

CHAPTER II - THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

Touma left a bit after half past seven. He received a call and told me that he had to head home. It was from his work phone. His regular phone was a nice, fancy smartphone. Its color was similar to that of his eyes. Maybe he picked it that way. His work phone, on the other hand, was a black flip phone. A Nomia, I think. Those things are, like, indestructible, aren't they?

The room is still filled with his scent. I really enjoy this smell, actually. It reminds me that I have someone who really loves me. Having cleaned up my room already, I can only hope that my parents didn't hear us. I think I'd die of embarrassment.

Finishing up my homework, I notice that my phone had started to buzz. On it was a number that I unfortunately recognized. As much as I wanted to ignore it, I couldn't let him make a ruckus around here at this hour. Deciding to bite the bullet, he headed downstairs and straight for the back door of the inn. Opening it up, I discovered none other than Junichi Kimura waiting for me. "Can I come in?" he asked.

Reluctantly, I nodded.

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Junichi looked around my room. He did this every time. I could never understand why—he'd been here more than my own boyfriend has by now, and even the analytical Touma hasn't bothered looking over my room this often.

"Let's fuck," Junichi suggested suddenly, causing me to jump.

"W-what?" I cried.

"I said let's fuck," Junichi repeated.

I told him to shove off. I wanted to repair my current relationship," I told him. And yet, part of me *really* wanted to accept his offer.

He's very pushy about this sort of thing, I'm afraid. And I'm too submissive.

Moments later, I found myself with him in my bed, both of us naked as jailbirds. He thrust his manhood into my body. He'd pinned both my arms to the bed, but even though part of my virtually *screamed* at me to resist, I did nothing. I lay there drowning in pleasure. I fucked up again. But hey, this will be the last time I ever see Junichi, so why not? I promised I'd go back to being a good girlfriend for Touma, so I'll let him have his fun today.

It's a safe day, so who gives a shit?

Placing one of his hands on my right breast, he squeezed it hard. He continued thrusting inside of me at a steady pace, like a pre-programmed

piston. I wrapped my newly freed arm around his shoulder. I still refused to let him kiss me, but he abided by that rule just fine. We're just animals having sex, after all. We don't need things like kisses—like symbols of love.

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The moon tonight is beautiful. I notice the beauty of the evening sky, without a single cloud to block it, as I slowly walk along the streets, admiring the area for what it is. Seishun has always been a special city. With a nice coastal breeze, this city in the Kyoto prefecture has always been wonderful...if not for its little *quirk*. Even the best places have their *quirks*, of course, but Seishun's is *extra* quirky.

I notice myself wonder how Michiko's doing. I sigh quietly to myself as I walk further down the street. I left her house saying that I needed to go home, but it's really just my employer telling me that I have a job early in the morning tomorrow so I needed my rest.

Celeste, that damn slave driver...at least she treats me to free food.

I hadn't slept with Michiko in close to two weeks, at least before tonight. It's strange, since she's supposed to be my girlfriend and all. But that's fine. She deserves her autonomy. I don't *own* her.

Reaching into my pocket, I remark that my personal cell phone is still there. Then, moving my hand around, I try and find my work phone.

My work phone's missing.

Shit.

At least I know where it is. It's still with Michiko. I received a call from Celeste telling me to get home, and I left the phone atop one of Michiko's drawers when I left. I forgot to grab it. How could I be so forgetful?

Sighing at my own incompetence, I pull out my journal and scrawl in a little note:

1958: Realized I forgot work phone at Michiko's place. Bad dog.

Turning around, I began walking back in the direction from which I came. I thought about calling her ahead of time, but I hadn't been gone long and she's probably noticed my phone was still there. If anything, she'd be expecting me to come back. She's more attentive than that. More importantly, I should probably get her a little gift. As an apology for having to bother her again. It'll be about 20:20 by the time I got back there, after all.

Scanning the area, I notice a flower stand. I walk over and ask the shopkeeper about their prices. He told me he'd sell me one rose (dethorned, and in a color that matched Michiko's eyes, actually) for 220 yen.

I paid up.

Taking the rose in one hand and giving it a little sniff to make sure it was fresh, I continued on my way back to Michiko's home.

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This place reeks of sex. I notice that the clock says 8:21 PM. My boyfriend has been gone for a little more than 45 minutes, and here I am, in the middle of having sex with another man. Again. And I'm *enjoying* it. Maybe I just like this sinful feeling. Is that it? No, I doubt it.

Junichi came again. I could feel his hot semen filling up my body. The amount was underwhelming, as always. It felt like a little trickle of water. Okay, so *that* was an understatement, but it certainly wasn't *impressive*. Not like when Touma makes me feel like my womb's about to burst.

Our bodies glistened with sweat, and our breathing was ragged. He'd cum five times by now. Junichi was approaching his limit. He started thrusting again.

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The night was silent. The moonlight seems to wash over each and every house, bathing all the roofs in a purifying light.

I walk casually into the Inoue family inn, hiding the rose in my hands behind my back. Michiko's parents are still at the front desk.

"Welcome back, Touma!" her mother says. "Do you need something?"

I apologized for bothering them again, especially considering the time (they were very nice about it, but I still felt kind of rude for intruding at this hour), and I informed them that I'd left my phone in Michiko's room. They told me she was still there. I assume she's waiting for me. She's never gonna let me hear the end of this one. Carefully moving as to keep the rose out of sight, I headed to the back and thanked Michiko's parents again before rushing up the stairs to the third floor where the Inoue family slept.

Upon reaching the third floor, I took a deep breath. Something about this place seemed different. It was all but impossible, right? After all, I'd been gone for less than an hour. Checking my watch, I saw the number "20:23" staring back at me. Yeah, it's been about 50 minutes. Yet I'm sure *something's* off.

A scent wafts to my nose. It's an odd scent. Something like sweat. That's a little unusual for this time of year. Michiko had no reason to be sweating this much. It was the middle of spring and a cool little breeze was blowing. She hadn't been wearing anything thick. Her parents were downstairs, likely this entire time (they hardly get a break until after 9 in the evening). She had no other relatives and only the Inoues lived up here.

What the hell is going on?

Cautiously, I step forward, ensuring that the floorboards don't creak beneath my footsteps. Maybe I should have called ahead, on second thought. Michiko could already be asleep. And if so, then that just makes me *even more curious* as to what this smell is coming from. Old laundry maybe?

As I pressed forward, I could hear the sound of ragged breathing. Occasionally, I'd hear a loud bumping sound, as if something was knocking against wood. What things go bump in the night? I wonder. Michiko may be masturbating in her room, actually. It would make sense. It would explain the smell of sweat (because apparently anything sexual makes her sweat like crazy), it would explain the ragged breathing (she sounds like that during sex, so I'd have to assume she does during masturbation too) and it would certainly explain the bumping sound (Michiko has a bit of a habit of thrashing around, so it's to be expected).

Part of me didn't want to just walk in on my girlfriend masturbating (what would I do, just go "hey, nice posture you've got there!" and pick up my phone?), and I find myself wishing I'd called ahead again, but none of that mattered now. Maybe she didn't expect me to be back so soon. There's no way she wouldn't have noticed my phone by now. There's no way.

I decide that *que sera, sera*. It's not like I haven't seen Michiko's body before. I'll apologize later. Shrugging to myself, I ignore her almost comically exaggerated moans and slowly open the door to her room.

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"I'm cumming," Junichi whispered into my ear as he ejaculated a sixth time. It was quick this time, as if he had somewhere he needed to be. Even though he'd cum inside, it's a safe day and I'm on the pill, so I'll be fine.

Even after he finished, he held me in a deep embrace, touching my breasts and licking my neck. He's a strange one, to be sure. And a damn pervert.

I miss Touma.

Lying on my back with my eyes closed, I take a few deep breaths as my body begins to recover. I breathe in through my nose, breathe out through my mouth. That's once. I usually repeat this process a good dozen times after sleeping with Junichi. It's partially to help me recover *physically*, of course, but it's actually largely to calm myself down *mentally* so I don't go into a full on panic attack. I still feel guilty about it. But I shouldn't worry anymore. After all, it's the *last* time I ever do this, so Touma won't know. I'm free of Junichi's influence from now on.

Breathe in, breathe out. That's twice.

Breathe in, breathe out. That's thrice (is that even a word?).

Breathe in, breathe out. That's four times.

Breathe in, breathe out. That's...the smell of smoke.

Something's on fire.

My eyes shoot open. There's no visible blaze in my room, but I can *tell* there's smoke. I can smell it. I can see it. I can *feel* the heat.

The smell suddenly comes back to me. The smell is that of burning sakura petals. It's *identical* to the smell of Touma's cologne.

Scanning my surroundings, I finally identify the source of the flame. But it's too late. The door to my room is wide open, and I manage to catch sight of a blaze moving away from the door.

I force Junichi's tired body off, panic quickly gripping my mind.

Grabbing the first sheet I could find and wrapping it around me, I sprint out the door.

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There's a certain sort of beauty to this kind of night. We, as humans, can never fully understand it. There's something *oddly poetic* about that naked moon. The white moonlight shining down upon the rooftops...it's like the color of Michiko's sweat-covered skin.

When I'd opened the door, what I found wasn't the comical scene I'd previously imagined, which was the (admittedly) amusing image of my girlfriend with her fingers halfway up her own vagina. I know it seems strange that I'd joke about it at a time like this, but it's just so unbelievable. It takes a minute for this kind of shit to settle in.

Michiko.

My Michiko.

Michiko was in bed with another man. And I'd caught them smack in the middle of their little love-making session.

Terrific. What a way to end off my day.

I noticed that my right hand, in which the rose had been held, was consumed with fire. Even my Patron Spirit was angry for me—for a moment there, I couldn't control the flames—and yet here *I* am, calmly watching the moon.

I'm standing on the balcony. The Inoue family inn is majestic. The whole thing stands at three stories tall, with a large lobby on the first floor and dozens of rooms. The second floor has twice as many rooms for guests. The third floor, however, is just two large corridors with rooms off to one side, and a wall off to the other. They're connected by one little passageway on the side with the wall—a thinner, shorter corridor. The four ends of both larger corridors are adorned with separate balconies. The whole thing forms the shape of a capital letter "H." I'm surprised no helicopter's mistaken this place for a hospital and tried to land on the roof (which, by the way, isn't flat).

I hear footsteps coming from the corridor behind me. Michiko decided to follow me, apparently.

Why?

As she approached, the flames on my right hand (or rather, my right arm) burned brighter, incinerating the poor rose I held. *It* didn't deserve that. Oh well.

Forcibly suppressing the fires (as to prevent the inn from lighting ablaze), I turn to face Michiko, who had chased after me with a sheet draped over her shoulders. She barely had to run to catch up with me, and yet she was out of breath.

Not a star athlete, I suppose. “Did you need something?” I asked as casually as I could. Even *I* would be shaken by this sort of nasty little ‘surprise.’

“Touma, let me...explain,” she said between deep breaths.

“Sorry, but I’m *really* not in the mood,” I replied. I gave her the best fake smile I could. I had to mask my own feelings.

I fucked up.

I was a crappy boyfriend, and I didn’t give her enough love and attention.

I wasn’t *good enough* for her. And it’s embarrassing as fuck for me to admit that. I’d rather mask it up.

But I couldn’t.

“Touma, I can explain, really!” Michiko persisted, her breathing calming down a little. I, on the other hand, was starting to get annoyed. “Listen, I just—” she began once more.

“I’m sorry,” I said, cutting her off. I haven’t ever done that before (or at least, I don’t *think* I have). But there’s a first time for everything, I guess. “It’s my fault.” Perhaps this is denial of any fault on *her* part. Maybe it’s my mind protecting me from the grief. Maybe it took this first step without me knowing. But even so, I have to say this. I have to *end* this. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t a good boyfriend, and I know that. I’m sorry for disappointing you. You deserve better than me.” I took a step back. “I’m sorry for everything. You’re free of this burden now...I promise.”

Turning away from her, I sighed. I couldn’t look at Michiko’s face any longer. I couldn’t bear that sort of pain.

After all, I’d *disappointed* her.

I took a step up and, in a flash, stepped up to the railing of the balcony. I wasn’t gonna kill myself, of course. With a little hop, I jumped forward, and in a brilliant blaze, I had landed safely on the ground, unscathed.

My Patron Spirit had given me this power. I can jump down safely by flying the distance as a pillar of fire. Quote convenient for situations where you don’t want to talk. With *anyone*.

Dusting myself off, I noticed that at some point I’d dropped the rose. But that didn’t matter to me anymore.

That rose lay somewhere as a pile of ashes. As does my heart.

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I stood, frozen in place on that balcony.

Now I’ve done it.

Touma hates me. I’m sure of it.

A cool breeze blew through the air and right against my naked body beneath the sheet with which I covered myself. But I didn’t care about the cold. I just lost *him*. Now I’ve fucking done it.

I felt myself stumble forward. On the ground lay a blackened item. I knelt down and picked it up in my hands.

A charred, burned rose lay in my hands.

He'd brought me a rose. He came back to see me with a beautiful little flower. Who cares about the reason he returned? I just broke his heart. Men aren't statues. Their hearts are just as fragile as a woman's. And I just shattered his gentle heart into a million little pieces.

I knelt there, the charred rose in my hands. It was still warm, but the fires that burned it seemed to have gone out by now. Bringing the burnt flower close to my naked body, I held it to my heart.

And I cried.

Without holding back, I cried.

What have I done?

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I forced Junichi out of my home. Though it was unfair to solely blame him, I *knew* he held part of the blame. So did I, of course, but *he* was the one I was mad at. Because he seemed not to care. When I came back into my room he simply laughed it off. He *laughed* at my Touma's broken heart.

I can't explain it. It didn't matter. Perhaps it was just in the heat of the moment, but I felt nothing but anger. Pure rage. I ordered him to get dressed, and once he did, I wordlessly dragged him to the back door, kicked him out and locked the door shut.

I didn't care if he'd make a ruckus anymore.

He didn't.

I spent the rest of the night lying awake in my bed, thinking. Is Touma alright? Is he sleeping? Is he mad at me? Does he really blame himself? It would hurt less if he blamed *me*. After all, as much as I hate to admit it, if this whole affair was anybody's fault, it was *mine*.

I didn't sleep that night. Instead, I watched the moonlight shine upon the rooftops. I wished they didn't reflect the light so much. It was as if they were trying to reflect my sins back at me.

And why not? I've lost what I care about most...and as much as I try to deny it, I'm wallowing in my own guilt. And I deserve it. I deserve to suffer.