

CHAPTER XIV - WICKED ENDEAVOR

Wednesdays. They have a tendency to feel like shit. Think about it. It's the middle of the week. You're not quite close to the weekend yet, but it's not near the beginning of the week right after you've rested for the weekend. No, it's the shittiest day of the week. That's how it is.

Maybe it's partially the fault of it being a Wednesday that I feel so apprehensive today. With a job coming up tomorrow (and a big one too, or Celeste wouldn't have me such early notice—she dropped off the message on Monday in the evening, so that would be over 48 hours in advance), I can't help but freak out a little. But the job isn't what's on my mind. Not right now. The job isn't eating away at my thoughts.

Michiko is.

Michiko texted me at lunchtime yesterday. She wants to meet after class, on the rooftop where we always were. A part of me wants to see her, and to figure out exactly what is on her mind. However, another part of me loathes the idea of being around her again. Maybe I subconsciously hold a grudge against her. Or maybe I'm crazy. God knows.

I notice my own hands starting to shake. I'm growing restless. Time seems to slow down as the day continues. At this point, with two minutes until the end of homeroom, I'm feeling more and more anxious. And indecisive. Funny enough, I don't think I've ever felt this uncertain before. Not even when I lost my virginity.

My eyes are glued to my watch. Our teacher is talking, but whatever. It's about the entrance ceremony near the end of the week. Tomorrow, that is. I'm not sure if I'll even be there, but that'll be up to Celeste when she picks me up for my job. And besides, it's not my first year at this school anymore.

The clock is ticking. I look towards Michiko's seat. She's holding a mirror, hiding it in the folds of her textbook. I can see her magenta eyes staring back at me. Seeming to notice my glance, she turns away and blushes.

Got her.

The moment the bell rings, Michiko picks up her bag and briskly walks out of the classroom.

I hesitate.

Exactly what is it that I wish to do now?

What's my next move?

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Touma didn't follow me out of the classroom. That much was to be expected, however. Of course he didn't follow me. That would be too awkward for both of us. I make my way towards the roof. I need to talk to Touma again. I *have* to talk to him again. Even if it's a brief conversation, it's a talk we *need* to have.

I can feel a pair of eyes staring into my back. Numerous pairs, actually, but that's normal. A lot of students stare at me when I walk through the halls. For better or for worse, I'm relatively popular. I don't particularly like that, actually. I'm not a fan of the attention. There's only one person—one man—whose attention I crave. And I do hope he'll come to me today.

Setting foot onto the roof, I settle in for a potentially long wait. I'm prepared to give it a good hour or two before I give up. Touma is relatively punctual though. If he intends on showing up, he will do so soon. I know he will. And yet, even if he doesn't, I'm willing to cling onto the hope that he will.

My hands are trembling. I'm nervous.

Of course I am.

I find myself looking down towards the students leaving the school grounds. The "go home club," as they're called. Or, rather, as *we're* called. Touma and I both don't really do club activities. Me, I don't exactly feel the need to be used as promotional material to bait a bunch of horny boys to join a club. I'm not a fucking object, damnit. The people trying to recruit me have got to get that straight if they want me to join their club.

As for Touma, I just don't think he's interested in clubs. The only thing that he does for fun (that I know of) would be reading, but our school's literature club is just...it's just *not* normal. I swear, it's like the club is made up of four nutcases who don't even do *that* much reading. I hear they like poetry though. That's fine I suppose, but that also kills Touma's reason for considering the club. And otherwise...I guess he could join a sports club (he's good at most sports, actually; he prefers individual ones) but he doesn't seem to care for *those* either. He tells me he hates jocks.

I'm inclined to concur with that opinion. Stereotypical jocks are assholes. I know they're not all like that, but when it comes to Chusei High, most of them *are*.

The sound of the door to the roof opening catches my attention. Touma's here.

"Well, hey there," I heard someone say.

Or not. That voice doesn't belong to my Touma. Having heard the sound of his voice, I knew instantly who it was. My muscles tighten. I feel a chill run down my spine.

"Y'know, you haven't called me in a little while," the voice said. "It's been almost a week, hasn't it?" I turned around slowly. The voice belongs to a boy with a slight tan and dyed teal hair. His outfit seemed to scream "rich." His grey eyes seemed half-dead. And they were locked onto me. "Why're you being so cold to me all of a sudden, Michiko? I thought we *had* something. Was it because we were caught?" the boy asked.

I knew it. Junichi Kimura found me.

"H-how? How did you find me here?" I choked. "W-what did you do?"

"Oh, I just followed you, Michiko," Junichi replied. "I've been quite lonely recently. You have too, haven't you? I'm sure that boyfriend of yours hasn't been taking care of your 'needs' ever since that night," he said, "and I've been saving up, so let's do it here. Nobody ever comes to the roof, so we can fuck up here."

I can feel my right eyes twitching. I invited Touma to come see me here. If I even *considered* the idea of having sex with Junichi here, and *especially if* Touma was to walk in...I don't know what I'd do. But I think I'd jump and kill myself. Forget embarrassment. I wouldn't be able to *live with myself*.

I slowly back away from Junichi, who comes closer and closer to me. "L-listen," I said, "I don't expect you to *understand*, but what happened between us was a *mistake*. I hate to be so rude, but please get away from me. Now."

"Not happening," Junichi said, taking a big step forward. I pick up my pace, but he's too fast for me. Before I know it, he's grabbed me in his brutish arms. His left arm was wrapped around me, right below my arms. Holding me still, he moved his left hand and placed it upon my breast, squeezing it aggressively.

It hurt. This...*hurts*. It feels like his nails are ripping at my flesh. It hurts...it hurts so bad...

Placing his right hand on my chin, he forcibly tilts my head upwards. "You never *did* let me kiss you," he said.

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I made my way towards the roof. It took me all of my courage, but I made my decision.

If Michiko was to tell me that she no longer loved me, then fine. I'd accept it. I'd move on. I'll invest myself in my job. I'll become a better man, one worthy of a woman's love. Then one day, *someone* is bound to love me. Maybe it'll be Celeste. Or Shizue. Or someone else, even.

If Michiko was to beg me to get back together with her then...well, I'd like that, but maybe not just yet. I'd need her to give me a few more days, at the very least. I need to be *mentally* ready for it. At the end of the day, our relationship ended once in adultery. I can't help but be cautious. I don't wish to lead her on, but even so, I just can't help but ask for some time to steel myself. But even so, I'd be happy to be with her again, I think.

I found myself before the door to the roof. It was unlocked, and slightly ajar. Taking a deep breath. I place my hand on the doorknob.

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Without another word to me, Junichi pressed his lips onto my own. I barely manage to let out a squeal of both terror and rage. Junichi just forced a kiss onto me—onto the lips that I've saved for my dearest Touma to enjoy, hopefully even for him to indulge in *today*. And yet I couldn't stop Junichi Kimura. I *didn't* stop him. I didn't even *try*.

I know I'm a victim, but even a normal victim would put up a *fight*. But I didn't.

I betrayed my Touma again. Unwillingly, but even so. I didn't even *struggle against it*. No, I'd *instinctively* accepted it.

I'm the scum of the Earth.

Junichi may be the Devil, but I'm still scum.

His tongue forced its way into my mouth, pressing against my cheeks and sometimes against my own tongue. It was a deep kiss. Our saliva had started to drip out of our mouths.

This is rape.

Why did I ever get involved with such a monster?

A moment passed as I continued to try and resist. It was all for naught. The unwanted kiss continued.

The door to the rooftop swung open. My eyes instinctively moved to look in the direction of the entrance.

What I saw horrified me.

Touma walked out onto the rooftop, stretching before opening his eyes. His expression quickly became one of confusion. Or perhaps it was shock.

Then it became a clear expression of anger. His eyes seemed to turn dark. He watched the two of us (that is, Junichi and I, who were still locked in a kiss) with a cold, condescending glare. I could feel the heat radiating from him despite the fact that I was meters away.

Someone is going to die.

I almost immediately realized it. Perhaps as a way of denying the guilt I had, I tried to gesture to him. I tried to show him that I was innocent, but that didn't change the way he glared at me. His eyes were as cold as ice, chilling me to the bone.

Junichi finally pulled away, taking a deep breath. He had an almost deranged smile on his face, one that caused my very being to quiver. He didn't flinch at all from his wicked deed. He seemed to notice my discomfort. Following my gaze, he spotted Touma. And he *laughed*. He *laughed* at my Touma's feelings—his sorrow, his rage, his shock, all of it.

"What's wrong?" Junichi asked mockingly. "Listen Koizumi, Michiko Inoue's body is *mine* now. Your 'girlfriend' deserves a man a *thousand* times better than you, got that? I'm more strong, charming and handsome than you'll ever be, and every last piece of clothing I'm wearing is probably

worth more than your entire *life's savings*. So piss off, loser. You're a stupid nobody, and your feelings mean *nothing* to us. Get used to it."

Touma walked over to us wordlessly, virtually ripping at the buttons on his uniform's blazer. "N-no, wait, please!" I cried. "This isn't what you think it is! I—"

Junichi cut me off with another kiss, his grip on me tightening. My eyes were wide open. I couldn't tell if it was because of the shock from this entire event, or if it was out of fear for what Touma would do to me if I closed my eyes. Instead, I watched as Touma slowly approached. He took off his blazer to reveal a white dress shirt beneath. He calmly rolled up his sleeves.

Junichi finally let me go, throwing me aside as Touma reached us. I landed a little ways away from the two of them, but the pain from landing on my ass doesn't exactly matter right now. Turning to Touma, Junichi gave a confident smirk and swung a fist.

Like that'd work.

Touma dodged the attack and delivered a straight jab with his right arm to Junichi's stomach. And, as expected, his arm lit ablaze on contact, consuming Junichi Kimura's body entirely. The fires reminded me of our date, long ago last November. How long has it been since then? Why have we changed so much in such a short time?

Junichi's flaming body collapsed. The fires began to burn brightly, and the heat could be felt from where I was. I stared at Touma, slowly picking myself up from the ground as I watched his every move. He may come for me next...

"I...I didn't mean for this to happen," I whispered. "This is all just a big misunderstanding—"

"Y'know what's funny?" Touma asked, cutting me off and glaring straight at me. "I thought to myself that I could become better...I thought I could be perfect. But I thought wrong. I can't. I just can't do it."

I froze.

"I'm sorry, Michiko," he said, tears rolling down his cheeks, "but I'm really starting to get tired of your excuses. I don't know what happened here today, but whatever the reason, so be it."

"N-no, Touma, please!" I begged. "This isn't what you think!"

"I'm really sorry, Michiko," he said. "I'm sorry that what we had wasn't good enough for you. I'm really sorry." And with that, Touma turned around. The fires upon his hand were extinguished, and he picked up his blazer.

But I couldn't let it all end like this.

Running after him, I threw my arms around Touma from behind him, tears in the corners of my eyes. "Please, Touma, just listen to me...I swear, this is not what you think it is! Junichi followed me, and he—"

"It's alright, Michiko," he said suddenly. "I don't blame you for this."

"R-really?" I asked, excitement building up in my heart. Perhaps he was willing to start over from scratch. Yes, that would do. I'd be happy to start over again with him, and to be happy with him...

"Of course I don't blame you," Touma said calmly.

I sighed with relief. Moving my hands upwards, I slowly reached for his cheek. He was so close. Just a little more, and I could finally kiss him once again. And we'd be together once again.

I wished so badly for that miracle to become a reality.

Alas, it was but a dream.

"I don't blame you for anything, Michiko," Touma repeated, his voice sounding tired. It sounded sad. It sounded...*disappointed*. "I've never blamed you."

This can't be happening.

"I'll never blame you, Michiko," Touma concluded, "because the only one I have to blame is myself." Forcing me to let go, he walked off. "I'm sorry I'm such a failure," he said as he left the rooftop.

We were so close. Just a little bit more, and we could have had everything back. We could have had *each other* again. I—no, we could have been happy again. But instead, *he* stole it all away. Junichi Kimura stole *everything* from me. Even in death, he went and stole it all.

I fell to my knees as the door shut behind Touma. Scenes of that one night flashed in my mind. The night I was *caught*. Before me, I could see the charred rose lying on the ground beneath the moonlight. I reached out to it slowly, hoping to pick it up once more.

But upon my touch, the poor rose was reduced to mere ash and dust.

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I wish I could've trusted Michiko. I thought we could have been together again, I really did. I don't know what kind of sick game this is anymore, though. Does she get off to this? Is it some sort of sick game of hers? Perhaps she likes to try and play the victim when she isn't. Who knows?

Does she enjoy making me see her with another man?

Does she think trying to deceive me is going to work again?

Is that it?

Time and time again, when I come to her, she's with *him*. She's fucking *him*. She's kissing *him*. It's always *him*. It's always *not me*. That's the problem here, I guess.

My girlfriend is not with me.

That's fucking ironic.

I don't want to blame Michiko. I don't want to hate her. Because I know I love her. But even so, when I want to trust her, my mind simply refuses. I don't know what or who to trust anymore.

Fuck it all.

Pulling out my work phone, I call Celeste. She picks up immediately. "What's wrong?" she asks.

"I fucked up," I replied. "I'll explain later. Get a cleanup crew to the roof of my school."

"Did you kill a guy?" Celeste asked flatly.

"Yeah," I said.

"Alright then," Celeste sighed. "I'll just have to assume you have a good explanation for this, I suppose. We'll cover it up for you this time. But this is a one-time thing, so remember that. And you better give me an explanation tomorrow."

"Thanks Celeste," I said. "I'll see you tomorrow." I hung up. Wiping the tears from my face, I made my way downstairs. I don't even know when I'd started crying, actually. But none of that matters anymore.

Forget Michiko. Forget *that* guy. Forget all of them. I can move on, right? It's over between Michiko and I, and today has been firm proof of that. It's my fault for even going to her today. Maybe I just helped her get off to her crazy little game.

But really, who cares anymore? I have a job tomorrow, don't I?

Forget guilt and pain and suffering.

Forget it all. I can do better. I can focus. I can focus on this wicked endeavor of mine—this crazy job that only *I* could do. I can focus on fighting the good fight. And maybe, just maybe, a better girl will come to love me for *that*.

But in the end, what can I do but hope?