



Happy Birthday

The living room is near silent. The only consistent noise is the ambient ticking of a clock, aside from quiet sips from a mug. It's a frigid day, and the cloud layer is thick and gray. Soon enough, it'll be raining. That's autumn for you. Even when the weather is artificial, dreary days are to be expected every now and then.

The calendar on the wall catches Kamille's attention, as soon as he averts his gaze away from the window.

October 9th, circled in red.

Hm. It has to mean *something* important.

Another sip, and it clicks.

Oh, right.

That competition he signed up for.

One more trophy to add onto an ever-strained shelf. One more distraction from this empty house.

Soon enough, he's thrown on a sweater over top of a rugby shirt, and Kamille's off. The cup in his hands was only half-finished, but it's fine. He's never loved coffee, and it was just leftovers from this morning, anyway.

Tap, tap, tap.

Loafers clack against the pavement as he runs against a (mostly) empty sidewalk. It's a pretty common sight: That socially reclusive and troubled boy rushing God knows where. That, and the fact he always looks so discontent, don't help to change how people see him.

Houses of different colors fly by. One after the other, all looking relatively the same.

Until one stops him for a moment. That sprint devolves into a brisk jog, and then, like a car, he skids to a stop. One second spent staring turns into two, then three, then—

"Kamille?"

The door unlocks with a click, and he remains planted at the end of the walkway. At the same time, a similar sound registers in his head. There's something else he's neglected.

Still, his lips are sealed. For a moment, that stern scowl on his face is wiped clean, only for it to near instantly return when he sees the girl who's meeting his eyes.

"Are you here for—...?"

"No. I have somewhere to be."

Of course he does. Restlessness runs in the family. The girl standing in the entrance has her hands remain at her side, subtly balling into fists, and then uncurling, and repeating that same motion endlessly.

Somehow, this is more infuriating than usual, because his response implies he remembers what today is, and is choosing to deal with something else instead.

"But—..."

It doesn't matter, does it? Fa can't convince him to stay without this degrading into another petty argument, and even then, nothing is guaranteed. They're both just too stubborn to let go of getting what they want.

Except right now. Only Kamille's willing to let it get to that point.

It's not even worth telling him any more details about her birthday party, because he's probably already aware. This is how it always is; he just happens to remember all of the details he wants to, and then coincidentally 'forgets' the ones he doesn't. She can already hear his agitated, 'I know, I know!'

"What could even be so important?"

"It's a junior mobile suit competition."

Another, he means. Can't, just this once, he skip out on it? Is that really so selfish a request? Kamille must read the look on Fa's face, because he's quick to say something else.

"I signed up a long time ago, and it's not like I can just back out!"

Maybe it is asking for too much. This headache is better saved for another day, and all Fa can do right now is sigh and shake her head.

“...Okay. Maybe next time, then. Good luck.”

And an uncharacteristically restrained closing of the door follows. Kamille knows because she's always shutting it dramatically loud when she's angry—just so he knows.

When he arrives, the competition isn't much different from any other he's been to. The same rules, some familiar looking faces, and a similar location. Probably a similar prize, too. It's kind of monotonous. And tedious. And boring.

...Well, not really. But the more excuses that push him to leave, the better. This isn't actually where he wants to be, as much as he claims it is.

Yeah. Yeah, this isn't even worth it. There'll be more times he can participate in something like this. There'll be more trophies to win. There'll be more chances to prove himself.

How many of Fa's birthdays will there be? When they only come once a year, they feel kind of rare, don't they?

Acting on impulse alone, Kamille runs away from the competition, disqualifying himself. Oh, well. This isn't his first disqualification (that time someone had the nerve to talk trash was, though), so no big deal.

What he didn't account for was the fact it had started raining. That, on top of it already being cold—...

Ugh.

The light tapping of his shoes has turned into splattering, and he desperately throws his arm above his head to avoid his hair from getting soaked. As to be expected, it does very little.

He runs, and runs, and runs, seeing all the same houses and all the same sights come into and out of view, before he arrives at the exact location he fled from earlier in the day.

He would typically nonchalantly walk up to the door, but the rain is forcing him to pick his feet up a little faster than usual.

Knock, knock.

Fa is the one who answers, again. Thankfully. Kamille can't stand talking to adults around here.

Although, instead of disappointed, she looks surprised.

"Kamille?"

Again. Said in a completely different tone. It's a lot nicer to hear his name when it isn't always enveloped in such a negative connotation.

"I decided I didn't really want to take part in another dumb tournament."

He scoffs, while trying to wring the last bits of water from his bangs. This boy—he makes everything so much more complicated for hardly any reason at all. He wouldn't be soaking if he had just done what he wanted to do in the first place.

"I'm not even interested anymore. I always end up winning, anyway."

Or so he says. The boy obsessed with robotics, exiting from a robotics tournament. It just means something else took priority.

Fa smiles softly. There's no gift or card in his hands, but that's okay. Isn't his presence enough? For some reason, she has a weird feeling she'll end up getting one either way, even if it's not today.

"...You should come inside. You'll catch a cold."