

CHAPTER XI - THAT HEAVY FEELING

Touma seemed to be deep in thought. Ever since he formally split up with Michiko Inoue, the two haven't really talked. That's fine though. I'd prefer if Touma never talked to her again. I'd prefer if she just *disappeared*, actually, but I'm not about to do anything illegal to make that happen.

I can't figure out why Touma cares so much about Michiko Inoue. Is it because she was his first girlfriend? Does the first girl have some sort of magical captivating powers that hold a man's heart to her no matter what? I doubt it. No, I think it has to do with Touma himself and how he feels about Michiko. He still loved Michiko Inoue, and he hasn't fully accepted the fact that they're separated now. It has likely barely processed in his mind.

Michiko Inoue cheated on him.

Michiko Inoue is a cheating skank. I can accept that fact, but that's because I've never had any sort of positive bond with her. Indeed, I went out of my way to *avoid* making such a bond because that way, when and if the time came—when and if she ever betrayed my Touma—I'd be able to hate her without reservation. And here I am.

I can say without a doubt that I hate her.

The carrot that I'm cutting to make Touma's yakisoba starts to feel heavy. It's a weird feeling—that *heavy* feeling, that is. I can't explain exactly why I feel this sudden increase in weight when it's obviously impossible. By the laws of physics, unless the Earth's gravitational force just changed, which I doubt. Looking at the carrot, I start to see a resemblance between it and Michiko's face.

I'm probably hallucinating, but what the hell, right?

With the knife in my hand, I make a tiny cut along that perfect little face of hers. I hate it. I'm jealous that such a deceptive little minx could trick my Touma and whisk him away from me, only to toss him aside like a used rag when she was done with him. The cut I made looked as if it'd begun to ooze blood, ruining her previously flawless complexion. I'll admit that I kind of liked that feeling...that is, the feeling of *ruining* something of hers. Am I...am I a *yandere* or something?

I blink twice.

The carrot had returned to normal, and the tiny cut I'd made along its surface just looked weird. What's worse, I'd cut pretty deep, and now if I tried cutting carrot strips the lengths are gonna be all weird. Fuck.

"You doing okay over there?" Touma called to me. "If you're tired, you can rest. I can cook too, y'know?" he laughed. "Lemme come over and help you."

"N-no, I'm fine," I lied. "Just rest up and let your cute childhood friend take care of you a bit, okay?" I cooed. That voice...it didn't *belong* to me, and yet I used it so freely. That voice was one I'd never use—not normally at least. The squeaky playfulness in its sound...it almost perfectly mimicked Michiko Inoue's voice. Indeed, were my voice a little deeper, I doubt even *Touma* could tell the difference, and I *know* how attentive he is to little details.

I don't know why I'm trying to imitate Michiko Inoue. Perhaps I'm subconsciously trying to show Touma that I can be like her, or maybe I'm just trying to comfort him by using the voice of the girl he misses so much. I don't know anymore.

Touma came into the kitchen. He clicked his tongue and walked over to my side. "Look at you," he said, getting dangerously close to me. I can feel my heart beginning to race. He easily wrestled the carrot out of my hand and forced me to put down the knife I held. "I'll get you a bandage," he said.

"W-what?" I murmur.

"You cut your hand, smartass," Touma sighed. "You're not yourself today. Come with me." He grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me out of the kitchen and into the living room. I suddenly felt a stinging pain in my hand. Looking down, I confirm that Touma was indeed correct. There was a little cut along my left thumb. It wasn't too deep, nor was it a long cut, but it was surely there.

So that was where the blood came from. Michiko Inoue had not bled. / did.

Touma took out a cotton swab and dabbed it lightly in rubbing alcohol. "Hold still," he said. "This is for your own good." Pressing the swab against my wound, I felt the stinging pain begin to overwhelm me immediately.

"W-wait," I pleaded, "i-it hurts!"

"Handle it," Touma said sternly.

"B-but—"

"*Handle it.*"

I nodded.

"That knife is used for raw foods. You have no idea what kind of bacteria could have been on it. You'll be fine," Touma told me, "but just bear with the pain for a little bit, okay? Just a bit. Please, Shizue."

I stared into his eyes. My heart was pounding. If Touma was to ask me to kiss him, I would do so without a second thought. *Especially* right now. In fact, the more I stared at his lips, the more enticing they seemed to become. I felt myself leaning in closer.

Yeah, I kind of *want* this.

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I finish patching up Shizue's wound. I know she probably doesn't think of it as much, since she cooks so much. These injuries are probably common. However, in my industry every little wound could *slow you down*, and that could get you killed.

It's just force of habit for me to bandage Shizue's hand like this by now.

I turn to face her. She looks drowsy, and she's leaning in closer and closer to me. I'm not quite sure what she'd after, but she doesn't look like she's in her right mind. Picking Shizue up in my arms, I start to carry her towards my room.

"W-wait, where are we g-going?" she asked.

"To my room," I replied. "You need to lie down."

Shizue's face was flushed. I doubt it's a fever, so I'm gonna assume she'd just embarrassed. I don't blame her. She's been in my room before, but I've never carried her there in my arms. I don't need her getting the wrong idea right now.

Kicking the door open, I march over to the bed and lay her down upon it carefully. "Relax and take a nap," I tell her. "I'm gonna go finish dinner up, and I'll come and get you when it's ready. Just take a break. You've earned it."

Shizue didn't struggle. She simply nodded and closed her eyes. I sighed and walked out of the room, slowly making my way towards the kitchen to finish making the yakisoba.

Shizue wasn't herself today. I can say that for sure. She's almost never this clumsy, and she certainly isn't the type to suddenly get lost in her thoughts without some sort of good reason. From the looks of it, I doubt she had a fever (in fact, I doubt she was sick at all), so it's safe to assume that she has something on her mind. Perhaps something happened to her today? Or maybe she's just tired. That's a fair argument; Shizue's always worked hard in school, and there have been moments where she gets totally burned out similar to this.

Suddenly, my feet begin to feel heavy. I feel my head start to ache, and my body starts to heat up. My Patron Spirit is agitated, probably because of Michiko. It's never really liked Michiko, actually, but it hates her even more now that we've broken up. I'm being honest and not sugar coating anything, I'd say this: Michiko cheated on me, and my Patron Spirit wants payback. And its feelings are getting to my head. They're keeping me still, swarming my mind with thoughts. My brain literally can't process enough for me to command my feet to move.

A minute passes and I can feel my body temperature returning to normal. Taking a deep breath, I walk towards the kitchen once more. The extra weight is gone from my legs.

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Touma wouldn't so much as shoot me a glance today. I spied on him through my mirror again today. I couldn't help it. I can't stop myself from thinking about him. It's just now I am.

I walked home alone. I wonder if Touma got home safely.

I want to talk to him again.

My parents have been asking me about him. I still haven't told them about my mistake—the cheating incident—since they'd probably kill me for it. Pulling out my phone, I open and scroll down my contacts list until I spot Touma's name. For some reason, it looked extra daunting to me right now, but whatever. I decide to call his home phone.

The phone rang for a few moments before someone picked up. "T-Touma?" I cried excitedly. He picked up! "D-d-did you make it home safely? We didn't really have an opportunity to chat today, so I was w-wondering if you were doing okay. That and I...I kinda wanted to hear your voice again..."

"Michiko Inoue, you have *some nerve*," the voice on the other end (not Touma's, clearly) snapped.

I gulped. "W-wait...Shizue Sasaki? What the hell are *you* doing answering Touma's phone? And that's his *home* phone! Why are you in his house?"

"We're having dinner together, for your information," Shizue said flatly, "but that's not important. Listen to me. Don't ever call this number again. Don't you know how much grief you've put Touma through already? Let him move the fuck on. Stay out of his life."

I sighed. Does she really think saying that will work?

"Alright, sure," I replied. "But I have one condition. I want to hear Touma himself say it. I refuse to accept such an order from *you*. If Touma really doesn't want to hear my voice for a while, then let him tell me that and I'll happily comply. Otherwise, I refuse."

"He doesn't want to talk to you," Shizue said. "He told me to tell you all this."

"Yeah, sure, and I'm your great grand-aunt, you lying bitch," I snapped. "My Touma's enough of a man to tell me that on his own, and I *know* that. Don't try to fool me. If he really didn't want to talk to me anymore, he would say so himself instead of having you do it for him. His pride wouldn't allow it."

Shizue clicked her tongue on the other end.

Got her.

"Listen, I'm sure you think your body's great, and I get that many guys seem to agree, but part of me can't help but feel like you're kind of rotten," Shizue finally replied.

"What're you implying?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I'm not implying anything," Shizue responded. "I just find it nice how nobody needs to try too hard when they're around you."

"You're saying that I'm easy, aren't you?" I demanded. This was starting to get on my nerves. The backhanded compliments were really starting to give me a reason to wanna punch her.

"I'm not saying *anything* I don't mean," Shizue answered with a hint of sarcasm in her voice. "It's your fault for twisting my words. I just think you're...*tastefully* slutty. That's all."

"I'm gonna rip your fucking hair out," I replied. "And besides, your opinion is worth jack shit."

"Hey, it's a good thing that you don't care how you come across to people," Shizue said.

"Shut up, bitch," I retorted. "What, you think you're so perfect? Yeah, go and enjoy checking out your pretty little face in the mirror. It's not like anyone else wants to see it anyways."

Shizue suddenly fell silent again. I might have got her with that one. Maybe she desires popularity? Or maybe she's self-conscious of her looks, or even her body? Eh, doesn't matter. That shut her up.

"Give up on Touma," Shizue demanded after a pause, her voice losing its playful tone and immediately turning more serious. "I'll say it

once again. I've declared *war* on you, Michiko Inoue. And I intend on winning my Touma back from you."

"What, giving up because I hit you where it hurts?" I laughed. "Fine. You can try to beat me, but know that it won't be so easy," I retorted, "because if you're gonna declare war on me, then don't expect me to take it sitting down."

"You're a stubborn bitch," Shizue snapped at me.

"That's the pot calling the kettle black," I laughed.

"I'm not joking around," she said. "Stay away from my Touma."

"How about *you* stay away from *my* Touma?" I said. "Regardless of what's happened, I don't intend on giving him up."

"Whatever," Shizue said. She hung up.

How childish.

After all, Touma loves *me* above all else. That's how it is, and that's how it's always gonna be. Shizue Sasaki doesn't know that, clearly. She should give up already.

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Touma had gotten two calls at once while we ate. One was from his work phone, and the other was on his home phone. The one from his home phone was Michiko Inoue, and I assume the one on his work phone was one of his coworkers (possibly Caecilia Wolfe?).

I watched as Touma did the dishes. This is rare for me. I'm usually the one taking care of him, but it's kinda nice for him to take care of me once in a while. I love it when he spoils me. Suddenly, I hear the doorbell ringing.

"Could you get that for me?" Touma asked. "I have a visitor from the office to give me some information and drop off a little package. That's probably them."

"Who did they send?" I asked.

"No idea," he replied. "If I were to guess, it'd be Celeste since she's technically my manager, but it would be anyone, really. Just go get the door for me, okay? Please?"

"Sure," I replied. I strolled out of the living room and made right for the front door. Unlocking it carefully, I opened it just a crack.

The blonde woman at the door stared back at me, her ocean-blue eyes watching my every move. Her recognizable glasses fit perfectly onto her face. It was Caecilia alright. I'd only noticed her *body* the last time I'd seen her, but she really is stunningly gorgeous. Her jawline was rounded out in such a cute manner, and her mature look hid her true age well without making her look old either. It would be impossible for me to guess her age, had Touma not told me how old she was. Her skin was smooth and bright white, without a single blemish. Beneath the light of the setting sun, which barely gripped the horizon, she looked like an angel who just descended from the heavens.

And this is coming from a *straight girl*.

Man, I'm jealous of that body...

"Hello, miss Sasaki. I didn't expect to run into you here," Caecilia said. "I assumed you were just mister Koizumi's neighbour, but...might I have been incorrect in my judgement?" she asked playfully.

"U-uhh...n-no! That's not it!" I cried.

Caecilia laughed. "I'm just joking. Sorry for teasing you there, I couldn't help it. Either way, though, is mister Koizumi home? I'm just here to deliver a small package for him, and I have a few things to discuss with him."

"I-I see," I said. "I suppose I should go then."

"Oh, no, not at all," Caecilia said. "I only have a bit of information about the company event that's being planned. It's nothing private or anything, so you can stay. It's no trouble. I'll only be here for a bit, anyways. But, if you'll excuse me..."

"O-oh, sorry," I apologized, moving out of her way so she could walk into the house.

"Pardon the intrusion," she said as she entered.

Taking her shoes off, she and I walked into the living room where Touma resided, having finished with the dishes.

"How are you, Celeste?" he asked casually. "Care for a drink?"

"It's alright, mister Koizumi," Caecilia replied. "I'm merely here to deliver a little package from the higher-ups. Oh, and we need to discuss the company event a little. Are you free this weekend? Everyone seems to be occupied on the weekdays, so we have to pick either this Saturday or Sunday."

Touma put his thumb on his chin for a moment. "Err...I think Saturday would be best, but I can do either," he replied.

"I see," Caecilia nodded. "Alright. I'll call you with the other details later." Walking over to him, she handed him the package she'd been holding (wait, where did that even come from?). "That's about it," she said. "I'll be taking my leave."

"Hey, Celeste?" Touma called to her.

Caecilia turned around. "Yes?" she asked.

"Next time, call ahead and join us for dinner will you?" Touma laughed. "Shizue's a wonderful cook. Trust me."

I couldn't help but blush at that.

Caecilia nodded again. "Sounds good. I'll call ahead a bit next time." She turned to me. "I hope it won't be too much trouble, miss Sasaki," she said with a graceful bow.

"N-no, it's perfectly fine!" I replied. "It'd be my pleasure."

Caecilia gave me a calm smile. "I'll take my leave for now then," she said. "Have a good evening, mister Koizumi. And you too, miss Sasaki." Saying so, she walked out of the living room. "Oh, and see you at work tomorrow," she called to Touma.

"See you, Celeste," he replied. "Stay safe."

Nodding, Caecilia exited the room with a smile on her face.

I really can't friggin' read her.

Watching her leave, I could hear myself give a little sigh of relief. And yet suddenly, my heart began to feel heavy again. Why do I feel like this? Am I jealous of Caecilia Wolfe's body? Or is it just my womanly intuition telling me something's wrong?

I wonder...