

## CHAPTER XIX - TO KNOW

I haven't really seen Celeste cook before. To me, that fact is unreasonably amusing. I know that her food consists of both Japanese cuisine and European foods, primarily from Germany and countries close to it (which makes sense—she *is* still German). I also know that she is not actually very proficient in the kitchen. It's pretty funny, considering how Michiko and Shizue are both great cooks. Celeste is a bit more of a "soldier girl," if that makes any sense. Her talents lie elsewhere.

Though I find the generic housewife type endearing, there's something about Celeste that I find inexplicably attractive. I'd love to say it's just her hair, but that would be a lie. I guess it's her personality. When at work, she can be almost *mechanical*, but I get to see a *completely* different side of her. I love that. It's like the timid, girly side of her is just for me to see. And I really, *really* like that.

I look down at the pot of sukiyaki before me. I suppose it's only right that I cook for her right now, since she paid for the dress in the end. Although my mind keeps drifting back to Michiko every little while. A part of me wanted to talk to her. A part of me still wants to believe her. I want to think she's innocent. I want to think that the guy I killed should have died anyways.

I honestly don't know if I should've killed him. But I wanted to.

Turning away from the stove for a moment, I looked towards Celeste. Our eyes met. She'd been on her phone until now, a slight scowl on her face. But that was gone now. I sighed. "Can I ask you something?"

"Go for it," Celeste replied, taking a sip of tea calmly.

"I killed a guy a while back," I said.

"You've killed a bunch of guys. Which one are we talking about?" Celeste joked. "Just kidding. You mean the guy at your school, right?"

"Yeah," I replied.

"Having second thoughts?" Celeste asked.

"Yeah," I repeated.

"Don't," she said sternly. "You killed a guy whose girlfriend was cheating on you with. Under normal circumstances, you'd be seen as petty. But in this case, I don't particularly think so. A life is only as valuable as the one living it allows it to be. If you ask me, he's fine being dead. You're better off without that guy in your life. And in all honesty, so is Michiko Inoue. Let him die. You did nothing wrong. Calm down. I promise, you did nothing wrong."

That was a lie. I can tell that Celeste was lying to me when she said I did nothing wrong when I killed that guy, but hearing *her* say that was comforting. Because she's the one who reassures me after my missions when I'm doubting myself that what we do is right.

But is it?

It is, isn't it?

My mind drifted back to when I'd met Michiko on the roof. I recreated the scene in my head. I didn't want to, but I had to. I had to know whether or not I'd seen everything correctly. I had to know whether or not I could trust myself anymore.

I could see Michiko with that man, kissing. Their lips were locked tight, their bodies held in a twisted, unnatural position. Wait, but some to think of it, that's pretty important. The position in which they held each other was not right. It looked forced. It looked...*undesirable*. Something had happened on that day that I didn't know about. It was something that I *should* have known about. But I didn't.

He *hurt* Michiko.

That jackass *hurt* my Michiko.

I smiled a little to myself. Yeah. He *hurt* my Michiko. So I killed him. It makes sense. It's not my *fault*. Right?

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I called Yuki. I had to talk to *someone*. I needed to get all of this nonsense off my chest. I know Touma is upset with me, but I just want him to love me again. I'm sure he doesn't know the full truth behind the situation I'm currently in, but I know he'll figure it out sooner or later.

He's just smart in that way. He's good at *figuring it out* (regardless of what "it" may be).

But for now, I needed to talk to someone.

Yuki picked up the phone pretty quickly, as usual. Despite her usual airheadedness, she tends to be good about this sorta thing. "What's up?" she asked immediately.

"Yuki...you heard about how Junichi died, right?" I asked.

"Yeah," Yuki replied. "Pretty sad that it was a house fire. I'm surprised the rest of the apartment building managed to stay intact.

"Yuki, you gotta listen to me," I said, "the day that happened...he tried to force himself onto me."

"Wait, *what*?" Yuki cried. "You're...not serious, are you?"

"I mean it," I sighed. "I just...I dunno. I feel like it's my own fault. I...I just feel like crap. And now I'm afraid that Touma hates me. I'd promised myself that I'd change and that I'd love *only* Touma with everything I had, but then when push comes to shove, I didn't even *try to resist* when Junichi—"

"Listen to me," Yuki said suddenly, cutting me off. "I don't know if you realize this, but you can't be blaming yourself for what happened. I get that you hear this line everywhere, but seriously. Someone *attacked* you. You didn't resist because you instinctively didn't want to get hurt even more, and in many ways you couldn't stop him. Nobody's gonna blame you."

"But—" I began.

“Stop it,” Yuki said, her voice growing more stern. I don’t know if she’s ever spoken like this to me before, honestly. “There’s a lot of things you need to get straight, but the bottom line is this,” she said. “You are a victim. Nobody has *any* right to blame you for someone else’s obscenity and stupidity. And as for Touma, if he’s selfish enough to blame *you* for that guy’s actions then—”

“No!” I cried. “That’s not it! Touma *stopped* him. He *punished* Junichi. But at the same time, I’m worried that he has the wrong idea about what happened. I know that Touma chose to punish Junichi because deep down, he felt the guy was responsible. But at the same time...I’m worried that he’ll hate me for not fighting back. I mean, *he* always does.”

“Yeah, Touma Koizumi *does* always fight back,” Yuki said, “but it’s to protect those that he cares about. Even *I* know that much. He saved you because he cares about you. And if you’re right, and Touma felt Junichi was responsible, then there’s no way in hell that he hates you for it. I promise you. So quit blaming yourself for being the victim. Blame the perpetrator, if anyone.”

I sighed. “Yeah, you’re right,” I said. “I still wanna talk it out with Touma when I get the chance, but thanks Yuki. I needed this.”

“Any time, sister,” Yuki replied, her voice returning to its usual cheerful tone.

After ending my call, I find myself lying on my bed lost in thought. I’m going to see Touma tomorrow. I need to see if he knows the truth. I need to know how he feels. And more importantly, I need him to know how *I* feel too.