Some love is worth sunburn

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Some love is worth sunburn

by FallLover

Summary

Sakamoto dumps Hirose by the trash. But when Nakamura walks over by accident, Hirose realizes a few things.

Notes

This was first published on Archive of Our Own.

The fanfic title is from "Sunburn" by Emily James.

See the end of the work for more notes

Language wasn't Aiki's best subject, but based on his studies, he felt there was something almost poetic about being dumped next to the garbage.

When Aiki got to school that day, he felt depressed in a way that was both familiar and worse than usual. It had been a growing mood for a while and he wasn't sure how to handle it. It wasn't class or his teachers. It wasn't his assignments. Kota had been manageable lately, and Aiki had been having fun with all his other friends.

The only difference in his routine lately was all the time he was spending with Hana, his girlfriend. Only, rather than being enjoyable, like such a relationship was probably supposed to be, at least according to boys like Kota, who never *shut up* about girls, it was frustrating.

Hana had asked to go out with Aiki, and Aiki knew that he'd be an idiot to turn down a girl as nice and pretty as her, especially when they worked together at school for class council. And he'd thought it would help with his weird moods lately, some of which predated the dating. After all, Aiki had been hanging out with more people lately, so maybe he just needed to hang out with the *right* person. He'd been happier when Okuto had helped him realize being where he always was, wasn't necessarily the right thing to do, after all.

But it was possible the person he needed to be around wasn't Hana. She wasn't a bad person: she was smart, friendly, and liked Aiki. She was even polite to his friends. But Aiki increasingly didn't like her intruding on his life. Because that's what she was: an *intrusion.* Always butting in at school, before and afterward. Asking him questions, pushing for more than she had… And given this was his first attempt at such a relationship, Aiki wasn't quite sure how to make her happy, or to let her know he was struggling. Because what if she thought he was blaming *her?*

So it got to the point that whenever he saw her at his classroom door, he had to restrain himself from finding some excuse to leave. Because at least when she wasn't around, he could pretend the problem – whatever it was – wasn't there.

He didn't know who to talk to about it, either. Some of the guys he knew were dating someone or had dated someone, and it seemed so easy for *them*, and all of them *had* to start somewhere, like him. But other than Kota's pathetic attempts at dating, no one else seemed to have the same issues. Aiki assumed the stuff he struggled with was just… something you figured out. And clearly, he was failing. But searching online didn't help, either. Aiki wasn't going to change his entire personality for one person, which seemed to be what was necessary.

He liked messing around, playing video games, listening to AquaPet, and watching silly TV. That didn't seem to be what Hana was into, though.

At the end of the day, as Hana pulled him aside to talk, Aiki knew the whole situation was unfair to *her*, too. He just couldn't be the person she wanted. And she told him as much. He was mostly grateful *she'd* taken initiative about it, *again*. Just like she'd been the one to confess in the first place. Aiki had only ever treated her like a peer before then.

A better boyfriend would have figured out what was wrong or how they could make it work. But all Aiki felt, listening to her talk, was a strange sense of near calm and resignation.

And then Okuto popped around the corner, carrying full trash bags. He was so clearly surprised to see them there, and it was obvious he was startled about it, as he quietly set the trash bags down, while Hana tried to grab Aiki's attention again.

Aiki smiled, thinking shy Okuto probably felt as uncomfortable as they did, and Hana said, with some clear exasperation, "You never smile like that around me anymore."

"Huh?" Aiki asked as he looked back at her in surprise. He supposed he'd been rude, paying attention to someone else while Hana was trying to have a serious conversation.

But she was smiling sadly at him and said, "You're not as fun as I thought you'd be, Aiki. But you might be… with someone *else*."

Aiki wondered if he should be insulted. No one had ever told him he wasn't *fun*.

But I didn't make things very fun for her, did I? He thought.

He watched her walk off, wondering what she meant about him finding someone *else*. If this was his first experience with dating, it didn't bode well for him. And it wasn't like he was angling for a girlfriend or anything. Hana had just been something new. Something different.

Maybe I'm better off alone, he thought. He had his friends if he needed them. And speaking of…

He turned a corner and saw Okuto still walking slowly and quietly away. And something about the sight made Aiki grin. They'd had fun lately, hadn't they?

Aiki jogged forward and lightly slapped Okuto on the back, startling him.

"I got dumped!" Aiki said with a grin, feeling oddly glad to say it.

"Huh?" Okuto asked, surprised.

"Seriously," Aiki continued as they walked together, easily falling in step with each other like they were walking to or from school, "I don't *get* girls!" He didn't feel like he'd learned much about them from the whole experience. Or at least about dating them. They said experience was useful, but what had *this* taught him, really?

"Wait," Okuto said, slowly, "your girlfriend dumped *you?"* He sounded so shocked.

I should probably be more surprised it took so long, Aiki thought. "Yeah, she said I was no fun."

"N-No fun?" Okuto stammered, clearly still surprised. It was kind of strange, chatting with someone who was taller than Aiki again, given Aiki was always looking down at Hana. But it was never intimidating with Okuto, who was always a bit nervous and energetic in the rare moments he spoke. He didn't push, and he had a gentle, warm smile when he was happy.

And he'd listened to Aiki's nonsense time and again. It made Aiki daring.

"She said I wasn't as fun as she thought," Aiki said. It sounded bad aloud, and he supposed he should be ashamed. But it wasn't like he *hadn't* tried! Sure, he'd been a bit standoffish in the end, but he and Hana had walked together a lot, gone out to eat, and he'd bought her food and listened to her talk about her day. They'd texted each other a bit, too. Maybe he wasn't the most *energetic* about it, but… he'd been around, hadn't he?

She knew I wasn't all there, Aiki thought, morosely. *But why wait so long?*

"I don't get it, really," he said, instead, too embarrassed to explain more. "I mean… what was she expecting from me?" How well did she know him, really, even if they chatted at school meetings? Aiki was always hanging out with other boys in his free time, not chasing girls like Kota or some of their other classmates. Perhaps *Hana* was the one who should have chosen wiser.

When Okuto was silent, Aiki felt a little more nervous.

"Right?" Aiki asked, a bit brightly. Trying to convince himself it wasn't just *him* who'd chosen wrong. After all, he and Hana were in the same age group. He wasn't the *only* one who needed to know what they were doing. If he hadn't been happy… surely Hana had done something wrong, too? Even if it was *only* choosing to be with Aiki in the first place. After all, no one else asked him out.

Okuto had a faraway expression on his face as he slowly said, "She… obviously didn't understand your charm." He smiled softly as he met Aiki's gaze.

Aiki's eyes widened in surprise as he met Okuto's warm gaze. *My charm? I have charms?* Sure, Aiki knew he wasn't bad to look at, and he had lots of friends, but… Well, obviously his *charm* wasn't enough to win over Hana. He'd been screwing up *somehow*. Okuto had seen it: Aiki had been so *non*-charming that he'd been *dumped by the trash.*

"You're not as fun as I thought you'd be, Aiki."

He's right, Aiki thought. *Hana didn't understand me at all.* And it wasn't like Hana hadn't tried. But her efforts had never managed to get through to him. They just… made things harder. Perhaps if they'd understood each other better, things might have changed. But Aiki hadn't given her the chance. He hadn't wanted to.

"A-Ah!" Okuto said, suddenly flustered. His face was red and he looked nervous, almost like Hana had. "I mean, well! A-Are you sad? You must be, right?"

It was the first time someone had asked him that question since Aiki had started being with Hana. Everyone assumed he was happy. After all, he was dating a pretty girl. What could be wrong?

Okuto looked at Aiki nervously, but didn't step away. It didn't seem like he was just *saying* something to say something, either.

Aiki remembered the way Okuto had talked to him by the water on the trip. Or listened to the suggestion about the hot chocolate. He was quiet, but thoughtful. And he cared. And Aiki owed him honesty. Honesty that Aiki didn't feel comfortable with around Hana or his other friends.

"No, not really," Aiki said. "It was kind of stressful, actually." Moments like this made him think of coming clean about Kota. Or talking about crushes in the gym closet. So many of these moments happened around Okuto. Because Okuto made it easy.

"A guy I can talk about lots of stuff with might be better, honestly," Aiki joked, half to himself. Hana had said he might be better with someone else, hadn't she? Maybe she'd chosen wrong, but so had *he*. It was like night and day being around Okuto and Hana. Heck, it was better than when he'd just been around his other guy friends…

Aiki was already happier than he'd been in a while.

Aiki blinked, and looked up at Okuto, who was gazing down at him in surprise. The sunlight from above made his pale cheeks warm.

Aiki realized what he'd just said and his face heated. "I mean… don't tell anyone I said that, sorry."

Okuto's eyebrows rose. "I… O-Okay." Okuto glanced around and then back at Aiki. "But there's nothing wrong with that. What you said. About uh… About a guy maybe being better."

Aiki's eyebrows rose in surprise. *He's fine with comments like that?*

Okuto looked away from Aiki, clearly a bit flustered again. "I mean… If that's… Maybe I'm reading too deeply into it… But you know… There's nothing wrong with it… If it's what you wanted." He looked at Aiki and then away again.

Aiki blinked in surprise, and then said, jokingly, "I'm not trying to flirt with you, Nakamura. You don't have to act so alarmed." He knew plenty of guys took such things really badly. He didn't think Okuto would be one of them: he was far too quiet. But everyone had layers.

Okuto stiffened and looked back at Aiki. "No, that's not what I—! I mean… I wouldn't… If you *were*…" He grimaced and looked away. Then he looked back at Aiki. "I'm not bothered by that. Even if you were. I would be… really flattered." His expression seemed more intense. "Really, really flattered."

Soft wind seemed to blow around them, ruffling Aiki's clothes.

"If you were," Okuto repeated. "Because I… I…" Aiki saw he was trembling.

Nakamura…? Aiki wondered. He thought back to when Okuto had put his all forward to ask to be friends. But they were already friends, what could Okuto be asking for now?

"I would be… really flattered."

Aiki's eyes widened in surprise. *Does he…?*

But whatever Okuto saw in Aiki's expression seemingly made Okuto's expression crumple, and then he forced a smile.

It would have been strange if Aiki hadn't seen Okuto force expressions before, like when he'd hidden his love of octopus. Perhaps someone else wouldn't have known something was going on at all.

"I mean, never mind," Okuto continued with a nod of his head. "It's nothing. Don't worry about it. I'm sorry about Hana. And how hard it's been for you. Any time you want to talk, I'll listen…" He was nearly babbling now.

"Nakamura?" Aiki asked, worried.

"I should… go finish cleaning up," Okuto said before he literally dashed away.

Aiki stared after him, realizing that he, Aiki, had *definitely* just done the same thing he'd done with Hana: not been there for someone who needed him.

But there was no sense of calm this time at being turned away. Only a nervous anxiety. And as he walked back into the school – where Okuto was completely absent – the anxiety only got worse.

He got up to his homeroom floor and gazed out over the empty school, wondering what he should do.

Should I apologize? Aiki wondered. But he hadn't done anything wrong, had he? And if Okuto was unhappy with Aiki somehow, well, wasn't it best to let him sort things out without Aiki making things *worse?*

"That's a long face you got there, kid," Mr. Otogiri said from nearby, drawing Aiki's attention. The teacher had walked down the hall and was holding a can of coffee.

Great, Aiki thought, *someone I* definitely *can't explain this stuff to.* It would just sound silly, no matter how he tried to look at it. Aiki looked back outside, pretending he was busy.

But Mr. Otogiri didn't take the hint. Instead, he said, "I get it. It's a pain, huh?"

"What is?" Aiki asked, surprised the older man had figured things out so quickly. Maybe *he* had the secrets Aiki was lacking.

"Everything," Mr. Otogiri replied.

That almost made Aiki laugh. "It's not *that* bad," Aiki said. The world wasn't falling apart. Only *Aiki* was falling apart. What had he nearly said? What had *Okuto* nearly said?

And what did Aiki do about it?

"Really?" Mr. Otogiri asked, clearly curious.

You're no help, Aiki thought with some frustration.

"You want to be alone?" Mr. Otogiri asked in the silence.

And Aiki ordinarily would have said yes. But being around *Okuto* had made Aiki feel better, so surely that wasn't true. "No, not particularly."

"Is it girl trouble?"

Aiki's face burned. *Everyone* was going to think he was upset about Hana! And it sounded so pathetic when Mr. Otogiri said it! So Aiki was a mess, so what! "H-Huh?! Nooo!"

Otogiri made a knowing noise and said, "Ohh, I see."

Aiki ordinarily liked his teacher, but he kind of hated the guy then. *Why do adults have to act like they know so much?*

But the more Aiki thought about it, the more it seemed like *maybe* Mr. Otogiri was the right person to talk to. After all, he *was* an adult. And he'd lived a life. He had experiences that Aiki didn't know about.

"When you had your first girlfriend," Aiki started. He frowned, wondering what to say. *What if he never had a girlfriend? But that'd be weird… A guy like him surely would have had at least one.* "What… was it like?"

"Mmm…" Mr. Otogiri said as he leaned against the window next to Aiki. "I'm not sure what you mean. What was what like?"

"Being around her," Aiki said, not really knowing what to ask about either. "Was it easy?" *People are too complicated.*

"I don't know that any relationship is ever *easy*," Mr. Otogiri replied.

Aiki grimaced. *Well that's not helpful.* "Doesn't seem worth it, then."

"The good ones are worth it," Mr. Otogiri said. "When you find the right person."

"But how do you *know* it's the right person?" Aiki asked, feeling desperate. Clearly Hana wasn't right for him. Or was it Aiki who was wrong for everyone?

And was that what he wanted? He'd walked over so quickly to Okuto, as if his life depended on it. And he'd end up ruining something he didn't fully understand. And it bothered him.

"Hard to say," Mr. Otogiri replied. "I'm having trouble in that department, too. But I think… someone who makes you happy. And comfortable, maybe. Someone who maybe isn't precisely easy, but makes you *feel* easy? If that's what you want?"

Aiki wasn't sure how helpful that was. But the anxious feeling came back as his mind conjured up the one person in his life who made him feel that way.

“If you were… Because I… I…”

What was he going to say? Aiki thought, feeling desperate now. He *needed* to know. And he felt that if he just let it go, if he ignored it… things would be worse.

He remembered Okuto’s crumpled expression. The forced smile. The sad way Okuto had been crouching on the floor in the aquarium.

I won’t let that happen again, Aiki thought.

“Don’t stay here all night,” Mr. Otogiri said. “Go live your life.”

Aiki nodded and said, “Thank you, sensei.” He bowed, making Mr. Otogiri laugh, and then ran off, not caring that a teacher saw him. Mr. Otogiri wouldn’t call him out for it, and he didn’t.

He caught up to Okuto as the other boy was heading out with his bag in tow.

“Nakamura!” Aiki called, startling the taller boy.

“H-Hirose?” Okuto asked, surprised. He clutched his bag, nervous.

And in that moment, Aiki wondered if he had things wrong again. If he was maybe screwing up in another way. He’d been with Hana for half a month, after all, and never figured things out.

But he’d known Okuto for a while now, and he refused to back away out of fear.

“Walk home with me?” Aiki asked, since he didn’t know where to start. *Walking together will give me time to think.*

“Uh… s-sure,” Okuto replied.

Aiki smiled and then went back to get his stuff, quickly, before the other boy ran off again. But when he returned, Okuto was right where Aiki left him. He hadn’t brought his bike that day, which made things easier.

Aiki fell in beside him as they left the school. It was familiar at this point because they walked home so often. And Aiki wondered when he’d started taking this for granted, especially since he’d been walking home with Hana so much lately.

I missed this, Aiki realized. It relaxed his racing heart a bit.

“Someone who maybe isn’t precisely easy, but makes you feel *easy? If that’s what you want?”*

Aiki bit at his lip, and realized they’d been walking in silence for a while.

Okuto hadn’t said anything at all. But then, he rarely started conversations. He was always very quiet until someone else got him talking. It was part of why it had been so surprising to see him on a *stage* in front of a live audience for Tamura’s play.

Nakamura is brave all the time, Aiki thought, *especially if he really almost confessed to me.* Aiki breathed in and straightened his shoulders. *I owe him more than being ignored.*

He stepped off a curb and his bag jangled, making the crab charm attached to it smack his sleeve. He glanced at it in surprise, and then smiled.

“I love this, you know,” Aiki said. When Okuto looked at him in confusion, Aiki showed him the little charm. “It’s so cute.”

Okuto’s cheeks grew red, and he smiled.

“I’m worried it’ll break if I have it on too much,” Aiki said. He’d seen that happen with Saho’s stuff sometimes, and she was always upset about it. She’d even teased him when she saw him with the keychain, though he ignored it as usual. “But… you’ll have to get me a new one if it does. Or help me repair it.”

“S-Sure,” Okuto said. His smile grew a little warmer. “I’d be happy to.”

Aiki worried his lip a little more, then said, “Because it’s not just the keychain I like, you know.”

“O-Oh?”

“It’s that it came from *you,”* Aiki said. He stopped and looked at Okuto, meeting his gaze. “That’s a big reason why I like it.”

Okuto gazed down at him in surprise. His lips were slightly parted. And it was like that moment by the water, where his hair was lit by the sunset.

“Because I like *you*, Nakamura,” Aiki said. It rang true in his chest. Truer than anything he’d been saying for a while.

Okuto’s eyes widened even more. His hand on his bag tightened.

Aiki felt the anxious feeling in his chest rise. *Was this how Hana felt when she confessed to me?*

“Really?” Okuto asked, which at least wasn’t a *no.*

“Yeah,” Aiki said with a grin. “Really. I really like you.”

Okuto’s eyes grew abruptly wet, which was a bit alarming. “You really…? *Really?”*

“A-Are you crying?” Aiki asked, more alarmed.

Okuto sniffed and swiped a hand over his face. “Sorry, I just… Am I dreaming? This is a dream, right?”

“No, it’s not a dream,” Aiki said, confused. “You dream about me confessing to you?”

“Yeah, actually,” Okuto said. Then he flinched. “I mean, not if it’s weird, or…” He clearly didn’t know what to say.

Aiki hadn’t been confessed to, much, but the idea that Okuto had imagined it… Aiki grinned and asked, “How did it go in your dream?”

Okuto winced and looked away. “I was a lot cooler, and… it was easier. And I made you happy. And…” He babbled a bit unintelligibly.

“You *do* make me happy,” Aiki said as he stepped forward with a grin. “You have for a while.”

Okuto gazed down at him in wonder, like Aiki was somehow amazing, even when he’d just been running after Okuto this whole time. “Really?”

“You were the first person to notice I was unhappy,” Aiki said. “And I always feel better when we hang out.” He reached out and grabbed Okuto’s collar, so the guy didn’t just run off again. “What about you?”

“I’m always happy when I’m around you,” Okuto said, quietly. He didn’t pull away from Aiki’s grip. “*Always*.” There was heat in his voice. Desperation.

Aiki’s chest was burning in response, with something like happiness. “Okay. So… Wanna go out with me?” Perhaps it was inelegant. But Okuto was the language expert, not Aiki.

A series of emotions went rapid-fire through Okuto’s face, and then he quickly nodded. “Yes! Yes, I do!”

Aiki grinned and said, “Okay.”

Okuto hesitantly reached up and put his right hand on Aiki’s left wrist, but didn’t move Aiki’s arm. He continued looking down at Aiki in wonder. And his eyes were still wet.

Guess this wasn’t entirely happy, Aiki thought, worried about screwing this up, too. It wasn’t *quite* a romantic ending. And he wanted to make Okuto happier. So he pushed himself up on his tiptoes and lightly pressed his lips to Okuto’s.

Kissing had been something Hana wanted to do, and Aiki had never been into it. But with Okuto, it seemed so simple, even as it was scary.

It was brief, and Okuto stiffened.

Aiki quickly lowered himself down. As first kisses went, it probably wasn’t all that good. “Sorry…” He wondered if he’d overstepped, letting his excitement run away with him like he had at Polpo Garden.

“No, that’s—!” Okuto grabbed Aiki’s face, and he seemed ready to make up with his own kiss. Given his face was a wet mess, it seemed a bit desperate.

But Aiki was ready.

So he was surprised when Okuto instead just pulled Aiki's head to his neck, and then lowered his hands so that he could wrap his arms around Aiki, and hug the shorter boy close.

Aiki stared ahead, confused. Okuto was warm against him, and a little sweaty. He smelled faintly of shampoo and clothing detergent.

"If you're struggling," Okuto said, "I'd do even worse! And I don't want to ruin it!"

He's nervous, Aiki realized. Of course that was obvious, but… Knowing Okuto *also* didn't just *know* these things was world changing.

Aiki didn't have to be alone even in this. And Okuto knew *he* wasn't alone, either, because Aiki could be honest with him.

"I'm so happy," Okuto said, hugging Aiki tight.

Aiki wrapped his arms around Okuto, hugging him close, as well. He smiled. "Me too." He wondered if he could get used to the feeling, or if things would always be like this.

"It was a good kiss, though," Okuto reassured him.

Aiki laughed. *He's a good guy, really.*

"I mean it," Okuto insisted, squeezing Aiki a little tighter before he let go and pulled back. He was almost pouting now. "If I weren't such a mess, I mean…"

"We can try again later," Aiki said with a grin.

Okuto's face went even pinker.

"Wanna come back to my place?" Aiki asked. "Or… maybe we could go to your place? I want to meet your octopus."

Okuto quickly nodded. "Whichever you'd like."

Aiki thought about it and said, "My place, then. Saho's working, so we can talk." After a second he added, "And maybe… try kissing again." It had to be something they could both figure out.

Okuto's face still burned, but he fell in step with Aiki again as they turned back to walking.

Aiki reached out for Okuto's hand, like Hana had done all the times they'd walked together. *At least I learned something, I suppose.*

Okuto squeezed Aiki's hand back, rather tightly, and Aiki winced, but it was nice to know he wasn't screwing up. That Nakamura really *did* want this.

Not everything has to be easy, Aiki thought as they walked together. *But it's worth it.*

End Notes

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