

CHAPTER XII - ARMISTICE

Celeste has a weird way of asking people to go somewhere with her. At times, like yesterday, it can be useful. We had no company event or anything (we *never* have those, actually) but she essentially made up an excuse to ask if I was busy on the weekend. She does this once in a while. It's kinda her way of asking someone out. Not on a *date* though (I mean for the love of God, she uses it on her father, her coworkers and her friends—there's no way it's a *date* sorta thing, right? Or at least I hope not). In all likelihood, she has something on her mind and she wants to confide in me.

Well, I'm honoured.

But really, Celeste is certainly one to ask early about your availability. It's one of her good traits.

She has a lot of good traits. But it'd take too long to list them all.

I'm not quite sure why Celeste decided to ask me to go out with her this weekend though. She's never been easy to read, and whenever she takes me out with her, she usually uses me as a pack mule for her shopping sprees. It's pretty obnoxious if I'm being honest.

Whenever Celeste and I go shopping together the clerks at the stores mistake us for boyfriend and girlfriend. It used to bother me a little, since I was dating Michiko (or well, I *was* dating her ever since I'd gotten my job, but that's over now, I suppose), but I don't know exactly how I'd feel about it anymore.

I think I'd like it, actually. Celeste is a beautiful woman, and I certainly wouldn't mind being spotted outside with her. Sure, it may be awkward depending on *who* spots us, but in most cases I think it'd be nice. I guess it's kind of funny in my opinion, since I doubt someone like me would ever have a chance with Celeste in the first place. She'd kind of be out of my league. Just a little (no, more like a *lot*).

But all that is besides the point.

More importantly, there's the package she gave me yesterday. Inside wasn't anything special, really. There was a little box of cookies (homemade, with a note saying that I don't eat enough sweets) and a tiny tube containing information regarding my next job. It was to happen this Thursday.

An assassination.

Eh, that's fine.

Our targets tend to be people on the *sketchier* side of things. Our hometown, Seishun city, is known for its connection to the *supernatural*. More specifically, it's one of the few places on Earth where humans can be born with Patron Spirits (that is, spirits bound by birth to a specific person as ever-faithful partners). These spirits bless their bearers with powers beyond imagination, but they aren't the only spirits around. There are numerous confirmed sightings of spirits all over the place. Indeed, these supernatural beings exist, and they are *visible* in our city.

They're often here at night, so there's a curfew after which ordinary citizens aren't allowed outside their homes excluding specific, special circumstances.

The city has invested heavily in infrastructure for this reason. The homeless were often victims of attacks in the middle of nights from spirits (many of those attacks were fatal), so there has been a sharp increase in the number of homeless shelters here. Indeed, some of the spirits had grown restless and violent, and because they were unwilling to coexist with us, they began to attack and kill us as a way of trying to drive us out of what they believe is *their* territory. The government needed to do something, and the citizens were losing their patience as well.

Soon afterwards, an organization established a branch within our city. This group recruited those born with Patron Spirits—particularly those with either medical certifications or combat experience—preferably both. This group, though kept a secret to the public, is known as The Armistice.

They're my bosses.

The Armistice is the reason I can get away with things like *killing* in broad daylight. So long as I'm hunting traitors and dangerous spirits, the group will work with the government and the police force to try and cover up (or just turn a blind eye to) my actions.

As far as I know, Celeste's card displays "Armistice Advertising Solutions" as our company's name. This is only half false. The company actually does hire advertising experts and works in the industry. We charge an extraordinarily high fee, and in exchange we secure promotion opportunities with a *little* help from the government. This allows us to be *mostly* independent of government funding (which is good for them, as they can balance their budget easier; everybody wins, and all it costs them is some prime, reserved advertising space). On the surface, this is the business that we're in. However, beneath that facade, a good half of the company is made up of elite assassins, spies, negotiators and strategists. We're mostly funded by the extra money from the higher-than-usual advertising prices, as well as a bit of money from the government and some from the central branch of The Armistice.

Everyone falls under one of four categories in our company. The first group, the Martial Artists, have Patron Spirits who give them extra physical strength and a few powers here and there. Then there are the Hunters, who usually specialize in heavy ranged weaponry or silent ranged weapons. The Spirit Masters utilize the most spirit weapons, and tend to have versatile Patron Spirits. And lastly, the Arbitrators are our negotiators (they're the ones who try and ensure no *wars* break out).

There are tons of talented people in our company. The first one I can name would be my friend Hayate Hayashi. He's three years my senior, and a professional Arbitrator. Not all spirits are malicious. Some of them are even on our side, and I don't just mean the Patron Spirits. Hayate works with a small team of humans and spirits alike to try and negotiate peaceful contracts with opposing spirit groups. Neither side wants this bloodshed, it seems, and we're actively trying to reduce it.

Hayate has seen lots of success in his field, but every once in a while things go sour and we're forced to fight.

That's where people like Celeste and I come in. We're what the company regards as Spirit Masters. We're the ones who go out into the field and do various types of espionage and extermination. We are in charge of killing dangerous spirits, or people who seek to betray their fellow humans and kill their own kind to help those malicious spirits. This is why the government helps cover it up when I'm killing the right people. They *want* these people dead.

And so do I.

Celeste is an agent like me, but she doubles as my Operator. She's my manager and is in charge of informing me of missions as well as providing backup and transportation for me. She's very good at the job too, which makes my life quite a bit easier.

I always feel comfortable when working with her. It's like she *understands* me and my style when it comes to my work. With the support of both her and her father, things tend to go smoothly.

A sudden realization catches my attention. I check the clock on my wall. Then, pulling out my journal, I scrawl down a few points.

April 13, 2511

Weather: clear

0641: Woke up late. Bad dog.

Leaping out of bed and throwing my clothes on, I bolt out of the room.
This took too long.

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It was three minutes before the beginning of class when Touma finally arrived at school. He rarely shows up late, so it's safe to say that something happened. He told me (a while ago) that he often finds himself lost in thought, and that he'd lose track of time. It could be that, I guess.

I'd rather not think about the possibility of him having been with another girl prior to this. I know that we're technically not boyfriend and girlfriend anymore, at least for the time being, but even so it bothers me when I imagine him with another girl. Perhaps I'm jealous, or perhaps I just wish we were still together.

Actually no, not *perhaps*. I think *definitely* is a better word for it. And it's not one or the other. It's *both*. I'm totally jealous and I do wish we were still an item.

I can't help it. I miss Touma.

I look over to my bag. I actually made him a little something for lunch again. I kind of did it without thinking, but after I was done, I noticed

that I'd made some extra. So I brought it along. Maybe he'd still be willing to accept it?

I glance behind me. Touma had sat down and was thinking about something. His thumb was on his chin, making that pose that I knew all too well. He was (without a doubt) deep in thought.

I feel a little throbbing pain in my chest. I kind of want to go over to him. I want to talk to him. I want to know how his day's been so far, and how yesterday was, and I want to know if he's tired or hungry or...or *anything*, really. I want to know how he's feeling. And yet I feel the need to restrain myself. I don't want to be burdensome to him. This mix of emotions has been brooding inside of me for the last few days, really, and it's starting to get to me. I don't even know anymore.

I just want my Touma to be happy.

I just want to *make* him happy.

I don't know what to do anymore. It's just a storm in my mind, consuming my very being. This balance between my desire to be with him and my wish to make him smile seems to teeter back and forth, making me tired, sad and indecisive.

Am I an idiot? Or and I just hopelessly in love?

Damnit, I don't care anymore. I miss Touma.

Turning towards Yuki, I nudge her. She turned around, confused. "Hey," I said, "what're you doing for lunch today?"