate, but it doesn't. Nor does the man wearing it. Much to Chuuya's surprise, the man leans in, slightly tilting his head with a pensive hum. A bandaged hand comes up, covering Chuuya's one, trapping it against the fabric.

It's warm, what an impossible little detail.

Chuuya has no time to dissect the thought, a deer in the headlights of whatever this fuckery is. It's Dazai who shrinks the distance between them, his face filling Chuuya's vision, close enough for him to see a loose thread amidst the bandages on his cheek.

Noticing and processing, though, differ plenty.

A mouth on his, a lingering point of contact. Even those lips are warm, and admittedly slightly chapped. Chuuya's breath hitches, how could it not? Asking himself why this is taking place, considering the bizarreness of the whole night, would be wise. But that would require pondering and admitting things, unveiling truths that cannot lead to any concrete action.

Instead, he prefers focusing on the sheer audacity of it. His ungloved hand releases the scarf, sliding off it to tangle in the surprisingly soft hair at Dazai's nape. He has no idea if that is what the bastard's hair really was to the touch, but it is silky.

His gloved hand slams against Dazai's chest, his fingers stretching wide, with the clear intention to shove away, to free himself from this bullshit. Chuuya's body decides to betray him: the hand doesn't push at all, it curls, the gloves cracking under his harsh grip.

The kiss persists a breath longer, even as its delicacy wages war against the surrounding violence.

Chuuya is shaking, he realises only after his eyes snap shut. He wants to scream, to ask why, but it's clear the other man doesn't have the answers. Holding on is the only option Chuuya has. Just a little longer. A second more.

In a jerky motion, it's Chuuya who pulls back first, burying his face in the crook of Dazai's neck, bandages rasp his jaw but he doesn't care. He is clinging like a stupid kid… or perhaps just like a pathetic loyal dog. Some things never change, do they?

At least, if he holds on strong enough, then this bastard ghost won't be able to float away… again.

Consciousness returns to him slowly, lazily, as if it doesn't really want to work this early, on Christmas of all days too. The world, for a couple of merciful seconds, is warm and comfortable. Beneath him there's something pliant and plush… leathery too. Oh, it must be the office's couch.

He must have dragged himself there, eventually.

On top of him, tucked impossibly well around his shoulders, there's a delightful weight. It grounds him and it's easily identifiable as the source of the comfort Chuuya is experiencing.

For a moment he mistakes it for black wool, belonging to a coat he knows is buried six feet down. It feels as such, against his cheek, but when he reaches for it with his single ungloved hand the texture morphs away, replaced by the much softer one belonging to a blanket.

There is no coat.

A soft groan escapes him as his eyes begrudgingly let the world in: there's light, the silvery one belonging to the onset of a wintry day. Long shadows paint the flooring, and the comfort Chuuya has savoured just a second ago curdles into something else, akin to a hollow confusion.
It was just a blanket, duh. The grey one he keeps in the closet for emergencies.

Sitting up is a bad idea, but he does so regardless: his head is throbbing, persistently, his eyes are burning and his mouth stinks of death… and of course a faint sense of vertigo is the cherry on top of it. A hangover. That's normal… customary even.

Whatever happened last night feels like an imperfect dream, one of those you remember bits and pieces of, but that you wouldn't be able to narrate out loud as it will disappear whenever you open your mouth.

The blanket is currently pooled at his hips, mocking him from below. How could you mistake me for a coat? You imbecile… Yeah, that's what Chuuya imagines it'd say.

With an annoyed huff, he hurls the offending blanket at the other edge of the couch before stumbling to his feet. Fuck, everything aches.

He needs water. Food. And a well placed blow at the centre of his forehead, to see if it can help him forget.

It was a hallucination, wasn't it? Stress-induced and aided by alcohol. Otherwise he's gone off the deep end for good.

Well, it was bound to happen. With the bastard gone, only one half of double black carries the insanity which was previously split in two.

Absent-mindedly, his focus hobbles past the couch, reaching the desk.

The two glasses dominate the wooden surface, two skyscrapers in that miniature of… where was this thought going?

The hell does Chuuya know.

What he knows, for a fact, is that he remembers pouring them both, one for himself and one for the memory.

He does remember drinking his own, rather vividly too… but the other one, it had been full. Of that he is certain.

It isn't full now.

What the hell…

Standing up and walking to the desk makes his muscles protest and whine, but fuck off.

He inspects both of them. Is this one his? Or is it the other one? Did he drink both and he doesn't remember it?

Was it a Christmas miracle?

If it was, what a shitty one it was. Just a kiss?

The disappointment doesn't come; despite the ache in his body, he does feel a bit lighter.

Chuuya reaches out, his skin gently colliding with the cold stem as he picks it up. A smile, small but tender, graces his lips.

"Merry Christmas to you too, ya shitty mackerel."

End Notes

Please, leave a comment; it'd make my day in these tiring times! Each and every comment will be welcomed and cherished, even if it's just an emoji! Whatever doesn't make me feel like I'm shouting into the void, really ♥
°. .

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!