

## CHAPTER XVI - A DRESS

Touma himself told me that Michiko Inoue wasn't his girlfriend right now. I know saying that right off the bat won't make me seem less guilty when I explain what I've done, but I still feel the need to make it clear. She's not his girlfriend right now. That's how it is.

I've been...shall we say "stalking" the two of them for a little while? No, that sounds crude. But I can't really say it isn't true. I've been monitoring the two of them in secret for the last little while and I have confirmed that Michiko Inoue and Touma Koizumi are indeed separated...for now.

As far as I've gathered, Michiko cheated on Touma, and got caught in the middle of eloping with another man. Touma distanced himself from her, and they started growing apart, but Touma still cared for her deep down. Long story short, Michiko invited Touma to the school's rooftop, but when Touma arrived, the man Michiko had been sleeping with was already there, kissing Michiko. Touma, feeling absolutely betrayed, killed the man and left Michiko.

I'm probably missing a few pieces of the puzzle, but that's more or less what I know. The fact that Touma killed the man is a surefire fact though, and I can say that with absolute certainty. After all, he called me immediately after the incident to ask me to cover it up (which I did).

I know that Touma skipped school yesterday, and so I'm hoping to get some information out of him today. After all, he *did* agree to a date with me today (regardless of whether or not he realizes that it's supposed to be a date). Furthermore, since I've confirmed that Touma's current state of mind isn't very stable (or happy), I can take the opportunity to comfort him a little.

I wonder how Touma feels right now. Hopefully he's not too down. Of course, I do intend on cheering him up no matter what it takes...even if that means making him forget all about Michiko Inoue. I'd gladly give him more love and happiness than she ever did. Because that's what I'd do for the man who saved my life. And the man whom I've fallen deeply in love with. Despite our work, he always has a moral backing. He always questions whether or not each and every death is necessary or just. Sometimes, thought can be dangerous in our industry, but I like it when he questions right and wrong. It makes him seem more human. It's one of his most admirable traits.

I'm crazy in love. But that's okay.

With a wave of my hand, a portal opens before me and I step through it, ending up at Touma's doorstep. My Patron Spirit manipulates space itself, you see, but its powers are limited by the very fabric of

existence itself. Or, more specifically, the issue of *human* existence. I'm not immortal, as you have probably guessed, so if I strain my powers too much, it starts to kill me.

I really don't like being killed, did you know that?

As for my limits, well, I never use my full power because it would kill me in mere minutes were I to fully unleash it. Touma doesn't let me use them to their fullest capacity for that reason.

He's always looking out for me.

I like it when he cares for me, did you know that?

I don't understand Michiko Inoue as a person, to be honest. I can't follow her thought process. She has such a wonderful boyfriend and still decides to cheat on him. I just don't get it. Does she not understand that people become busy? Or maybe she's just that kind of sick slut? Or is she just impatient? Regardless, she's not fit for my Touma, and that's for certain.

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"I hope you're in there, Koizumi," I said, knocking on Touma's front door. He better not have ditched me to go frolic around with some other girl today or I swear to God...

A moment later, the door opens. "Celeste? What's going on?" Touma asks, peeking out. I give him my brightest smile and let myself inside. Taking his hand in my own as I close the door behind me, I lean over to his ear. "What do you wanna do today?" I whispered. "Is it alright if we just go shopping together? Or would you prefer for us to have a little fun indoors instead?"

Touma sighed, much to my amusement. "Let's head down to the shopping district," he said. "I'll treat you to some ice cream or something."

Does he think I'm a *child*? To be bribed with *ice cream* of all things! How laughable! My goal was to get some private time indoor with him, and I intend on—

"I'll get you a waffle cone and everything," Touma added.

"Let's go to the shopping district then!" I replied instinctively.

Fuck. I got baited by an ice cream cone? *Seriously*? How immature am I?

"I like your outfit, by the way," Touma suddenly said. "The black skirt you have on really suits you, but more notably, seeing you in a nice blouse once in a while is a good contrast from the usual suit. And blue really is your color. Your shirt almost matches your eyes. Almost. It's...quaint."

I found myself blushing uncontrollably at his words. He rarely gives me compliments, and *never* so many at once! Could he be trying to seduce me? Not that I'd *mind*, but still...

No, this *must* just be his way of messing with me, right?

"Let's go," he said with a chuckle, taking my hand and leading me out the door.

Yeah, I think he was messing with me.

Probably.

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There's only one question floating around in my mind right now: why am I in the shopping district again? Oh right, I needed a few kitchen supplies. Part of me wanted to go see how Touma has been, but I managed to stop myself. I know that seeing him right now would only upset him more, and I'm more worried about his mental state right now.

At the end of the day, he still saved me. He had no reason to. He could have killed me too. Easily.

And yet he chose to leave me be.

Maybe it's because he understood that what happened wasn't something I'd wished for. Or maybe he simply didn't desire to take my life. Whatever the reason is, he must have deliberately chosen to let me live, and that's why I'm here right now.

I didn't tell anyone about Junichi's death. Shortly after Touma left, I also left the rooftop, and I've been trying to pretend nothing happened. The day after, it was reported on the news that Junichi had been killed in an accidental fire in his apartment. Of course, I knew better than that. Whoever Touma worked for is *powerful*, and they don't want any blemishes on their reputation. They'd obviously cover up their employees' mistakes.

I'm hoping they don't know about my involvement in the whole event, but that's another story.

I wonder what Touma's up to right now. I wonder where he is. I wonder if he's thinking of me, just like how I'm thinking of him...

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"How's the ice cream?" I asked, ruffling Celeste's hair gently. She smiled at me, holding the cone in her hands. "It's great!" she cooed. This is one of those rare moments where Celeste acts like an adorable little girl, unlike her usual serious (albeit sultry) self. I don't deny that I enjoy her usual demeanor, but this is a nice change of pace to experience once in a while.

As much as I'm trying to focus on Celeste, though, my mind just keeps defaulting back to Michiko, alternating between the happy memories we shared together and the pain I've felt over the last few days. This sharp juxtaposition hits

me just as hard every single time. I would've thought I'd get used to it, but no. Every time, I fall deeper into the pit of memories that Michiko and I made together, and then that beautiful image is shattered in an instant by the events of the last week or so. And it fucking hurts.

Come to think of it, it's been over a week since I found out she was having an affair, right? I know it's hard to get over this kind of thing, but you've gotta be fucking kidding me.

I never thought of myself as the type to be unable to let things go.

Celeste leaned over to me, placing her head against my shoulder gently. "I want a new dress," she muttered.

"Listen Celeste, your clothes really don't matter that much," I replied. "A beautiful woman is a beautiful woman, period. I'm not gonna flatter you by saying *every* outfit suits you, 'cause God knows I've only met one person before who can pull *that* off, but *you* certainly can make *many* outfits look wonderful. However, since this is supposed to be a date and all," I said, "I'll entertain that idea of yours just this once and get you a dress. Just...please don't pick one that'll bankrupt me or something."

Celeste laughed. "Oh, I wouldn't do that sort of thing!" she cried. "Not...not to *you*, anyways." Finishing her ice cream, she took my hand in her own and pulled me along towards a dress store. It's a fairly well known store called *Melina's*, famous for selling high-end women's dresses at relatively reasonable and cheap prices. However, a *relatively* cheap dress with the quality these stores provide still end up being well over 30,000 yen. "I'm going to try and pick a nice white dress to go with the new shoes I bought a few days back," Celeste explained. "I loved those shoes so I bought them, but then I realized I had *no* matching dresses! It was such a letdown!"

"Then let's fix that," I chuckled.

My wallet's gonna have to bite the bullet. Just this once.

I'll humor her *just this once*.

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I want a new dress. Maybe Touma will like that.

I dunno.

He rarely commented on my outfit when we were dating. He always mentioned my makeup or my perfume, or something minor here and there like my hairstyle or even the necklace I wore, but rarely did he mention my actual *clothing*.

Come to think of it, Touma never particularly cared for a super elaborate outfit or anything. Besides his school uniform, he usually wears this white blazer over a black tank top and black pants. Otherwise, it's a thin short-sleeved button-up shirt and a pair of shorts (the colors vary on that pairing though). I suppose it just wasn't something he found important. He always told me that my choice of clothes didn't matter too

much because I was the only woman he knew who legitimately made every outfit I wore look stunning.

I wonder if that was just flattery. Probably, right?

Maybe I can get a new dress and ask him to see how his answer changes now that we're not a couple anymore?

Having thought of that, I look around, searching for a women's clothing store. The only one in my immediate sight range turns out to be a *Melina's*.

Oh, what the hell? I have the money thanks to my (admittedly *generous*) allowance, so I can afford a dress. The cheapest stuff they have is 20,000 to 30,000 yen, and I can certainly buy one of those.

Nodding to myself, I enter the store.