The afternoon sun had mellowed from its morning brass to burnished gold, casting long fingers of light across Nemuri Kayama's apartment. Dust motes danced in the warm rays, suspended like tiny planets in their own quiet universe. The lingering fragrance of coconut and freesia from her salon visit had settled into the space—a whisper of indulgence that clung to silk curtains and polished surfaces.

Before her full-length mirror, she moved with the deliberate grace of someone preparing for battle. But this wasn't the kind of fight she was used to. Her reflection stared back—a woman transformed from the vivacious Midnight into something altogether more dangerous: herself, unguarded.

The midnight-blue silk dress seemed to absorb light rather than reflect it, its fabric flowing like liquid shadow across her curves. The neckline's soft V dipped just enough to suggest without revealing, while the fitted sleeves traced her arms like whispered promises. A single strand of silver rested against her collarbone—no more jewelry than that. Restraint had never been her forte, but tonight called for a different kind of power.

Her wild hair, usually a cascade of controlled chaos, had been tamed into a sleek chignon that exposed the vulnerable curve of her neck. A few calculated strands framed her face, softening the severity. She looked like a woman with secrets—which, she supposed, she was.

"Perfect," she murmured to her reflection, though her voice carried the faintest tremor of uncertainty.

The taxi's interior smelled of worn leather and someone else's perfume. Outside, Musutafu pulsed with evening energy—neon signs flickering to life, office workers hurrying home, couples disappearing into restaurants. The city's heartbeat thrummed through the windows as they wove through traffic that moved like blood through arteries.

Musutafu View Terrace. Eighth floor. His message had been economical, almost curt. She found herself wondering if that terseness masked nervousness or simple confidence. With someone like Kagutsuchi, it was impossible to tell.

The building that emerged from the urban maze was all clean lines and ambitious glass, reaching toward the darkening sky like a crystal spear. The entrance whispered of money—not the gaudy kind that screamed for attention, but the quiet sort that didn't need to.

"Good evening, Kayama-san." The hostess's smile was professional warmth, practiced but genuine. "Fujimoto-san has been expecting you."

The elevator was a shrine to understated luxury—mahogany panels that gleamed like dark honey, brass fixtures that caught and held the light. As they ascended, Nemuri felt her pulse quicken. Eight floors. Seven. Six. Each number brought her closer to something she couldn't quite name.

Get it together, she told herself, smoothing her dress with hands that trembled almost imperceptibly. You've faced down S-class villains. This is just dinner.

But even as she thought it, she knew it was a lie.

The elevator doors whispered open to reveal a space that stole her breath. The restaurant sprawled across the entire floor, its floor-to-ceiling windows offering the city like a glittering gift. Each table sat in its own pool of candlelight, intimate islands in an ocean of urban stars.

And there, at the center of it all, sat a figure that made the rest of the world fade to background noise.

Kagutsuchi—no, Fujimoto, she reminded herself—rose from his chair with fluid grace. The dark suit he wore was clearly bespoke, cut to accommodate the power that seemed to radiate from him even in stillness. His hair caught the candlelight, and when those molten gold eyes found hers across the room, the air itself seemed to thicken.

His smile was slow, genuine, and utterly disarming.

"Nemuri."

Her name in his voice was like whiskey—smooth, warm, with just enough burn to remind you it was dangerous. He didn't extend his hand; instead, he gestured toward the table with old-world courtesy that should have seemed antiquated but somehow felt timeless.

She moved toward him, hyperaware of the silk whispering against her skin, the soft click of her heels on polished floor. When he pulled out her chair, his fingers barely brushed her shoulder, but the touch sent electricity racing down her spine.

"So," she said, settling into the plush seat and leaning forward with calculated casualness, "the hostess called you Fujimoto-san. I have to admit, I wasn't expecting that particular plot twist."

His chuckle was rich, resonant. "Bunta Fujimoto. My civilian identity, you might say."

She blinked, genuinely caught off guard. "But all your paperwork—"

"Says Kagutsuchi, yes." His smile widened, revealing a hint of boyish mischief that was utterly at odds with his imposing presence. "Nezu and I thought it would be amusing. You all still call me by my title, but legally speaking, I'm just another citizen named Bunta."

"Just another citizen," she repeated, her voice dripping with skeptical amusement. "Right. And I'm just another schoolteacher." She tilted her head, studying him with the intensity she usually reserved for particularly challenging students. "So why Kagutsuchi? That's not exactly a name you pick out of a phone book."

Something shifted in his expression—a shadow of memory, perhaps, or the weight of centuries. "It's what they called me when I first walked on Japanese soil," he said simply. "The name stuck."

Understanding bloomed in her mind like a flower opening to sunlight. "Kagutsuchi no Mikoto. The fire god." Her voice was barely above a whisper. "They named you after a deity."

"They named me what they thought I was." His shrug was elegant, dismissive. "I found it... fitting."

She leaned forward, drawn by curiosity and something deeper—a hunger to understand this impossible man across from her. "And what other names have you collected over the centuries?" The question came out more breathless than she'd intended, tinged with desire that had nothing to do with flesh and everything to do with the intoxicating mystery he represented.

His smile turned predatory, playful. "Now where would be the fun in revealing all my secrets at once? Some mysteries are meant to be savored."

"You're impossible," she laughed, but there was no frustration in it—only delight. She sat back, crossing her arms in mock defiance. "Fine. New rule: tell me something personal. Something that wouldn't be in any file, classified or otherwise."

The playfulness faded from his features, replaced by something more thoughtful, more careful. "Before I settled in Japan more recently, I spent considerable time in Italy. But my first visit to this country was during the late Kofun period."

The words hit her like cold water. "The late Kofun era? That's..." She did the math, felt her world tilt slightly. "Over fifteen hundred years ago."

"Give or take a few decades." His tone was conversational, as if they were discussing the weather rather than a timeline that made her feel like a mayfly in comparison.

"And Italy?" Her voice was smaller now, struggling to process the casual way he spoke of centuries.

"Twelfth century onward." A shadow of something—nostalgia? regret?—flickered across his features. "Turbulent times. The Crusades, the rise of city-states, the endless wars between Guelphs and Ghibellines. I was stationed there with other... colleagues... to monitor the situation."

She felt like she was drowning in the implications. "The Crusades. You were there for the actual Crusades."

"Several of them, yes." His voice had grown cooler, more distant. "Politics dressed up as holy war. Land grabs sanctified by scripture. The usual human theater, played out with swords and righteousness."

"But why were you there? I mean, what was your role in all of it?"

The temperature in their small bubble of space seemed to drop several degrees. When he spoke, his voice carried the weight of eons. "Every world, every timeline, follows certain... parameters. Key events that must occur for history to unfold correctly. My colleagues and I ensure those events happen as they should."

Something cold coiled in her stomach. "And if they don't?"

His golden eyes met hers without flinching, without mercy. "Then that world is classified as a failure."

The words hung between them like a blade. She found her throat had gone dry, her carefully applied lipstick suddenly feeling like paint on a corpse. "What happens to failed worlds?"

"I think you already know the answer to that."

The casual way he said it—as if he were commenting on the wine selection—made her blood freeze. She stared at him, this impossible man who spoke of genocide with the detachment of a bureaucrat discussing quarterly reports.

But then his expression softened, warmth creeping back into those molten eyes. "This world is safe, Nemuri. Even with the emergence of Quirks, you're still well within acceptable parameters. There's nothing to fear."

She took a shaking breath, trying to process what she'd just learned. "And this—what you've just told me—this isn't classified?"

His laugh was genuinely amused now. "This is barely scratching the surface. What's truly classified is the mechanism by which we maintain those parameters. The actual work we do." He leaned forward slightly, his voice dropping to a whisper that somehow carried more weight than a shout. "If I told you that, you might never sleep peacefully again."

She gave a nervous laugh, reaching for her menu like a lifeline. "Right. Moving on to lighter topics before I have an existential crisis over appetizers." She paused, gathering herself. "Let's talk about you—the real you. I mean, you probably know everything about me already, don't you? My life's an open book to someone like you."

"Knowing facts about someone isn't the same as understanding them." His voice had gentled, become almost tender. "I may know your history, your preferences, your fears—but I don't know you. The woman behind the hero, behind the teacher. The person who chooses what to share and what to keep sacred."

A blush crept up her neck, warming her cheeks. It had been a long time since someone had made her feel truly seen rather than simply observed. "You make it sound almost romantic—this surveillance you do."

"It's not surveillance when it comes to you." The words came out more intense than he'd apparently intended, because something flickered across his face—surprise, perhaps, at his own honesty. "It's... curiosity. You fascinate me in ways that have nothing to do with protocol or duty."

The admission hung between them, vulnerable and electric. She felt her carefully maintained composure crack, revealing something raw underneath.

"I..." She started, then stopped, overwhelmed by the magnitude of what was happening. This wasn't just dinner anymore. It was something far more dangerous, far more precious.

"Where should I begin?" she whispered, the question encompassing so much more than just her life story.

His smile was soft, patient, devastating. "Wherever you want. We have all the time in the world."

All the time in the world. Coming from someone who had lived through centuries, who had watched empires rise and fall, who had witnessed the birth and death of ages—the phrase carried weight beyond measure.

Outside the windows, Musutafu glittered like a handful of stars scattered across velvet. But inside their bubble of candlelight and whispered confessions, time seemed to slow, to bend, to become something malleable and precious.

She looked at him—really looked at him—and saw not the ancient entity, not the keeper of divine balance, but simply a man who was asking her to trust him with her truth.

And despite everything—despite the terrifying revelations, despite the impossible nature of what he was—she found that she wanted to.

Their conversation unfolded like silk unwinding from a spool—smooth, luxurious, inevitable. Nemuri found herself sharing stories she'd kept locked away for years: the loneliness of being seen as a sexual fantasy rather than a person, the weight of responsibility that came with shaping young minds, the quiet moments of doubt that visited her in the small hours of the morning. Kagutsuchi listened with an intensity that was both flattering and unnerving, as if every word she spoke was being carefully catalogued and treasured.

When the waiter appeared—a ghost-silent professional who materialized at their table without disturbing the intimate bubble they'd created—the ordering felt almost secondary to their conversation. The food, when it arrived, was artistry on porcelain: delicate arrangements of flavor and color that spoke of a chef who understood that some meals were meant to be remembered. They ate in companionable quiet, the comfortable silence of two people who no longer felt the need to fill every moment with words.

The city sprawled beneath them, a living tapestry of light and motion, while above them the first stars began to pierce the deepening indigo sky. Nemuri found herself stealing glances at her companion between bites, noting the way candlelight played across the sharp angles of his face, how his eyes seemed to hold depths that reflected more than just the flame's glow.

"You know," she said finally, touching her napkin to her lips with deliberate care, "the way you speak about your work—all this divine responsibility—it sounds like you're not carrying this burden alone. Are there others? Besides you and Graviel?"

Something shifted in Kagutsuchi's expression, a subtle relaxation that suggested relief at moving to safer conversational territory. "Seven of us, actually," he replied, and there was something almost fond in his voice, like a parent speaking of difficult but beloved children.

Nemuri's fork paused halfway to her mouth. "Seven." The number hung in the air between them, heavy with implication. "Should I be worried? After Graviel's... theatrical introduction to our school, I have to wonder if we're in for more surprise visits."

His chuckle was warm, reassuring. "Graviel is unique among us in his flair for the dramatic. Most of the others prefer subtlety—they operate in shadows and silence, content to remain unseen by mortal eyes."

As he spoke, his gaze drifted past her shoulder, and something flickered across his features—recognition tinged with what might have been amusement or apprehension. His smile took on a knowing quality that made Nemuri's skin prickle with awareness.

"Speaking of which," he murmured, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, "we appear to have company. Don't turn around just yet, but..."

The command was futile; curiosity had always been Nemuri's weakness. She turned, following his gaze to a table positioned in the restaurant's shadows, where candlelight barely touched the occupants. One figure sat with their back to her—a silhouette of careful anonymity that somehow radiated deliberate concealment.

Kagutsuchi raised his hand in a subtle gesture, and the shadowed figure's posture changed, becoming alert. After a moment's hesitation—long enough to suggest internal debate—the person rose with fluid grace and began approaching their table.

As the figure drew closer, stepping into the restaurant's ambient lighting, Nemuri felt her breath catch. It was a woman, though 'woman' seemed an inadequate term for the creature moving toward them with predatory elegance. Her blonde hair was cut in a severe bob that framed sharp, aristocratic features. Amber eyes, cold as winter morning, surveyed the world through wire-rimmed monocle glasses that somehow managed to look both scholarly and menacing. She wore darkness like armor—a black turtleneck that emphasized the pale column of her throat, topped with a white jacket that was tailored with military precision.

When she reached their table, the temperature seemed to drop several degrees. Her amber gaze fixed on Kagutsuchi with the intensity of a laser sight, and before anyone could speak, her hand moved in a blur of motion.

The crack of palm against cheek echoed through the restaurant like a gunshot. Conversations died mid-sentence. Silverware froze in mid-air. Even the waitstaff paused in their choreographed dance between tables, turning to stare at the tableau unfolding in the center of their refined establishment.

"Selaphiel," Kagutsuchi said with remarkable composure, one hand rising to touch his reddening cheek. His tone held the long-suffering patience of someone accustomed to such treatment. "Your subtlety, as always, is breathtaking."

The woman—Selaphiel—was decidedly unimpressed by his attempt at levity. When she spoke, her voice was cultured silk wrapped around a blade. "Don't you dare 'Selaphiel' me, Michael," she snapped, her voice low and sharp. "I was enjoying a perfectly civilized dinner with Lucifer—our first meal together in three centuries—and I would prefer not to have it interrupted by your theatrical gestures."

Nemuri felt the world tilt slightly off its axis. Michael? The implications crashed over her like a tsunami. She looked between the two figures, seeing them with new eyes—ancient powers wearing human faces, entities whose true names carried the weight of legend and nightmare.

Kagutsuchi's eyebrows rose in theatrical surprise, though his eyes held genuine interest. "Lucifer is here?" His gaze moved past Selaphiel to the shadowed table she'd abandoned, where another figure remained seated, carefully maintaining their anonymity in the restaurant's dim recesses. "How delightfully unexpected."

Around them, the other diners had begun to settle back into their conversations, the slap dismissed as merely a piece of urban drama—a lovers' quarrel, perhaps, or a business deal gone wrong. They couldn't have known they were witnessing a confrontation between beings whose existence predated their civilization.

Selaphiel's amber eyes flicked to Nemuri for the first time, and in that brief glance, Nemuri felt herself catalogued, assessed, and filed away with terrifying efficiency. "And you," Selaphiel said, her voice carrying centuries of barely contained irritation, "must be the mortal he's been fixated on." The word 'mortal' was delivered with the same tone one might use to describe a particularly interesting insect.

"Nemuri Kayama," she managed, surprised by the steadiness of her own voice. "Though I'm starting to think introductions should include full disclosure of divine significance."

A ghost of a smile touched Selaphiel's lips—there and gone so quickly it might have been imagined. "How refreshingly direct." She turned back to Kagutsuchi—Michael—with renewed intensity. "I trust this interruption has a purpose beyond showcasing your latest romantic conquest?"

The casual cruelty of the words hit Nemuri like a physical blow, but before she could respond, Kagutsuchi's expression hardened. When he spoke, there was steel beneath the silk of his voice. "Mind your tongue, Selaphiel. The lady deserves better than your jealousy."

"Jealousy?" Selaphiel's laugh was like breaking crystal. "My dear Michael, you mistake my concern for the mission with personal interest. Some of us remember what happened the last time one of our number became... entangled... with mortal affairs."

The words carried a weight that made the air itself feel heavy. Nemuri sensed undercurrents of ancient history, old wounds that had never properly healed. She was witnessing something that mortals were never meant to see—the personal dynamics of beings who shaped the very foundations of reality.

"That," Kagutsuchi said quietly, "was different. And you know it."

For a moment, something almost vulnerable flickered across Selaphiel's sharp features. Then the mask reasserted itself, cold and impenetrable as winter ice. "Was it?" she asked, and the question carried the weight of eons. "Because from where I'm standing, it looks remarkably familiar."

The silence that followed was heavy with unspoken history, with decisions that had shaped worlds and broken them. Nemuri felt like an intruder in a conversation that predated her species, yet she was inexorably part of it now—a catalyst in whatever ancient drama was unfolding between these impossible beings.

Finally, Selaphiel stepped back, her posture suggesting dismissal. "Enjoy your dinner, Michael. But remember—some mistakes are too costly to repeat." Her amber gaze flicked once more to Nemuri. "Both of you would do well to remember that."

And with that, she turned and glided back toward the shadows, leaving behind the faint scent of winter air and the lingering echo of warnings that felt more like prophecy.

The silence that descended upon their table wasn't merely quiet—it was a living thing, heavy and suffocating, pressing down on them like the weight of centuries. The restaurant's ambient sounds—the gentle clink of crystal, the murmur of distant conversations, the soft jazz filtering through hidden speakers—all seemed to retreat, as if the very air around them had become too dense for sound to properly travel.

Nemuri sat motionless, her fork suspended halfway between plate and mouth, forgotten. The carefully prepared meal before her might as well have been cardboard and paste. Her world had just shifted on its axis, and she was still trying to find her balance in this new reality where archangels slapped each other in five-star restaurants and the man she was falling for carried names that had shaped human mythology for millennia.

Across from her, Kagutsuchi—Michael, her mind corrected with a kind of numb disbelief—had returned to his dinner with an equanimity that was almost insulting in its casualness. His golden eyes remained downcast, focused on the precise movements of cutting his food, as if the careful ritual could somehow restore normalcy to their evening. The red mark on his cheek had begun to fade, but it served as a stark reminder that what had just occurred was no hallucination.

When he finally looked up, catching her staring, his smile was small and apologetic—the expression of someone who had just tracked mud through a pristine house.

"That was Selaphiel," he said, his voice carrying the same conversational tone he might use to comment on the weather. "One of the seven I mentioned. She's... particular about her privacy, though she does occasionally descend from her ivory tower to remind the rest of us why solitude is sometimes preferable to company."

The casual way he dismissed what had just happened—as if supernatural beings crashing their dinner was merely a minor social inconvenience—made something snap inside Nemuri. Her throat felt raw, constricted, as if she'd been screaming though she'd barely whispered a word all evening.

"She called you Michael." The words escaped her lips in a hoarse whisper, laden with implications that made her hands tremble where they rested on the white tablecloth. She couldn't bring herself to look away from his face, searching for some sign that this was all an elaborate joke, some cosmic misunderstanding.

He set down his fork with deliberate precision, the soft clink against porcelain unnaturally loud in their bubble of tension. When his molten gold eyes met hers, she saw something she hadn't expected—vulnerability. Raw, ancient, and carefully hidden beneath layers of composure.

The silence stretched between them like a taut wire, vibrating with unspoken questions and the weight of revelation. She didn't need to voice her demand; it hung in the air between them, as clear as if she'd shouted it across the restaurant.

Finally, with a nod so slight it was barely perceptible, he spoke. "Yes." The single word fell between them like a stone into still water, sending ripples through everything she thought she knew. "I am that Michael."

The admission hit her like a physical blow. The taste of her dinner turned to ash on her tongue, and for a moment, she wondered if she might actually faint—something she'd never done in her life, not even during her most grueling hero training. Her gaze involuntarily drifted to the shadowed table across the restaurant, where another figure sat in careful anonymity.

"And... Lucifer?" The name felt strange on her lips, too large and terrible for casual conversation. "He's really here? Should I be..." She swallowed hard, her voice dropping to barely above a whisper. "Am I about to be dragged into the bad place? Because I should probably mention I haven't updated my will recently."

The attempt at humor fell flat, hanging in the air like smoke from a snuffed candle. But it served its purpose—breaking the crushing weight of the moment just enough for her to breathe again.

Kagutsuchi's—Michael's—chuckle was soft, tinged with something that might have been fondness for her attempt to lighten the mood. "You're safe, Nemuri. That's not... that's not how things work anymore." He paused, and for the first time since she'd known him, she saw a flash of genuine pain in his eyes. "Besides, he doesn't talk to me anymore."

The simple statement carried the weight of eons, of relationships severed by choices too large for mortal comprehension. In those few words, she heard the echo of a loss so profound it had shaped the very foundations of human understanding of good and evil, of fall and redemption.

"How long?" she asked quietly, surprising herself with the question. "How long since you've spoken?"

His smile was bitter as winter wind. "Time moves differently for us, but... by your measurements? Several thousand years. Give or take a few centuries."

The casual way he discussed millennia of estrangement made her heart ache. She found herself studying his profile as he gazed toward the shadowed table where his former brother sat in deliberate isolation. The candlelight caught the sharp planes of his face, highlighting the weight he carried—not just the responsibility of divine balance, but the personal cost of choices made before humanity had learned to count beyond their fingers.

"Do you miss him?" The question slipped out before she could stop it, too intimate and too revealing of her own growing feelings for this impossible man.

For a long moment, he didn't answer. When he finally spoke, his voice was so quiet she had to lean forward to hear him. "Every day."

The admission hung between them like a bridge—fragile, precious, and utterly unexpected. In that moment, she saw not the archangel Michael, not the divine enforcer Kagutsuchi, but simply a being who had loved and lost and carried that wound across the ages.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, and meant it with a depth that surprised her.

His eyes found hers again, and in them she saw gratitude mixed with something else—something that looked dangerously like hope.

The quiet that followed them from the restaurant wasn't the comfortable silence of earlier—it was heavier now, weighted with revelations that had fundamentally altered the landscape between them. The evening air carried a chill that seemed to seep through Nemuri's silk dress, though she suspected the cold came from within rather than the October night.

Musutafu stretched around them like a living diorama, its neon signs and bustling streets suddenly seeming fragile—an elaborate stage set that could be dismantled by forces beyond human comprehension. The ordinary sounds of urban life—car engines, distant laughter, the hum of electrical signs—felt surreal after what she'd witnessed. How could the world continue its mundane rhythm when angels walked among mortals, when divine drama played out over dinner and wine?

The walk back to her apartment building passed in a respectful quiet, the rhythm of their footsteps a steady counterpoint to the thrum of the city. Her heels clicked on the pavement, a sound that seemed terribly mundane in the wake of such a momentous evening. She kept stealing glances at Kagutsuchi's face, trying to reconcile the man who had ordered her dinner with the being who had cast his own brother from heaven. The angry red mark on his cheek had faded completely, leaving no physical trace of Selaphiel's disapproval, though the memory of it hung between them like smoke.

The silence stretched until it became unbearable. Nemuri had never been comfortable with unspoken tensions—her nature demanded clarity, understanding, resolution.

"Selaphiel," she said finally, the name feeling strange and powerful on her tongue, like speaking an incantation that might summon something she wasn't prepared to face. "How is it that she can sit down to dinner with Lucifer as if..." She struggled for words that could encompass the magnitude of what she was trying to understand. "I mean, given your... history... I would have thought you and he were the closest. Brothers in arms, and all that."

Kagutsuchi's smile was a masterpiece of melancholy, touching his lips but never reaching the golden depths of his eyes. When he spoke, his voice carried the weight of eons. "Among all those in heaven, Lucifer and Selaphiel shared the deepest bond. They were... inseparable, in a way that transcended the relationships the rest of us had."

Something in his tone made her study his face more carefully. There was a wistfulness there, a kind of vicarious pain that spoke of watching something beautiful from the outside. "Romantic?" she asked, though the word felt inadequate for beings whose existence predated human concepts of love.

He was quiet for several steps, considering his words with the care of someone who had learned that careless speech could reshape worlds. "I wouldn't diminish what they had by calling it something so simple," he said eventually. "It was love, yes, but the kind that burns at the core of stars—too fierce for mortal understanding, too complex for easy categorization. They were two halves of something larger than either could be alone."

The pain that flickered across his features was so brief she might have missed it if she hadn't been watching so intently. "After the Fall," he continued, his voice growing softer, more careful, "they've had to conduct their relationship here, in the mortal realm. Heaven's gates are closed to him now, and she... she chooses exile over abandoning him."

The implications hit Nemuri like a physical blow. "She gave up heaven? For him?"

"Love," Kagutsuchi said with something that might have been admiration or envy, "makes fools of us all. Even angels."

They had stopped walking without her realizing it, standing beneath a streetlight that cast them both in pools of amber illumination. The city continued its restless dance around them, but they might as well have been alone on an island in space.

"And you?" The question escaped before she could stop it, gentler than she'd intended but loaded with implications she wasn't sure she was ready to explore. "You're still... I mean, heaven is still home for you?"

He turned to face her fully, and the city lights behind him created a halo effect that was either divine irony or perfect symbolism. For a moment, he looked exactly like what he was—an archangel bearing the weight of duty that had cost him everything he'd held dear.

"Things are as they should be," he said, but the words came out flat, rehearsed, as if he'd repeated them to himself countless times without ever quite believing them. "He broke the fundamental laws that govern creation itself. Someone had to enforce consequences. Someone had to..." His voice caught, so briefly she almost missed it. "Someone had to cast him down."

The simple statement contained multitudes of pain. She could see it now—not just the divine enforcer, but the brother who had been forced to choose between love and duty, who had chosen duty and carried the wound of that choice across millennia.

"You didn't want to," she said, and it wasn't a question.

His laugh was bitter as winter wind. "Want had nothing to do with it. The rules aren't suggestions, Nemuri. They're the fundamental framework that keeps reality from unraveling. When someone breaks them—even someone you..." He stopped, his jaw tightening. "Even someone you care about—there are consequences. Always."

She could see him retreating into the role, the cosmic responsibility that he wore like armor against the pain of personal loss. But she'd seen beneath it now, seen the man who missed his brother, who carried guilt like a stone in his chest.

The weight of his words settled between them like a physical presence. Nemuri found herself studying the play of light and shadow across his features, seeing not the divine enforcer but a being trapped by the very righteousness that defined him.

"Do you regret it?" The question slipped out before she could consider its implications. "The choice you made?"

His silence stretched long enough that she wondered if she'd overstepped some invisible boundary. When he finally spoke, his voice was carefully controlled. "Regret implies I had alternatives. The law was broken. Order had to be restored. The fact that it destroyed everything I..." He stopped, his jaw working silently for a moment. "Personal feelings are a luxury I can't afford."

But even as he said it, she could see the lie in the tension of his shoulders, the way his hands clenched and released at his sides. This wasn't the serene acceptance of duty—this was a man who had convinced himself that sacrifice was the same as righteousness.

"That's not an answer," she said gently. "That's a justification."

He turned to look at her then, really look at her, and she saw something crack in his golden eyes—a hairline fracture in the armor he'd worn for millennia. "You're dangerous, Nemuri Kayama," he said, but there was no heat in it, only a kind of weary recognition. "You make me remember what it felt like to be more than just duty and consequence."

The admission hung between them, vulnerable and electric. She realized they had stopped walking entirely, standing in their pool of streetlight like actors on a stage, the city's rhythm continuing around them while time seemed suspended in their small bubble of honesty.

The walk back to her apartment building passed in a comfortable haze, their conversation shifting to lighter topics—the city's architecture, the evening's unexpectedly mild weather, anything that didn't require them to excavate more ancient wounds. But beneath the surface pleasantries, Nemuri was acutely aware of every step bringing them closer to the end of this impossible evening.

Her building materialized before them, a modest residential tower that suddenly felt embarrassingly ordinary after the night's revelations. The lobby's fluorescent lighting seemed harsh and artificial compared to the restaurant's candlelit ambiance, and she found herself hesitating at the entrance, reluctant to break whatever spell had been woven between them.

"This is me," she said unnecessarily, gesturing toward the glass doors with their simple brass handles. The words felt inadequate, too mundane for what they'd shared.

Kagutsuchi nodded, his hands sliding into his coat pockets as he turned to face her fully. The streetlight caught the gold in his eyes, making them seem to glow with their own inner fire. "Thank you for tonight, Nemuri. For... listening. It's been a long time since I've spoken about any of this with someone who didn't already know the ending."

She felt her heart leap in her chest, a complicated flutter that had nothing to do with his supernatural nature and everything to do with the way he said her name, like it was something precious. "Thank you for trusting me with it," she replied softly. "I know it couldn't have been easy."

He stepped closer, close enough that she could catch the faint scent of his cologne—something expensive and subtle that spoke of cedar and winter air. "Good night, Nemuri."

The moment stretched between them, electric with possibility. She could feel the weight of propriety, of reasonable caution, of all the sensible reasons why kissing an archangel on her first date was probably inadvisable. But looking up into those ancient golden eyes, seeing the man beneath the cosmic responsibility, she found she didn't care about sensible.

Before she could lose her nerve, she rose up on her toes and pressed her lips to his.

The kiss was soft, tentative—a question rather than a demand. For a heartbeat, he went perfectly still, and she wondered if she'd made a terrible mistake. But then his hand came up to cup her cheek, warm and gentle, and he kissed her back with a tenderness that made her knees weak.

When they broke apart, the silence that followed was deafening. Nemuri felt her cheeks burn, suddenly uncertain. Had she overstepped? Misread the signals? Made things impossibly complicated?

But then Kagutsuchi smiled—that slow, knowing expression that had first caught her attention in the faculty meeting—and she felt her own lips curve in response.

"See you at work tomorrow," she managed, her voice slightly breathless.

"Indeed you will," he replied, his voice carrying a warmth that made her stomach flutter all over again.

She watched from the lobby as he walked away, his figure growing smaller under the streetlights until he disappeared around a corner. Only then did she press the elevator button, her fingers still tingling from where they'd touched his face.

Three blocks away, Kagutsuchi paused in the shadow of an alley and reached behind his back, his fingers finding the small device that had been carefully attached to his coat collar. The transmitter was a masterpiece of miniaturization—barely larger than a button, with the kind of sophisticated circuitry that could only have come from one source.

"Yaoyorozu's handiwork," he murmured to himself, examining the device with genuine admiration. The girl had outdone herself—the transmission range alone must have been considerable, and the audio quality would have been pristine.

He thought of nineteen young faces gathered around phones and laptops, listening with growing horror and fascination as their enigmatic janitor revealed himself to be one of the foundational figures of human mythology. Their reactions would have been... entertaining. Poor Midoriya was probably having some sort of analytical breakdown, while Bakugo was likely oscillating between rage and existential confusion. Todoroki would be processing the information with his usual stoic intensity, and Iida was undoubtedly researching whether there were proper protocols for discovering your school janitor was an archangel.

"You're welcome, kids," he said softly to the empty air, a smile playing at his lips. "Consider it an early lesson in the complexity of the world you're inheriting."

With a gentle squeeze, he crushed the transmitter between his fingers, the delicate electronics crumbling to dust that scattered on the evening breeze. The evidence vanished into the night, leaving no trace of the evening's surveillance.

Sliding his hands into his coat pockets, he began walking again, a soft melody rising from his lips—a gentle, nostalgic tune that seemed to capture something of the evening's bittersweet magic. The Japanese pop song drifted through the empty streets, a piece of modern beauty carried by a voice that had once sung hosannas in the presence of the divine.

As he disappeared into the urban maze, the melody lingered in the air like a promise, sweet and melancholy and full of hope for whatever tomorrow might bring.