Alone

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by flightless_pigeon

Summary

Yoshiki thinks about his first two years of high school. They had been, up until that point, the worst years of his life.

He doesn't know what it was about Shinozaki Ayumi, but he listened to her the day that he was ready to give up. Back then, he was scraping by on rent if he limited his meals to one or two a day, barely making the required attendance rates, putting just enough effort into his job that it wasn't worth the hassle of firing him. And he was determined to do it terribly, terribly alone.

He hadn't expected to walk in late to classroom 2-9 on his first day of 11th grade with Shinozaki's desk one up and to the right of his own. The vibrant, childlike personalities some of his classmates possessed were overwhelming, yet he found himself being roped into taking walks around the courtyard, eating lunch with others, hanging back in the classroom after school had finished for the day. Feeling young again.

These days, Yoshiki sits by the one window of his apartment, staring blankly at the cars passing by, and taking drags of cigarettes that he once made a good effort to cut back on. Knowing this will forever be the worst year of his life, and feeling terribly, terribly, alone.

Notes

(Edit: This work was originally published on AO3 on 15/10/2020, and has been ported over on 30/10/2026. This may not be the final updated version, because this fic is so old I don't even have a draft of it saved on my current software. I had to download this shit from [REDACTED]! When the AO3pocalypse is over I will update it with the original tags and publishing date.)

(I also take great shame in bringing this horribly-aged series to this site. I swear it will be the only one.)

I'm back babey! A couple of notes/warnings before we start:

- Though this takes place between the prologue of Book of Shadows and the beginning of Blood Drive, I'm using the Blood Covered: Repeated Fear events as canon (other than the replacement homeroom TA), because I hate BOS and it makes the canon too complex.

- The tags make it look scarier than it is. The most serious it gets is descriptions of aversion/demonisation of food and body image issues, as well as a somewhat graphic description of Mayu's death, which isn't any heavier than it is in-game. All other tags are pretty much safety nets, and those topics are only really glossed over/implicit.
- There's no direct dialogue or events going on at the time that this is set. This is a reflective piece from Yoshiki's perspective, and he is the only character that is present, though it felt silly not to tag any other characters who were mentioned in detail.

See the end of the work for more notes

In retrospect, it was all too good to be true.

Yoshiki thinks about his first two years of high school. They had been, up until that point, the worst years of his life. He'd been thrown into the real world, scrambling to find landlords that looked past forged signatures and youthful naivety, trying to rope himself into jobs that took on children without work experience nor references. He remembers his former 10th grade classmates laughing, turning their noses up, knowingly grimacing at him as the news spread that he'd flunked his end-of-year exams so spectacularly that they were forcing him to redo the entire year. He didn't care all that much. It's not as if he liked any of those people anyway.

It kept getting worse. Working longer hours to keep up with his climbing apartment bills, and often having to do so during school hours. Teachers keeping him in detention due to the lack of schoolwork he would hand in, making him late to his job and ensuring his relationship with his manager remained a consistent level of aggressive. Being visited often by his younger sister, who forced him to eat when he had no appetite, and told him that it would all be over soon, everything would be forgiven (he doesn't have the heart to tell her that things are permanently different, that he would never be 'coming home', not even now). Nearly dropping out of Senior High altogether when he thought he'd reached his limit, and yes, Tsubota-sensei, he *was* a waste of the school's time, his parents *did* fail to raise him, he probably *would* be rotting on his sofa in a couple of years' time. Not before he'd socked an adult in the face who he was determined he'd never become, though.

He doesn't know what it was about Shinozaki Ayumi other than the fact that it had been years since anyone other than Miki had shown compassion for him (*cried for him*, he remembers distinctly), but he listened to her that day. Thinks about what she did for him a lot more than he probably should. He's sure he didn't do any better in his finals that year, but they must have pitied him, because they let him continue into 11th grade anyway.

Back then, he was still set on carrying on like the previous years, scraping by on rent if he limited his meals to one or two a day, barely making the minimum attendance rates, putting just enough effort into his job that it wasn't worth the hassle of firing him. And he was determined to do it terribly, terribly alone.

He hadn't expected to walk in late to classroom 2-9 on his first day of 11th grade with Shinozaki's desk one up and to the right of his own. And at first, he certainly believed he'd hallucinated the small smile of recognition that she gave him, until she turned around and told him that she was planning to run for class representative that year, and she'll be damned if he was going to be slacking as much as last year under her watch, a fiery, no-nonsense look in her eyes to complement her words. When she turned back around, Yoshiki had almost laughed. Instead, his chest got tight and he stared at her for the rest of the day in disbelief.

Her being there and acknowledging him after their first meeting half a year prior threw him off that day. It didn't help that he hadn't slept the night before, and the new homeroom assistant had been 'warned' about him so was playing the role of the nice, understanding teacher, and so he hadn't been as cold as he expected to be when his classmates were introducing themselves to each other. Didn't push them away as menacingly as he did the previous year, in which he made very clear to his 10th-grade classmates that he was their

senpai by a long shot, and wanted nothing to do with them. In Class 2-9, most of them seemed to catch onto his natural brooding demeanour and kept their distance at once.

Mochida Satoshi was not 'most of them'.

Though he was fairly decent at sizing people up, Yoshiki was not at all prepared for a boy as popular and naïve-looking as Mochida to be as perceptive and thoughtful as he was. Having someone ask him if he needed help with schoolwork, where he went at lunch, and why he hardly turned up to school with a genuine interest as to what the answer was was nothing short of foreign to him. He'd nearly had a panic attack when Mochida had first turned up on his doorstep with his homework, telling him that he was sent by Yui-sensei to deliver it, and he'd nearly cried the first time he referred to the both of them as friends (he definitely *hadn't* gotten teary-eyed at the time, but he must have looked so stiffly-postured and surprised that Satoshi caught on anyway, and quickly switched to referring to him by his first name. Yoshiki hopes that by now the other boy has forgotten that encounter).

Satoshi's blessing of friendship was apparently a big deal to the rest of the class, who blindly trusted him (which Yoshiki thought was ridiculous at first, but understood as they grew closer) to be someone whose actions could be safely followed. Knowing that their good-natured classmate Mochida-kun was having a fine time hanging around the brooding blond boy who spent most of their classes sleeping at his desk seemed to be a silent invitation to approach and interact with him, and sometimes offer to *include* him in whatever they were doing. Suzumoto was one of the first to do so, which doesn't surprise him now that he got to know her more personally. She was always too kind for her own good, and seemed to take pity and interest in troubled kids like Morishige and himself. But then Shinohara had started to joke around with and prod at him, and she was most often accompanied by Nakashima, and that meant Satoshi was probably nearby enough to force him to take part in whatever they wanted to do. Just like that, he found himself being roped into taking walks around the courtyard, eating lunch with others (when he remembered to bring it), hanging back in the classroom after school had finished on days when he didn't have to run off to work.

It had felt so unnatural at first. The previous years where he was forced to adapt to huge amounts of responsibility and maturity had emotionally aged him. The vibrant, childlike personalities some of his classmates possessed were overwhelming, and he was all the more aware that he was older than them, almost an adult amongst sixteen-year-olds bursting with energy and imagination. It got easier once Yui-sensei began engaging more with them, who was a little older, yet much more youthful at heart, and when Suzumoto kept Morishige, who was one of the youngest in their year, but talked and acted like a 19th Century Romantic, around to remind him that there were other sane people who didn't quite match the rest of them.

What was the most grounding was Shinozaki's demeanour towards him. She had been overly nice at first to help him fit in, but quickly made clear that she held herself and everyone else to a certain standard, which meant she often lectured and forced him to carry out his duties. Yoshiki found he didn't really mind when she whacked him upside the head with a textbook to wake him up, or when she shoved brooms and wet cloths in his hands when they were to clean up the classroom, or when she yelled until she was in tears for him to please try harder, for his own sake (it did make him panic at times, but was a nice reminder that he was a part

of something, and someone noticed these things). Sometimes she looked as if she held him in a low regard, expected better of him but didn't believe he'd be capable, which bothered him. It reminds him of the 12th graders who still look down on him when he passes them in the corridors. Reminds him of their first exchange, where she seemed to know what he was going to do and lied and screamed and cried for him to sort himself out. He was a mess back then, and so for a while he strove to do better, to avoid that same look he hated so much. To prove that he was better than that.

(Deep down, he figures it probably wasn't healthy, trying to impress a girl who belittled him whenever she saw fit, but he had so little else pushing him forward. If not for Shinozaki, and if not for himself - he didn't care what became of him - then who was he proving his worth to? His parents? He didn't want to follow through with what *they* wanted of him all along. They were right, but he didn't want to give them the satisfaction of it, so it was all for Shinozaki.

Somewhere between April and October of that year, his obsession with proving to her that he was a respectable person and trying to get to know the girl who saved him at his lowest point turned increasingly romantic. He refused to acknowledge it directly with anyone who could see it, not even himself, and he tried harder to impress her.)

He sometimes saw the stress she held when she instructed the class, and thought about his own responsibilities, and found he didn't want to make it any worse for her. Once, he caught fear in her eyes whilst she tried to scare (impress) Satoshi with one of her ghost stories, and didn't know whether to laugh or cry at how similarly she handled her insecurities to himself. He saw how desperate and committed she was to prove to her classmates that she was brave, dependable, unstoppable. He thinks about how frustrated and passionate she was when she looked at him for the first time. They were so similar, but he had succumbed to giving up.

He thinks about how frustrated and angry she was when he had to think about whether to go back to Heavenly Host Elementary School to save the remainder of their friends, or if he'd rather ensure his own safety. Her commitment out-ruled his, immensely.

These days, Yoshiki sits by the one window of his apartment, staring blankly at the cars that pass by, and taking drags of cigarettes that he once made a good effort to cut back on, per Shinozaki's request. Lighting new ones when a stare-down with his fridge leaves his stomach churning. Knowing without a doubt that this will forever be the worst year of his life, and feeling terribly, terribly, alone.

Though the first couple of weeks back had certainly been the worst, he found himself at school every day, doing a body count and making sure everyone else was coping the best that they could. Even though it was awful seeing how wrecked Nakashima was over the loss of Shinohara, and watching Shinozaki shake and sob at her desk every day, and knowing the stress and exhaustion Satoshi held as he bounced between comforting Yuka and his friends and ignored his own trauma, it was manageable. They were all there, suffering together each day, until Yoshiki went back to a dreary apartment devoid of all other life forms.

Now, he stays home. Shinozaki landed herself in the hospital, and after Nakashima broke down trying to explain to Satoshi and himself what happened, he doesn't feel like leaving again. He had grown close with Shinozaki after they got back. Most of what they had

endured in that school, they had endured together, and so a lot of times it seemed only he could comfort her, remind her what was real, what wasn't, and why it none of it was her fault. He hates the part of him that is glad she spends more time with him and trusts him more now, because it wasn't worth what they had to go through for him to get it at all. When he heard he couldn't see her anymore, it didn't seem necessary to turn up to school from that point on. Satoshi sometimes comes by, forces him out of bed, and makes him spend the day with the three of them (counting Nakashima) sitting in silence, giving each other fleeting looks that remind them all too much of how different everything is now. He's always too tired to start a conversation. Satoshi doesn't pick him up as much as he used to.

He doesn't sleep well, forever plagued by nightmares of the bodies of vibrant, childish personalities being torn apart, away from him. His apartment is cold like Tenjin was, so he stays in bed. It gets colder after weeks of not bringing himself to eat enough, so he throws an extra quilt on. The covers are heavy, and his bones ache, which make him feel older than he ever has before, and he rarely leaves. Barely gets himself to work. Makes guest appearances at Kisaragi Academy, just like last year. Wears his old school shirt, the one he got after his last growth spurt, when he was a little too lanky, but he was younger, and it was okay back then. Burns a couple more notches in his belt with a lit cigarette, because every time he opens the drawer with the scissors they're stained with blood and his head swims with dizziness. Just about manages not to break down when his sister comes through the door, giving him a once-over to see if he's been outside today, and he thinks about how much more fragile Yuka is now, with possibilities drifting through his mind that could have been all too real.

He's on his last warning with the manager of the store he works at, who only let him off last time because he pitied him. His memory of what happened is fuzzy, but he remembers a light going out and a customer smacking their groceries onto the counter and *the smack of Suzume's head on that light bulb as she gets dragged backwards out of the infirmary into the hallway and* then he was in the backroom, throwing up over himself, and he couldn't breathe. He doesn't know who was there that day, and he's thankful for that, because the spare uniform he's given to change into is a size smaller, and he doesn't think he can look the person who knows how sharp his shoulder blades are now in the eyes.

He'd tried to stay strong. He still wants to be strong, to protect what's left of the people he cares about. He'd tried for a while, and it had fallen through. Meat was off the table most days, when he could smell the rotting of the corpses it belonged to. Sauces were out, when they oozed like Suzumoto's blood dripping down that wall. Bread stuck like cotton in his throat, suffocating him, and he wonders what it was like for Shinohara to slowly lose her life like that, unable to do anything about it. He could stop it from happening to himself in the short term though, and so he sticks to tobacco and mints, and eventually he can't do ten push-ups in a row. It was a safer option to stay in bed and do nothing. After workouts he would definitely need to shower, and the filter system in his apartment building already smells like sewage, and sometimes he's in there and he ends up flailing, trying to grasp Shinozaki in his arms, get her out of the pool. Instead, he grabs rattling skulls and skeletal arms and hands with bloodied knuckles, and is shaken to his core when he finds out that they belong to him.

Shinozaki. He'd taken up swimming lessons after that nightmare, vowing to never be in a situation that rendered him so weak and helpless again. He stopped going when the instructor pointed out that he was getting thinner. He supposes it was better than being exiled after a

flashback about Heavenly Host finally reared its head whilst he was there. And at least he doesn't have to shower afterwards anymore. And now he can't see Shinozaki, he's often reminded of how he wasn't there to protect her, couldn't reach her in time, and the nightmares about the pool come more often. Better to stay away.

Since her hospitalisation, the first thing Yoshiki thinks about when Miki comes over is what Nakashima said had happened to Shinozaki's sister. He makes his younger sibling so worried, he knows, especially now his eating and hygiene habits have gotten worse, but he tries his best to convince her that he's managing alright on his own. It's not persuasive when he can't keep down soup with severed limbs in it, or pasta that moves and squelches like intestines. He fears the day that she's here and Satoshi turns up at the door, shaking and unable to cope and needing a distraction from the reality that they left behind. It wouldn't be good for Miki to see what she understands is one of his only two friends in a state as vulnerable as that, nor for Satoshi to pick up that his sister was sweet like Suzume and lovingly chiding like Yui-sensei and trigger his grief once more.

They don't ever talk about it, when it's just the two of them. Satoshi had brought it up properly exactly once, when they were pretending they were paying attention to the TV, and he couldn't finish what he wanted to say to Yoshiki without choking up in the middle of it, so they don't bother trying again. He was already cracking from the pressure of holding up both Nakashima at school and Yuka at home, so at Yoshiki's apartment, they are normal friends who poke fun at each other and yell at the TV and play games until dawn hits. He tells Satoshi not to worry about him, not to drag him out of bed into school, for the sake of his friend's sanity. He doesn't need anymore on his plate, and Yoshiki can fend for himself. He always has.

He hates the new homeroom assistant. They all do. He can't help it, when Niwa-sensei tells him to call her Kuon-sensei, he's a friend of Satoshi-kun's, they're close enough, aren't they? It forces him to comes to terms with the face that Yui-sensei is gone, and establishing a friendly bond with Niwa-sensei would be like betraying her (after she diligently sacrificed herself for Shinozaki and himself), and it would feed into whatever the fuck she and Satoshi have going on, which reminds him that the bonds and friendships and relationships they came back to aren't what they were before. He feels sorry for Satoshi, being depended on by so many people at once, and guilty about the times he's been jealous of his popularity and trustworthiness. Another reason why he attempts to distance himself from the younger boy now, try and stop him from bearing Yoshiki's weight, but letting him know that he has a place where they can pretend to be children again when he's struggling. Struggling to deal with the aftermath, which, Yoshiki often remembers, wasn't even his fault in any respect.

After all, nobody Satoshi had accompanied in Heavenly Host had died. He, on the other hand, was responsible for multiple deaths. Most significantly was Suzumoto's, who had been taken from right under his fucking nose. He had prodded the ghost children into thinking (knowing) that he and Shinozaki were going to take their new friend away from them, and forced them to ensure that that couldn't happen. Her death affects him the most by far, even to this day, and he doesn't think he remembers anything else so vividly in his life. Though he hardly felt the pain of the stone hammer smashing down onto the back of his head, he remembers staring at flesh and guts and tattered uniform and blood dripping down the wall and onto the floor outside the infirmary. He remembers the stench of a fresh corpse that could

have once been described as one of his closest friends. He still hears that final, abrupt-ending scream, and Shinozaki's wails, and her thumping footsteps as she tears down the hallway, and the groan of Yanagihori as the hammer swings down on him. His knees hitting the cold, hard floorboards, and his face landing in something wet and warm, and he never dares to think about it any further than that.

Then there was Morishige, whom they'd crossed paths with a couple of times whilst they were there, the last of which was back at Suzumoto's remains. He remembers the lump in his throat, the cotton that the texture of bread resurfaces in him to this day, and eventually finding the strength to take the bag containing the severed tongue. The one Morishige had unknowingly dug through his best friend's corpse to obtain. He couldn't tell him, not when they were right by her, but he should have forced Morishige to tag along with them. How ridiculous it was to leave him alone, how cowardly Yoshiki was - he *is* - to not want to tell him the inevitable truth, and wait for him to find out himself. How haunting those recorded screams on his cell phone sounded when he did find out. And found out alone, without anybody there to protect him from himself.

Yui-sensei, whom they'd run into fairly early on. They were foolish enough to split up with her too, and Yoshiki had watched the only adult who had ever thought he mattered fall several stories down to her demise whilst pulling a distraught Shinozaki up and away from the same fate the next (and last) time they met. If they had just stuck *together*, there would have been no confusion about what was going on in that room, and he would have gotten there on time, and they would have known better.

And finally, Shinohara. Shinozaki and himself were lucky enough not to run into her corpse, and were only informed of her passing, but he recalls hearing her and Nakashima's voices in the distance, calling out their names, several dimensional spaces away from one another. Yoshiki swears he used to be smarter than this. The danger in that place was imminent from the start with all the corpses around; that alone should have woken the dormant part of his brain up that was able to combine intellect with survival instinct. He should have pieced together how to get out of that space instead of waiting for Shinozaki to use her own brain or some all-knowing spirit to do the work for him. He knew his past laziness would cost him eventually, but not that it would manifest itself to be as lethal as this. They should have gotten to them in time. He would have been able to pry Nakashima's possessed hands away from Shinohara's neck. But he didn't, and he was too late.

It's pathetic, Yoshiki thinks, that the only person he was even slightly able to keep from harm was Shinozaki. Shinozaki, the strongest person he'd ever met, who was practically fending for herself when taking into account the frequent possessions, the riddles she solved, the willpower she had to actually leave the comfort of their classroom and re-enter Tenjin to save their remaining friends after Yuki had given them a free ticket out. He wonders subconsciously if the reason he didn't want to go back was because he knew he wasn't strong enough to keep anyone else from dying. A different kind of selfish to what Shinozaki thought he was at the time, but selfish all the same. He certainly didn't have the strength to, after their *second* time escaping, still try and find a way to revive those they had lost and risk his life doing so like she had.

He laughs bitterly at times with the knowledge that Shinozaki saved his ass in there far more times with her paranormal understanding and commandeering than he had ever prevented her death. And still, she continues to hold all the responsibility, blame herself for those deaths and for bringing that stupid charm into school. Surely she knows? Surely she knows that Yoshiki was the one with the physical power and strength to stop Suzumoto from being taken away, to keep Morishige with their group, to pull both her and Sensei up from that trapfloor classroom, to use his *fucking brain* like he used to and work out how to transport to the other spaces instead of relying on other people until it was too late? That Yoshiki bears just as much responsibility, if not more, than her? He was the eldest of their classmates, after all; he has the ability to tell them what to do if he really wants to. He's broken enough to know how children who craved friends were, should have seen in their faces (well, *face*, when he thinks of the decapitated ghost child that accompanied Yuki) what they were willing to do to keep Suzume by their side forever. He had dealt with losing loved ones before, and could have been there for the friends he still has better. He should be doing that now.

But he can't bring himself away from his apartment window. He's glad he lives on the ground floor, because on bad days like this, Morishige crosses his mind, and he dreads to think what he would do if he was higher up. He focuses on the cars passing nearby instead, and closes his eyes when the thoughts merge. He feels useless, wasting away whilst Shinozaki is having to pull through several injuries at the hospital, whilst Nakashima is frequently breaking down and struggling to convince her mother she's still sane at home, whilst Satoshi bears all his trauma himself and tries to keep Yuka and Nakashima's spirits alive, and whilst Yuka remains excruciatingly frightened of everyone she meets that towers over her, and lives with the physical symptoms that she developed as a result of that school. He grimaces as he imagines himself rotting away on his sofa in a couple of years' time.

Terribly, terribly alone.

End Notes

My fave copa fics are always the post-HH ones, but I didn't realise I'd never written one that adhered to canon events myself. I actually feel like doing something similar to this for Satoshi, because both in fics and gameplay his perspective is almost entirely ignored, and there's so much that he has to deal with afterwards. As we know, I can only write from the perspectives of two characters, so whether this actually comes to light is unlikely.

Some notes on the choices I decided to make:

- Miki points out Yoshiki's tendency to skip meals (either on purpose or due to forgetting) in a flashback, and so it felt natural for Yoshiki's post-HH symptoms to relate to rejection of food and not looking after himself. I don't know if that makes it an eating disorder, nor am I well-versed in the subject, so I tagged it as unspecified to be on the safe side.
- Yoshiki flits between calling Mayu Suzume and Suzumoto in the source material. This fic makes it look like a 50/50 ratio, but I think he only really used Suzume when he was feeling affectionate, and because of the nature of this fic, he tends to use it more often then I believe he would have pre-HH.
- I flit between Heavenly Host and Tenjin because I don't really know which I like better. Please excuse that inconsistency, and also excuse my overuse of italics and brackets whilst you're at it.
- This is intended to be a low point of Yoshiki's between the BOS prologue and Blood Drive. I'd like to think that after the events of this fic, Satoshi would come around and start pushing to repair his drifting relationship with Yoshiki, they'd talk about HH more, and so by the events of Blood Drive, they're more friendly with one another again and Yoshiki isn't struggling with eating and going out as much and regains his strength.
- I have an ongoing turmoil with the timeline of this franchise, particularly in relation to his birthday and age they give him during the events. The events and his birthday are close together but I'm sticking with the idea that he's a year older than the rest of this classmates, because it makes the most sense given his situation.

Sorry for always ending my writing with essays, you can tell I'm an English student at heart. As always, please point out any grammatical or spelling errors, because it drives me crazy to find them a few months later after everyone else has already read it. Thank you to those three people that have read it, and if you enjoyed, leave kudos or a comment and hold me to my word about a Satoshi version, because there's some interesting topics to explore there.

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