

## CHAPTER IX - A JOB

My work phone started to buzz first thing in the morning as I walked into the classroom. It's been three days since I talked with Michiko. The sun was shining. The birds weren't singing. Everything was great, except for the fact that everything could be a lie and it could fall apart the very next second.

I know I told Michiko that our separation would be temporary, but deep down I still don't think we'd ever get back together. I don't know. I thought I could trust her, and I thought I could do a lot for her as the man who I am, but I don't know anymore.

I pull out my phone and stare blankly at the screen. Barring an absolute emergency, only one person would call me at this time of day: Celeste. I sigh. Answering the call as I take my seat, I put my ear to the receiver. "Koizumi speaking," I mutter.

"You have a job," the curt voice on the other end of the line informed me. It was indeed Celeste. "I'll be there to pick you up in five minutes. Your teacher has already been informed, so you can go ahead and walk out. Leave your things there. The job will take less than twenty minutes so you won't miss much."

"I understand," I replied.

Hanging up, I scanned the room. Michiko was talking with her friend (the one with the tan—I can never seem to remember her name). Standing up, I turn and simply walk out the door.

Skiping class? Too easy.

Not really.

My job is a little more important than class is right now.

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I sit in the car beside Celeste as she drives along an almost empty road. Exactly five minutes after she'd called, her car pulled up in front of the school and I got in. We drove back to my home where I retrieved my new equipment, and from there we drove off towards the downtown core.

It's well past rush hour. The streets are oddly deserted considering what part of Seishun city we're in. The kanji for the city's name means "youth," which does symbolize the place well. Most of the residents are relatively young, with the older population opting to leave and move back to their cities of birth to hopefully pass away peacefully in their hometown.

Because passing away *peacefully* in Seishun city is a pretty rare thing.

Looking around, I take out my journal and make a little note beneath the previous one.

o829: Left for job.

o837: I miss Michiko. I wonder how she's doing in class. I should be focusing right now. Bad dog.

“Yeah, ‘bad dog’ is right. Don’t write about another girl when you’re with me,” Celeste joked (I think), peeking at my journal. “We’re almost at our destination. Put your notebook away and I’ll give you a rundown of what’s gonna happen.”

“Alright,” I replied.

“You shouldn’t have any trouble with this one. Someone’s been suspected of collaborating with our enemy,” Celeste said. “Your objective is simple: terminate him. Don’t worry about being subtle. The building to which we’ve lured him is completely empty, and we’ll cover up the little ‘event.’ Shall we say he threw himself from a window?” she suggested cheerily.

“It always scares me when you smile while saying something so morbid,” I told her. “Although I guess it’s sexy in its own way.”

“Are you *flirting* with me?” Celeste laughed. “I’m not saying I *mind*, but it’s rather unexpected. I *thought* you had a girlfriend, but I suppose information depends on who you ask for it from, hmm? Curious.”

“Who did you ask?” I inquired.

“Well, there was that girl who claimed to be your girlfriend, as well as your neighbour,” she told me. “They gave me opposing answers.”

“I see,” I replied. “Well, as it stands right now I’d say my neighbour was right, it seems. Michiko isn’t technically my girlfriend right now. *Things happened* and we’ve decided to separate for the time being.”

Celeste nodded. She seemed deep in thought, and barely looked like she was paying any attention to the road. A moment later, she pulled over. “We’re here,” she said. “The target is on the fifth floor. Go ahead and change clothes before you go meet him. Take care of it fast and don’t worry about cleaning up.”

“Alright,” I answered. Taking off the top of my school uniform, I reach into the back of the car and grab my work uniform: a black tank top and a white blazer. I’d gotten used to wearing this outfit on a regular basis too, but even so, it *is* my work uniform. Celeste closed her eyes and turned away as I reached back again and pulled out the pants for my uniform. Moments later, I finished changing and tapped her on the shoulder. She turned around. “Please don’t take off your pants so recklessly like that again,” she giggled. “Give me some prior warning or I may end up seeing a little *something*,” she added, “though I’m not sure if it’ll be ‘little’ at all.”

I laughed. “I’ll be back,” I said, stepping out of the car.

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About two minutes went by in complete silence. I could essentially *guess* where Touma was right now. He’d gone inside the building and went for the stairs. By avoiding the elevator, he could lower his chances of informing our target of his arrival. Without any warning, Touma will show up. And he *will* finish the job.

The target has almost certainly noticed the lack of people in the building by now, but he should also *expect* for there to be no people. After all, he's not making a deal with another human being.

Our target has a family of two children and his wife. They'll be informed of his death, but the cause of death will have to be a lie. I do feel a little bad for them, but it's my job to protect this city and if we must draw blood to do so, then so be it.

I know Touma likes this job anyways. It helps him vent his frustrations.

I look up towards the fifth floor of the building. Staring into the window, I wait. A moment later, there's a brilliant flash, like a burst of fire.

I told myself that the job was done. In a single shot, our target was eliminated.

Flawless as ever, my dear Touma.

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I love it when blood splatters everywhere. It gives me a shot of adrenaline. I know it's sadistic of me, but still. This is what I do for a living.

The guy *tried* to put up a fight. When I showed up, he'd sensed me. He turned and immediately knew I wasn't who he wanted to meet. However, he was unarmed. Running towards me, he threw a punch. Deciding to humour him, I'd just dodged it and crushed his right arm with a downward smash. I could *hear* his bones snapping like twigs upon impact. He had cried out in pain, and I proceeded to slam him into the ground. Stomping down onto his limbs, I crushed his arms and legs. Then, as he lay helplessly on the building's floor, I pulled out one of the new guns Celeste had handed me.

Indeed, they were the most delectable of weapons. Their weight fit me just right, and their size was perfect for my hands. These spirit weapons were really custom-made to suit me. Staring at the work of craftsmanship I held for a moment, almost in awe of its beauty, I'd felt excited as I let my powers run free. My right hand, which held the gun, had lit ablaze. Flames surged through the weapon and a little fire erupted from the hole where my gun's ejection port should have been.

I liked that aesthetic.

Pointing the weapon's barrel at the man on the floor before me, I found a smile creeping onto my face.

I swear to God, something's wrong with me.

I don't give a fuck.

Pulling the trigger, I watch as a shot of concentrated fire bursts forth from my weapon. A tiny, glowing bullet shot out and pierced the man's flesh. In an instant, he erupted into flames.

Satisfied, I put my weapon away and walked off, extinguishing the fire with my powers as I left.

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Touma's uniform was clean when he returned, but I could tell from his calm expression that he'd completed his task without a hitch. That made me happy. I like it when Touma gets his jobs done. He always looks so cheerful afterwards. I like it when Touma's cheerful. Maybe I'm a weirdo.

I wonder if Touma likes it when I smile. He never tells me.

Consciously, I flash him the most radiant smile I can muster. My friends tell me that my smile is blinding every once in awhile, but usually it's just...plain.

"Celeste, you look beautiful today, by the way," Touma said.

I gasp a little in surprise.

"What?" he asked. "I'm just saying. You seriously look beautiful today. It's not a joke or anything. I kinda just noticed it. You rarely smile like that. I kinda like it."

I blinked twice. Had he read my thoughts?

Touma reached over and ran his fingers through my hair gently, caressing every last strand of it as he watched my reaction. He seems to love teasing me like this, though he only does it once in a while.

"Alright, we should head back," he said. "If we stay here any longer, we'll start to look suspicious."

I nod. "Alright," I said.

As I began to drive once more, tuning and heading in the direction of Chusei North High School, a thought came to me: I really liked being around Touma. I like it more than I should, and then some.

I'm a weirdo.