

Lie in the Sound

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11393409) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/11393409>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	Nazotoki wa Dinner no Ato De , Kizoku Tantei Noble Detective
Relationships:	Hosho Reiko/Kageyama , Hosho Reiko/Noble Detective
Characters:	Hosho Reiko , Kageyama (Nazotoki wa Dinner no Ato De) , Noble Detective (Kizoku Tantei)
Additional Tags:	Canon - Japanese Drama , Angst , Hurt/Comfort , Crossovers & Fandom Fusions , Detectives , Post-Series , Sex , Oral Sex , Cunnilingus , Post-Break Up , Aftermath of Violence , Non-Graphic Violence , Complicated Relationships , Butlers
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-07-04 Words: 15,030 Chapters: 2/2

Lie in the Sound

by [astrangerenters](#)

Summary

After a harrowing incident turns Reiko's world upside down, she's desperate to feel normal again. But that might not be possible.

(Nazodi / Kizoku Tantei crossover)

Notes

So there's a lot of comedy potential with a crossover like this, right? Well, here's an angst dump instead. Sorry. I have a lot of feelings.

There's really no Kizoku Tantei spoilers here—all you need to know is the basic premise: a hot, wealthy dude who looks like Aiba is a detective, but his servants do all the investigating. However, this story expects you to know a little more about Nazodi.

Title from [the song](#) by Trespassers William.

Chapter 1

Reiko buttons her blouse quickly before reaching for her blazer. When she turns to look at the mirror, she's pleased with what she sees. There she is, Hosho Reiko. Tokyo Metropolitan Police, Kunitachi branch. Star detective. Her hair is tied back in a prim ponytail, her glasses lend her an intellectual air, and her pantsuit is simple but comfortable.

It's been a while since she's been able to see this Hosho Reiko, and she can't help smiling.

She adds a coat of her favorite lipstick and grabs her work bag from her chair, leaving her bedroom behind as she descends the stairs to the dining room. The house is rather quiet this morning, and she finds her breakfast already waiting. She lets out a huff of disappointment and has a seat at the table, setting her bag down beside her. Lifting the lid reveals a hearty breakfast of French toast and sausage, hot from the kitchen and ready to see her through a challenging day.

It's not until she's draining the last of her orange juice that Kageyama bothers to make an appearance. He comes to clear her place, his movements efficient as always as he removes the plate and silverware. She knows by now not to bother talking. The only conversation she'll receive in return will lack depth. He'll comment on the weather, the new gardener with her grand plans for the rose bushes, or perhaps some odd anecdote he heard on the radio.

How many weeks has it been now, Reiko wonders, since Kageyama has been able to look her in the eye?

She tamps down her disappointment, her bubbling anger, and thanks him politely for the meal. She gets to her feet, taking her bag with her as she heads for the garage. He meets her there, holding the limousine door for her.

The ride from the house to the station is utterly silent this morning. In the past, Reiko used this time to complain. About Kazamatsuri's boneheaded assumptions, about the latest gossip in the forensics lab, about her neverending pile of paperwork. This morning Reiko simply stares out the window, the sights outside familiar and comforting. The gas station they always pass. The elementary school with its playground full of boisterous children. She's missed it, this familiar route. Before, she took it for granted. The world spins on outside the limousine, but inside it the world is stuck on that day just over four months ago. Reiko bites the inside of her lip, wanting to be free of the unnerving quiet.

He holds the door for her again after he parks, but it's not the old meeting place. Of course not. Kageyama's a creature of habit, but he'll never park there again. Instead she's now two blocks west of the station instead of three blocks east. She rejected all of his other suggestions. All of them were closer to the building, and Reiko prefers her colleagues to remain in the dark about her social status.

She steps out of the limo, bag in hand. Reiko turns her head, trying to look at him. His eyes face down, fixed on some part of the door. Anywhere but at her.

“Please have a safe and pleasant day, my lady,” he says in a friendly-enough tone. It’s too rehearsed, like nearly everything he says to her now.

She misses him. He’s standing right here, holding the door, performing his duties admirably. Respectfully. He’s Kageyama with his tuxedo and bow tie, Kageyama with his glasses and dark hair. He’s Kageyama, but he’s not hers. And he might never be again.

“See you tonight,” she replies, ignoring the slight throb in her shoulder when she hoists her bag and walks away.

—

She tugs her hair free from the elastic, sighing in relief after another long day. Reiko’s phone chirps with a new text message as she rounds the corner and heads down the quiet, tree-lined street. She wants a nice hot bath and if she pouts enough, maybe she’ll get a massage without having to ask for it.

She retrieves her phone from her bag, smiling at the notification. Speak of the devil.

Her heels tap rhythmically against the pavement as she reads the message. Running a few minutes late. Traffic. Many apologies. She rolls her eyes. Great, it’s only going to delay her massage.

The comfort of bath bubbles and the touch of warm, gentle fingers are flooding her mind as she walks. She passes a hedge, and since the person is wearing sneakers, she only hears their footsteps at the last moment.

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She’s welcomed back with an embarrassing amount of clapping and a three-tiered cake that she suspects Kazamatsuri bought mostly so he could eat it himself. Reiko accepts the well wishes with a grateful smile before easing away from the celebration and going to the chief’s office.

He spent most of the last week telling her to take more time, but Reiko doesn’t need any more time. She’s only been cleared for investigative duty anyhow. Crime scene visits and interviews. Nothing too taxing, doctor’s orders. She just needs to be here. She needs to be Hosho Reiko. Tokyo Metropolitan Police, Kunitachi branch. Star detective. After four long months of Hosho Reiko, hospitalized and Hosho Reiko, resting at home, she needs to be herself again. She needs to be out there, fighting to keep Kunitachi safe.

The chief doesn’t put her on Kazamatsuri’s current case. He doesn’t need to say why. He thinks it’s the right thing to do. Four women, three in Kunitachi, the other from Hino. Two survived their attacks, two unfortunately did not. It’s only a matter of time before Headquarters sends a team out to take over since Kazamatsuri’s leads keep drying up. Of course they’re drying up, Reiko thinks. It’s because she’s been gone.

Instead she’s tasked with joining another case in progress, a series of thefts at the local high school. She accepts the assignment with a smile, even though she’s disappointed. But work is

work, and Reiko finds the lead detective to receive her orders for the day.

Reiko spends three hours interviewing some rather snotty teenagers before she gets the call from Kazamatsuri. He sent the most irritating floral display to the hospital, but he meant well by it. And now that she's back, he's not about to let the opportunity to force her to do work for him pass him by.

"Hosho-kun, where are you?"

"I'm still on the Kunitachi Senior High case with Inspector Harada," she tells him patiently, her partner for the day watching her with irritation in his eyes. The guy can't stand Kazamatsuri.

"Well, I'm at Joyama Park. Get over here right away."

Kazamatsuri doesn't have the authority to pull her off her current case, but Reiko is secretly grateful for his grouchy orders. She puts up a good fight though. "Keibu, I have more interviews to complete over here."

"They can wait!"

He hangs up on her, and Reiko makes a face. Harada shakes his head. "You don't have to go, Hosho."

Harada is absolutely right. She doesn't have to go. She already has an assignment. But the women in Kazamatsuri's case deserve justice. It seems a bit more urgent and pressing than some jewelry being stolen from a student's locker. And she can always remind the chief that Kazamatsuri still outranks her on the detective squad (and perhaps that could change with a well-deserved promotion...)

She pretends to be annoyed when she leaves Harada behind, asking the patrolman to bring her to Joyama Park. She feels more like herself, like Hosho Reiko, star detective when the patrol car pulls away from the curb.

—

She's still woozy from surgery when Kazamatsuri arrives, bragging about his gaudy "Get Well Soon" roses before telling her that the assailant has been arrested. She'd fought back hard, scratching her nails across his face. It's how they managed to find him, and he's being held at Headquarters. It's Ichimatsu Yuto, the husband of Ichimatsu Raya. It was Reiko who was responsible for putting Raya behind bars for attempted murder after she tried to poison her boss. Well, Kageyama's deductions played a part, but it was Reiko who'd gotten the warrant to search her home and find the evidence.

Now husband and wife are both in jail and won't be coming home any time soon.

Kazamatsuri's a little confused though, asking why Reiko was walking in that direction from the police station after work that night. The train station is closer, the taxi stand is closer, and

he knows that Reiko has never parked a car in the lot before. She lies and says she was simply enjoying a pleasant walk, was on her way to a different train station to get home.

She's never told anyone, and especially not Inspector Kazamatsuri, that she's picked up every evening in a limousine so her butler can bring her home to the mansion she lives in. The chief knows, but only because he has to.

And she'll never tell anyone, especially not Inspector Kazamatsuri, that her butler was late in picking her up that night because he was buying her flowers.

—

Reiko is alarmed when she finds Kazamatsuri standing impatiently outside of an elaborate tent in the middle of Joyama Park, only yards from the fourth crime scene. There's a bespectacled middle aged man in what Reiko easily recognizes as a butler's uniform standing just at the tent's entry flap.

The closer she gets to the fancy thing, the quicker her brain works. Great. He's finally come to Kunitachi. Kazamatsuri turns to her when she arrives, and even in his flashy white suit, he's not the most eye-catching thing in Joyama Park. She knows that Kazamatsuri hates to be upstaged.

"Hosho-kun, finally. What took you so long?"

She's arrived only ten minutes after his call, so he's just being a jerk. She inclines her head in greeting to the strange butler and stands before her senior officer. "Keibu, I came as quickly as I could manage. What's the problem here?"

"The problem," Kazamatsuri complains, hands on his white-trousered hips, "is that my investigation is being taken away from me."

The butler bows to them both.

Reiko hides a bitter smile. "Taken away?"

"I can't even get inside here unless you're with me!" Kazamatsuri complains. "I'm the lead detective here, but apparently whoever's inside here will only talk to me if you're here too!"

The butler is nothing like Kageyama, speaking to her in the most reverent and respectful tones. He introduces himself as Yamamoto and explains that his master has been in touch with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police.

"He has grave concerns about this case, Hosho-sama. Kazamatsuri-sama. He only wishes to see it solved as soon as possible."

Reiko cocks her head. "I'm sorry, Yamamoto, but I'm on another case right now. This case is Inspector Kazamatsuri's to investigate..."

"Please," Yamamoto interrupts with an apologetic look in his eyes. "Won't you come in and speak to the master?"

Reiko has no choice but to agree. Yamamoto holds the flap of the tent open, and she steps inside, an impatient Kazamatsuri at her heels.

The tent is just as obnoxious and ostentatious as she's heard. It appears in a flash and can be dismantled in a flash, yet it has a floor. Seating for guests. Statues and plants and a woman in a rather old-fashioned maid's attire standing dutifully beside a cart, bowing as Reiko enters and offering her a cup of tea. Kageyama, at least the old Kageyama, would have relished the opportunity to have his afternoon tea from such a grand set of cups and saucers.

Reiko accepts the tea and has a seat on a small sofa while Kazamatsuri nibbles on a few cookies and is desperately trying not to like them. He goes back to the maid, Tanaka, for another handful without bothering to thank her.

Reiko's had a few sips of tea when he arrives. She only knows about him through what her father has told her. He's an investor in the Hosho Group, owning ten percent of all company shares. Papa has always liked him, even though his existence is such a mystery.

He has no name, or at least no name he's publicly known by. Even his stock has been purchased through a holding company, KT Enterprises. He only appears in the Hosho Group's annual report under his ridiculous alias.

"So this is the Noble Detective," Kazamatsuri says, crumbs flying from his mouth as a man comes into the tent and heads for a rather throne-like chair on a small, raised platform. He offers no apologies for the delay as he takes a seat, looking between her and Kazamatsuri with a twinkle in his eye.

He's handsome, absurdly so, Reiko realizes, even as she takes in his odd appearance. He's tall, lean, his black hair slicked back away from his face. He's dressed like an aristocrat from another century in a long brown coat that falls almost to his knees and tight white trousers tucked into knee-high boots. He looks like someone who's lost on his way to a costume party, except Reiko knows he's the real deal.

His voice is smooth and relaxed as he rests his hands on the arms of his fancy chair. He has a rather wicked smile, and Reiko knows something her father doesn't. Her father only knows him as "Noble Detective," stockholder. Reiko has heard whispers among friends of his flirtatious nature, his cavalier attitude. Seeing him in person, even in his peculiar clothes, it's hard to deny how attractive he is, the confidence he exudes.

"Hosho Reiko," Noble Detective says. "And Kazamatsuri Kyoichiro. I trust my servants have offered you proper refreshments."

Kazamatsuri is clearly put off by the overt displays of wealth under the Noble Detective's tent. He is probably seething that he doesn't have a gaudy tent of his own to set up in the middle of a public park.

The Noble Detective offers Reiko a cheerful smile. "What a lovely shade of lipstick."

"Thank you," she replies, a bit thrown by the odd compliment. Of all the things to remark about...

“Chanel?”

“Well, yes...”

“Rouge Allure Velvet?”

“Let’s get to the point, Noble-kun,” Kazamatsuri fires off. “This is a police investigation, not a department store makeup counter, and I am in charge here.”

Noble Detective’s smile grows wider still. “Four unsolved attacks in three weeks, two of them fatal, and *you’re* still in charge?”

Kazamatsuri falters, munching on a cookie. “Well...well, it’s a complicated case.”

“Precisely. Which is why I’ll be solving it for you.”

“Beg pardon?” Kazamatsuri sputters.

The nobleman’s face grows more serious. “Four innocent women attacked, I simply won’t stand for it. This is clearly the work of a misogynistic serial killer, and it must end. Now.”

Reiko sets down her tea cup. “This area is the jurisdiction of the Kunitachi police. You have no authority here as a...private...contractor.”

His eyes meet hers, and she doesn’t shrink. Reiko has spent her entire adult life juggling two worlds - the world of the Kunitachi police and the world she was raised in, a world of wealthy, self-involved aristocrats. One day the Hosho Group will be hers to control, and she won’t be intimidated by anyone she considers a peer or social equal. This “Noble Detective” will not walk all over her.

But she has to tread carefully. She doesn’t want Kazamatsuri to learn her real identity, though they’ve worked together for years now and he’s never bothered to be very curious. Apparently a pair of glasses and a plain pantsuit are disguise enough.

“I have friends in high places, Hosho Reiko. I expect cooperation or for you both to simply stand aside.”

“I’m not even assigned to this case,” Reiko points out.

“But it’s personal for you, is it not?”

Reiko is silent for a moment. Hosho Group money was more than enough to keep things quiet. The attack was never made public, her hospital stay and rehabilitation were kept equally quiet. The four women in this case were stabbed, although the assailant is obviously not Ichimatsu Yuto. So yes, of course this is personal for Reiko. But how on earth does the Noble Detective know that?

“My servants are already investigating,” Noble Detective insists. “So you can either share your information with them, or I can put in a friendly call to the head of the Tokyo

Metropolitan Police and force it from you.” He crosses his legs casually, cocking his head. “I’d rather not start a feud with the heir to Kazamatsuri Motors.”

Kazamatsuri’s expression changes. “You know our company?”

“Why, my driver Sato has always told me about them. He is an auto enthusiast.”

“We make the best cars in the world!” Kazamatsuri brags, his objections forgotten.

The Noble Detective simply smiles, clearly disagreeing but not willing to say so and lose his edge.

Reiko takes a step forward. “Just a moment, what do you mean by your servants are investigating? Aren’t you the detective here?”

He gets to his feet, walking over until he’s in Reiko’s space. He smells like brandy, and he’s deliberately wearing a warm and sensual cologne. Even in her heels she has to look up at him. He knows very well who she is, who her family is, but she doesn’t think he’s going to say so out loud. No, he’s more calculating than that.

“A nobleman doesn’t dirty his hands with such things. That’s why we have servants to do our snooping for us.” He leans close until she can feel his warm breath against her ear when he whispers. She shuts her eyes, savoring it yet still annoyed with herself for being taken in by such an overtly flirtatious move. But she’s been so lonely. “Your own servant is out in the park right now, hiding behind a bush. Isn’t he?”

Reiko stands up tall, irritated at the truth of it. Kageyama trails her everywhere, he always has. It’s likely that the Noble Detective is telling the truth.

“Can’t solve the case on your own?” she whispers back in challenge.

His chuckle sends a rush of heat through her body. All the rumors about him are absolutely true. “Takes one to know one, Reiko-chan.”

“Well, it’s a terrible shame what’s been happening,” Kazamatsuri interrupts, sounding as though he’s had an abrupt change of heart. Hearing the praise for the source of his wealth (even though it wasn’t quite praise) has made him more agreeable. “In the interest of solving this case and ensuring there are no more victims, I feel like it might be best to pool our resources.” He looks over, waving at her dismissively. “Hosho-kun, you can go back to the junior high school.”

“It was the *senior* high school,” she complains under her breath as the Noble Detective steps back, moving over to clap Kazamatsuri on the shoulder.

Yamamoto the butler is called back so that he and Kazamatsuri might exchange information. Apparently Yamamoto, Tanaka the maid, and Sato the driver work together to investigate the Noble Detective’s cases. Reiko feels a little less embarrassed about her usual reliance on Kageyama to prod her in the right direction - at least he’s just one person. She doesn’t have a whole team doing work on her behalf.

Thinking about Kageyama and the way he used to be only a few months back, his gleeful investigations, makes her feel tired. She takes a breath, looking over and seeing that the Noble Detective is watching her from where he's standing beside the tea cart, nibbling on a cookie. She goes over, bringing her cup and saucer.

He takes them from her hand, shaking his head.

"Tanaka would have cleaned this up. That is her duty."

Behind them Kazamatsuri is talking up a storm while Yamamoto patiently listens to his rambling.

"What is your real purpose here?" she asks him quietly.

He seems a little confused. "Women are being gravely injured in Tokyo, even killed. How can I just ignore it?"

"You wouldn't speak to Inspector Kazamatsuri without me," she reminds him. "Why?"

"You fascinate me, Hosho Reiko," he says, reaching out to tug at a stray lock of hair that's fallen out of her ponytail, likely in her rush to get here from the high school. He tucks it behind her ear, a tender gesture he has not earned. "I've longed to meet you."

"I'm just a police detective."

His knowing smile would make any other woman swoon, but she's made of sterner stuff. And her heart's already spoken for, foolish as it is after all that's happened.

"Will you dine with me? Tonight?"

She raises an eyebrow. "Here? In your little tent?"

He laughs gently. "I can arrange for a private room at Joy Tree. I do remember someone recommending it to me recently..."

Joy Tree is a Chinese restaurant in Nakameguro. Coincidentally, it's her father's favorite place to eat in all of Tokyo. She wonders if her father has arranged for this behind her back. It was Reiko who fought for Kageyama to keep his job, even though he'd already tendered his resignation to her father after the incident. Perhaps Papa thinks Kageyama is no longer enough.

"I can have my butler drive me there at..."

"Nonsense," the nobleman interrupts. "I will send Sato for you at 7:00."

She stares up at him, knowing that she could easily turn him down. Reiko's life is complicated enough right now, and she's spent so many long weeks fighting to get back where she is. On her own two feet, working to solve crimes and keep her city safe. She's lost so much else that she needs her work to keep herself afloat.

And as much as she wishes for this case to be hers, it's not. But that doesn't lessen her curiosity about the man before her, and why he's chosen this exact moment to force himself into her life and her business.

"I am going back to the high school to work on the case I've been assigned," she tells him. "I will not be ready until at least 8:00 tonight."

"Not a problem at all." He takes her by the hand, lifts it to his lips. He brushes a soft kiss across her knuckles, no hesitation in anything he does. "I look forward to it."

—

He waits until she's home, in her own bed. He waits until the private nurse Papa hired has retired for the evening. She pats the mattress beside her, but for the first time in a long time, he doesn't join her.

His face is grave, a mask. Even when they first met, his face was never like this. He was always halfway to an insult, a teasing remark. Now he looks at her, and she doesn't recognize him.

"My lady," Kageyama says without tenderness, without affection. He addresses her merely as his employer, which she still is despite his best attempts to leave her. "Given recent happenings, I feel it is best we remember ourselves."

"Remember ourselves?" she asks, watching as he closes himself off to her more and more with each passing second. "You think that's what I want?"

"It is in your best interest," he says, voice so calm it makes her furious. She lets it bubble under the surface, lest she rips her stitches. "I have a duty here, and I was selfish. I was selfish for too long."

You're breaking up with me, she wants to accuse him, but that's not quite the way to phrase it. Because Kageyama will still live here, sleep here, and serve her here. But from now on, he's saying, that's all it can be. She's just a job. She's just an obligation.

"I need you," she says and hates how she sounds when she says it. It hasn't even been that long since they've...

"If there's anything else you require, please ring for me. Good night, my lady."

He closes the door, and that's how it ends.

—

Reiko stands inside her closet for twenty minutes pondering dresses. It's been a while since she's worn any of them. Once she was back on her feet, there was little need to dress up for meals. Little need for jewels and sequins.

She's mostly come to the dinner table in a loose-fitting top and a skirt or pants. Something that can easily come off so that the live-in nurse could examine her, although those days are

now over too. Reiko's well enough now that she'll simply have to go to the doctor's office for check-ups every other week and eventually less than that.

She frowns. So many of her newest acquisitions are low cut so she might drape her neck in pearls or jewels, the extravagant gifts from her father, who is overseas far more than he's ever home. Form fitting, elegant. She has to dig around for a while, back a few fashion seasons until she finds something that will work but still look stylish. Current. Worthy of its wearer. It has a high neckline, short sleeves. A conservative A-line dress she wore on a trip to Italy, opting for modesty on a family vacation in the Vatican.

Her scars are covered entirely when she has it on, turning from side to side in front of her mirror. Hosho Reiko, the beautiful heiress, looks back, although her glamour has been tempered somewhat. She puts her hair up, does her makeup. It's nice to feel wanted, even by a notorious playboy. It'll be fun to pretend at romance after so many weeks without.

Kageyama is waiting in the hall when she comes proudly down the stairs, a small clutch tucked under her arm. He's staring for a few moments before he scolds himself, and then he looks away, schools his expression. She catches him sometimes, catches him looking so long as she's not looking back. But even if he regrets his decision, she knows he isn't likely to change his mind.

"I can drive you," he says, just as he said earlier when she explained that the Noble Detective's driver will be picking her up.

"Take the night off," she replies, wondering how she's managed to make it four months without shaking him. Without screaming in his face, without begging for him to reconsider.

She tells herself it's because she's Hosho Reiko, heiress to the Hosho Group, and heiresses don't beg.

The car pulls up in the driveway before Kageyama can say anything else, and she leaves him behind. If he's jealous, it doesn't matter because all of this was his choice. All of this was his cowardly retreat.

Sato bows to her and opens the door of the sedan for her. She gets into the car and ignores the ache in her belly as the mansion and Kageyama fade into the darkness behind her.

—

He comes up from behind her and pushes. She falls forward, dropping her phone and hearing it shatter, her heel scraping the pavement as she tries to brace herself. It doesn't work because he's fallen with her, landing on top of her. It's enough to knock the wind out of her, keeping her from letting out a scream.

She tries to wriggle out from under the stranger, lashing out with her hands and as best she can with her feet. He's bigger, and unfortunately most of her self-defense training has revolved around assailants who are still standing.

Reiko doesn't feel the knife go in the first time, she's too busy crying out as loud as she can. It's a rather feeble sound, and so she goes for his face. It's dark and she just goes for whatever she can find, delighting in his screams as her nails find something soft to dig in to. She does feel the second stab, only a few inches shy of her lung, the x-rays will reveal later on.

It's a residential neighborhood, and so he doesn't get to try it a third time because someone in the distance is shouting. He gets off of her, flees.

The man that finds her, the man that shouted, calls an ambulance. As he's hung up, pressing his hand against her wounds, she looks up at him, gasping. "I'm a police officer. My phone... can you call someone..."

The man tells her to stay calm.

The last thing she manages to say before she passes out is "Kageyama needs to know..."

—

The Noble Detective has made no effort to tone down his wardrobe as he enters the private room on the second floor of Joy Tree. His coat is blue with brass buttons, worn over a button-down dress shirt. It's tucked into a sinfully tight pair of trousers just like before, and Reiko doesn't allow herself to be distracted by it for long.

He looks distressed to find her already sitting down. "I would have held your chair for you, Reiko-chan."

"I'm quite capable of sitting down on my own," she replies lightly.

There's a knowing look in his eyes as he decides to sit to her left rather than across from her at the table. His maid, Tanaka, has come along to serve them both, and she quickly moves the place setting in front of him.

"Gozen-sama," she says in her pleasant voice. "Shall I have the chef prepare something to your liking? Mabo tofu perhaps?"

He gives her a rather astonished look. "You'll do nothing of the sort, Tanaka. I will eat whatever Reiko-chan recommends."

"Of course," the maid replies.

Tanaka bows to her, presenting her with a Joy Tree menu. Reiko blinks for a moment, wondering where she was hiding it because a second ago her hands were empty. They move quickly, these servants of the Noble Detective.

"My father is a long-time devotee of this restaurant," Reiko explains. "I think I'd like to order some of his favorites."

"Sounds perfect to me," Noble Detective says with a grin.

She tells Tanaka what to order, and she's gone. It seems that Tanaka will handle everything tonight, as though they are dining in the Noble Detective's own home rather than in a Michelin-starred restaurant.

Reiko waits until Tanaka returns with wine and disappears again before she decides to accuse him of anything. "You had the opportunity to tell Inspector Kazamatsuri who I am," she says. "He doesn't know I'm an heiress."

"Well, then he is a fool," comes the reply, the Noble Detective clinking his wine glass against hers before lifting it to his lips and having a sip. "The Hosho Group is a marvelous company. It astonishes me that he's never made the connection. But then, the nouveau riche can be awfully self-involved."

"A marvelous company in which you have a ten percent share of stock."

He smiles. "I have very diversified business interests, Reiko-chan."

"Why are you interfering with the Kunitachi police's case?"

He shakes his head, laughing. "Goodness, we haven't even had our appetizers yet. I wasn't expecting an interrogation this evening."

She relents when Tanaka wheels in a cart overflowing with food. The maid's face remains perfectly calm as she serves them, but this time she doesn't leave the room. She stays in the corner, waiting for the opportunity to top off a wine glass or clear a dirty plate. Reiko's questions will have to wait.

Instead of the case, they talk about the Hosho Group. Recent and pending acquisitions, financial results. He seems amazed by how much she knows about the company's holdings, but Reiko has grown accustomed to people underestimating her. Only Kageyama seems to...

Reiko reaches for her wine glass.

"The Hosho Group will be mine someday," she tells him. "It is essential that I understand its inner workings in detail."

"Quite right," Noble Detective replies with a nod. "I'm just impressed with you, Reiko-chan, that's all."

She feels herself blushing. It's been a long while since she's been complimented. "Impressed? Why?"

He leans forward, taking her hand in his own. He doesn't seem to mind that his maid is in the room. "You have a lot on your plate. You stand to inherit one of the largest conglomerates in Asia, if not the world. And then there's your day job. Tokyo Metropolitan Police. I know I'd never have the patience for two such diverse occupations."

"My work for the police is very important to me."

"So I've gathered."

“I suppose I have a strong sense of justice.”

He beams. “You’re brave, Reiko-chan. A risk taker. A woman in a man’s profession, and a noblewoman at that.”

She doesn’t pull away, trying to stay strong against the wicked look in his eyes, the way his thumb is stroking across her skin. She’s dealt with his type many times, attending parties with her parents. Overly familiar men, playing at gentleman when they mostly just want to meet with her father about some business venture and think it’s easier to go through her.

But Noble Detective, flirtatious reputation aside, already has his connections to the Hosho Group and her father. As forward as he is, Reiko is surprised by his sincerity.

She grins. “Women make for much better detectives.”

He leans even closer, squeezing her hand tighter. “I couldn’t agree more.”

“Gozen-sama,” Tanaka interrupts. “Will you be having any dessert this evening?”

“No, Tanaka. Thank you. Perhaps you can see if Yamamoto or Sato would like anything.”

She bows and departs, pushing the cart and leaving them alone in the private dining room. He takes his hand back, having another sip of wine.

“Why are you interfering in the Kunitachi police’s case?” Reiko asks again as soon as the door is closed.

He laughs merrily. Between the two of them, they’ve had plenty to drink already. “I take on cases that interest me, nothing more.”

She presses him. “You mean you have your servants take on the case while you sit back and watch.”

He leans back in his chair, watching her carefully. “Unlike you, bravest Reiko-chan, I have no wish to dirty my hands with the nitty-gritty of a mystery. That’s why I have servants.”

“Did Papa ask you to do this?”

He says nothing.

Reiko’s father stayed in Tokyo the first two months after the incident, working from home, tending to her carefully. But a businessman of his stature couldn’t hide away much longer, especially when what happened to Reiko was not public knowledge. He’s back to his jet-setting lifestyle now, but he knew she was going back to work this week.

For years, he’s tolerated her career, even cheered her on. Many parents wouldn’t, especially in their privileged social circumstances. Her peers attend soirees and play tennis or fly to Dubai on a whim to go shopping. Even the Noble Detective only takes on mysteries as a hobby, investigating murders with the same enthusiasm one might have for stamp collecting

or butterfly catching. But her Papa has long accepted that his daughter isn't satisfied with mystery solving as a mere hobby. It's her job. It's her passion, seeing justice done.

But what happened to her has rattled him, as it would rattle any father. He's long tasked Kageyama with watching over her, protecting her, but perhaps he's decided it's not enough anymore, putting that on one man. Reiko expects that Kageyama, at least the Kageyama of today, is inclined to agree.

Her Papa knew she was going back to work, and he knew there would be no stopping her. But it seems like he's set on keeping her away from the stabbing case. She's been shuffled to her other assignment. It's insulting. It's infuriating. And there's nothing she can do about it.

"Even if he did ask you to take charge of this case, you wouldn't tell me." She crosses her arms. "Would you?"

"Let's not end the night on a sour note," he says lightly. "I've relished the opportunity to get to know you better. After all, when your father retires, I will look to you to see that my investment in the Hosho Group is well-tended."

It's not a threat or a warning. He seems genuinely impressed with her.

He gets to his feet, moving to pull out her chair. He's still standing close when she gets to her feet, turns to look up at him. If life was simpler, she'd give in to him without questioning it or questioning herself. It's been a long while since a ridiculously handsome man's spent an entire meal praising her without any hint of irony. The Noble Detective is mysterious, true, and his motives for taking up the stabbing case are equally muddled.

But his feelings for her, even after only a few hours in her company, seem real. He falls in love, or at least in lust, very quickly. He reaches out, cups her cheek in his firm hand, thumb stroking affectionately.

"It's been too long since someone has touched you like this," he murmurs. "Hasn't it?"

His servants haven't had to snoop around for this. And Papa never knew the full truth. No, this is a mystery the Noble Detective has solved on his own.

"Not so very long," she replies, smelling the after-dinner mint on his breath as he looks down at her. Only four months, but it's felt much longer. It's felt so much longer because of how abruptly she lost him.

"Bravest Reiko-chan," he teases in his warm, soothing voice. "Brave even now."

She shuts her eyes, shuts off her mind and the emptiness she's felt for so many weeks. She may never be full again, but it's nice to be wanted. Nice to be wanted by someone who doesn't hesitate or hide. It's harmless, allowing this, if only for a night or two. He'll solve the case and the tent in Joyama Park will vanish. He'll be that mystery man in the background, the stockholder again. Out of her life.

Whatever his motives are with the case, taking her to Joy Tree and holding her in his arms are actions of his own free will.

She's accustomed to a different type of kiss. A kiss that always asks permission, a kiss that always keeps her in control of where it leads. The Noble Detective's kiss is different. He holds her close, tipping her face up to meet his, and he closes the distance without delay or doubt.

It doesn't feel like a betrayal. Four months ago, the decision to stop was Kageyama's and not hers. So Reiko moans softly, giving herself permission to indulge. His hand is warm against her back, possessive and eager. She parts her lips, allowing his tongue to slip inside to explore.

Reiko's not used to kisses without history behind them. She's not used to things moving so fast. It's thrilling, exciting. She's felt like unwanted goods for months, and something as simple as the Noble Detective's kiss has reignited the fire in her belly.

There's a knock at the door. This time Tanaka seems to know she mustn't walk in.

He ends things with a series of small, gentle kisses. The corner of her mouth, her cheek, her forehead. And then he's stepping back, looking like a hero from a western fairy tale, the gallant prince.

"Have Sato bring the car around. Reiko-chan will be going home," he calls out, and Tanaka acknowledges the order without coming in. He moves back to his seat, reaching out and downing the rest of his wine, his eyes never leaving her. "I'm sure you have important police business come morning."

"And so do you," she says, still catching her breath, letting what they've done sink in. "In your own way, of course."

"With what Inspector Kazamatsuri has shared and with what Yamamoto has already told me, it will not be long. We'll find the despicable character responsible for this."

She moves to the door, Noble Detective on her heels. It's his hand that moves for the knob, holding her there.

"When the case is solved, meet with me again," he says.

She merely nods.

—

There was no grand gesture, no over-the-top moment that brought it about. It was a night like any other, discussing things in the sitting room after dinner. She was listening patiently as Kageyama poked holes in every single theory she had about whatever case it was. Well, Reiko felt she was being patient. Kageyama may have thought otherwise.

She finally got to her feet, exasperated that yet again he had proven himself the more observant of the two of them. One day she would outsmart him, she vowed. Either way, she'd

been tired of listening to him, tired of that 'I told you so' tone.

Tired enough to say what she was really thinking when usually she just threatened to fire him for being so condescending.

"I'll shut you up myself," she'd said, leaning down to where he was sitting opposite her preferred sofa. She'd expected him to back up, to stop her. To list numerous reasons why they shouldn't.

Instead he'd been smiling just as their lips met.

It was still months before she allowed him in her bed, but it all started with that night. That night when she decided to be daring, to go for what ought to have been perpetually out of reach. She found in it something that had probably always been there, simmering under the surface. Hidden under layers of duty and status. She'd always wanted him, he'd always wanted her.

Now he acts as though it never happened, and she doesn't know why.

—

Sato is a well-trained servant and drives her home in silence.

She gave Kageyama the night off, but he's still there opening the door just as she's taking her key out of her bag. She moves past him, into the house, without greeting him. Another man kissed her tonight, and it felt good. It felt good but it didn't necessarily feel right.

He trails her up the stairs, telling her that he's already drawn her a bath. That tomorrow's breakfast will be Japanese-style. That a pair of shoes she custom ordered has been delivered, and he's left the box in her room.

It all goes in one ear and out the other, and Reiko shuts her bedroom door in his face. She leans back against it, struggling to breathe. She knows that like most nights, he'll probably stay out there for a few minutes, just in case she has a need for him. Not the way she used to need him, but in the way a mistress might need a servant.

He's blamed himself for what happened from the beginning. If only he'd been there on time. If only he hadn't dawdled trying to find the perfect flowers for her. If only he'd never loved her, he'd have been able to carry out his duties.

Reiko struggles a little to get out of her dress, but she won't allow him in here when she's home now. She bathes, tries to let her mind drift to work, to the things that are more important. She soaks until her fingers are pruny and gets out, standing naked before her mirror.

It's the same Reiko, with only a few minor modifications. Still perfect hair. Still a perfect face. Now that she's been cleared for more vigorous exercise, she uses the treadmill and free weights in the exercise room. The softer parts of her are firming up again. The only thing that's different are the two scars on her chest.

They're not even that big, two slightly raised patches, lighter than her normal skin color. They rest side by side just over her left breast, and they weren't as deep as they might have been. She'd fought back hard.

He's never seen them, not as they look now. He only saw her blouse soaked through with blood as the paramedic had to cut it off her. And after that, he only saw the bandages peeking out.

She dresses in a comfortable pair of pajamas, getting under the covers. For some foolish reason, she often wakes up on the right side when the entire mattress is hers to command. Her body is still wired for someone to wake beside her.

Tonight Reiko rearranges her pillows, scoots to the very center of the bed. She hugs one of her stuffed animals and pretends that it's enough.

—

He's playing the piano when she comes downstairs on a Sunday morning. She walks up behind him, resting her hands on his shoulders while his fingers move gracefully over the keys. It's not a song she knows. He's likely just improvising, filling time until there's a proper start to the day, and he has to do the job her father pays him for.

It's daring, touching him down here on the ground floor of the house during the daytime when any other member of the staff might pass by. But Reiko revels in the danger of it, feeling his firm body under her hands even through his layers of clothing. She strokes the back of his head, his playing growing more lazy.

He eventually starts playing with only one hand, barely a tune anymore as his free one moves to bat her hand away from his hair playfully. She leans forward with a soft chuckle, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

"Will you always love me, Kageyama?" she asks airily, her words whispered so only he might hear them.

"My lady," he says softly. "Are you blind?"

Before she can protest, he's laughing that arrogant laugh of his.

"Look closer. Pay attention. And you'll have your answer."

She grins in relief, wrapping her arms around him.

Chapter 2

Reiko and Inspector Harada manage to uncover the truth after a few more days of interviews. The student at the high school hadn't been robbed by a fellow student—a teacher with loan sharks after him overheard his student bragging about the gift from her parents and broke into her locker himself. A horrible thing, to be sure, and another win for the Kunitachi police station.

But all that's waiting for her back at the station is another theft to investigate. Thankfully there have been no other attacks, but Kazamatsuri has stayed very tight-lipped about the investigation. He's been working closely with the Noble Detective's servants, and patrolmen on the force have told Reiko about the mysterious traveling tent that's been seen around town the last few days.

Reiko tries to disappear into her new case, reading up on the initial reports and formulating a list of suspects and people to interview. She stays late reviewing footage from security cameras that first night and loses track of time. By the time she's grabbed her bag, phone in hand to text Kageyama and apologize for her tardiness, she discovers butler Yamamoto waiting for her in the Kunitachi station's main hall.

He bows to her. "Good evening, Hosho-sama."

She nods her head. "I was just heading home."

"Sato would be happy to drive you."

She hopes her unease isn't noticeable. "That's quite alright, I have someone to pick me up."

"My master actually wished to see you before you headed home. I apologize for appearing here at the last minute. You see, I've just come from Metropolitan Police Headquarters. Ah, but it's a marvelous building with such a history. If I recall correctly, the architect was..."

"Yamamoto, if you will kindly come to the point."

"Ah, my apologies," the butler says. "Gozen-sama has solved the case admirably."

"Oh, did he really?" she asks, raising an eyebrow. Clearly the man who really helped to solve the case is the one standing humbly before her.

"At this time, I cannot share the details. Your superiors at Headquarters will be holding a press conference come morning jointly with Kazamatsuri-sama."

At least Kunitachi, the case's proper jurisdiction, would be acknowledged to some extent. She wondered if Noble Detective found a way to ensure that Kunitachi's hard-working squad and staff would receive some credit for the case's swift resolution.

"He really needs to see me tonight?"

Yamamoto again looks apologetic. “With the case solved, Gozen-sama has accepted an invitation to a party this weekend at the home of a dear friend in Niigata. He did not want to leave Kunitachi without saying goodbye.”

She bites her lip, wondering if Yamamoto knows what his master really wants from their farewell meeting.

“Where is he now?”

“Oh, just outside, Hosho-sama. After you’ve said your goodbyes, Sato will drive you home.”

Now that gets her attention. She makes her way through the double doors of the police station. That massive tent takes up half of the parking lot, its flag flapping in the evening breeze. Doesn’t this man have a mansion like any other normal wealthy person?

Sato and the sedan are parked nearby, the driver reading through a newspaper as though it isn’t so strange to have set up a large tent in the parking lot of a police station. Yamamoto holds the tent flap for her, and she enters, finding the Noble Detective sitting on one of the loveseats inside. Tanaka is already pouring out tea for two.

She stands in the entryway, taking in the tent’s ostentatious interior. How did they manage to move this monstrosity all over town with such speed?

Tanaka bows to her, and this gets her master’s attention. He rises to his feet, smiling at her.

“Reiko-chan,” he says in his soothing, friendly voice. “I’m glad Yamamoto managed to find you. I was worried you’d already gone home for the night.”

“If that had been the case, would this tent be in my backyard right now?”

He grins at her warmly. “I don’t trespass on private property.”

Tanaka inclines her head. “Can I offer any further refreshments?”

“No, thank you very much. Please have Yamamoto call the Hosho family butler to let him know that Sato will be dropping her off later,” the Noble Detective tells her. “Dismissed.”

Tanaka says nothing, and her face betrays nothing either as she disappears from the tent. She’s now outside with Yamamoto and Sato, but Reiko is still unamused with the chosen venue.

“This is my workplace,” she tells him, trying not to think too much about how Kageyama will interpret Yamamoto’s call. “Not the most secluded place for a private chat.”

He reaches into the pocket of his long red coat and pulls out what looks like a remote control. He presses a button on it, but it doesn’t make a sound.

“It’s private now,” he explains, returning the controller to his pocket. “Sound-canceling device. State of the art. Nobody outside will hear us...I mean to say, nobody will hear our private chat.”

She wants to roll her eyes. He's come right to where she works to bid her farewell, and after their night at Joy Tree, Reiko highly doubts that it will be a simple farewell. Not that the idea doesn't excite her. He's watching her so intensely, as though any moment he might make his move.

Reiko isn't quite ready yet for any moves of that nature, and so she has a seat and sips her tea, settling her work bag beside the loveseat. He sits down beside her, forcing himself into her space by leaning back, crossing his long legs and resting his arm on the back of the sofa on her side.

"Yamamoto says you've solved the case already. Shall I congratulate you?"

He watches her, fingers tapping against the sofa fabric. "The four women all had something in common that your colleague Kazamatsuri failed to note. All four were once members of an online community about makeup. Our assailant posed as a female supplier, offering a rare, one of a kind lipstick that's been taken off the market."

"And so he lured them out for a trade and hurt them?"

The Noble Detective nods, bitterness in his tone. "He preyed on the most insecure ones, promising them that they'd look beautiful if only they had this rare lipstick." He shakes his head. "A woman is beautiful with or without makeup and ought to be cherished, but the world is full of people who disagree with such a sentiment. Anyhow, all will be revealed at tomorrow's press conference."

Reiko is astonished when she remembers. "When we first met," she says, fingers moving to her mouth unconsciously, "you complimented me on my lipstick. Did you know all along that..."

"Ssh," he says, bringing his finger to his own lips. "None of that matters now, Reiko-chan."

She has to admit she's a bit impressed. He's quick, attentive. Perhaps he only pretends to pawn off his cases on his servants to thoroughly prove the solutions he's already deduced. Reiko thinks that Kageyama and the Noble Detective squaring off to solve a mystery might be an interesting meeting of the minds.

But that is not to be.

"You're off to Niigata then. Is there a mystery waiting for you out there?"

He grins. "Trouble seems to follow me wherever I go."

"Will you be reporting to Papa?" she asks. "Will you be telling him that you've cracked the case of the Kunitachi Lipstick Stabber?"

He tilts his head, looking at her with amusement. He'll never tell. And neither will Papa.

"Ah, Niigata. It's been a while," he says, ignoring her question. "I will miss you, but I'm not the sort that sticks in one place for very long. Forgive my abrupt departure, but I receive so many friendly invitations."

She smiles in reply. "I imagine so."

"But I must admit that I've spent the last few nights consumed with the thought of you. I couldn't bear to leave without seeing you again. Bravest Reiko-chan, Kunitachi's heroine."

"Or more like you couldn't bear to leave without adding me to your collection. Your reputation is not a mystery."

"Collection?" he scoffs, eyes growing dark. His voice is lower now, enough to make her glad she's sitting down. "What a vulgar term."

"Well, then what term best matches your intentions tonight, Noble Detective?"

Reiko sets down her tea cup because she knows that a man like the Noble Detective simply goes for what he wants. He scoots closer, moving so that his arm is around her shoulders. With his free hand, he removes her Hosho Reiko, star detective disguise. Her glasses are set aside, the elastic keeping the hair out of her face.

He teases his finger along her lips, watching her reactions closely.

"Collection implies that I view women as mere objects for my pleasure," he whispers, sending a thrilling shiver down her spine. "No, I'm interested only in mutual satisfaction. An *adventure*, if you will."

She closes her eyes, basks in the attention after so many months without. His every touch is deliberate, calculated. Designed to make her want him all the more. Certainly he's had many opportunities to practice, but she decides not to hold it against him. What will it hurt to feel pleasure again? To be touched and held close again?

Before he can kiss her, she clears her throat.

"You're sure that your little...gadget cancels out all the sound in here?"

Reiko has to admit that it's been very quiet. Despite knowing that the station is only a few dozen yards from where she's sitting, she hasn't heard one siren. Not even engine noise from a patrol car returning, idling in the parking lot. But does the same concept apply to those sitting outside?

"I would never betray a woman's confidence."

She supposes that's the only answer she's likely to receive, so she gives in, trying to ignore the foreign feeling of hands that aren't Kageyama's brushing against her skin. He cups the back of her head, kissing her with the same lack of reserve he'd shown that night at Joy Tree.

They're sitting side by side on the loveseat, and it's not a very easy position. So it doesn't surprise her when he pushes her onto her back, letting him lie in between her legs. They kiss for a long while, her arms slipping under his fancy jacket to touch his back, to feel his warm body through the thin cotton of his shirt.

She can feel the hard length of him whenever their bodies come into contact, and he seems unashamed of his interest in her, smiling against her mouth when she moans at the contact. He eventually leaves her mouth behind, moving so that he's up, kneeling between her spread legs.

She keeps her eyes closed, not sure she can bear to watch him. To see in his eyes how badly he wants her even though he barely knows her. He undoes the button on her blazer, opens it wide and then moves his fingers to her blouse, undoing the buttons from the bottom up.

He's just about to reach the top when she moves her hands to stop him.

"No?" he asks, not pressuring her in any way.

"I just..." She still can't bear to open her eyes, and she squeezes his wrists. "You know what happened to me and..."

"Ah," he whispers. "Would you rather I didn't look?"

"You can. You can, but if you don't like..."

"Reiko-chan."

She opens one eye, sees the gentle smile on his face.

"You're beautiful."

She moves her hands, and he undoes the last button, slowly pushing her blouse open. He grins at the sight of her lacy white bra. He probably thinks she wore it just for him, but here's one thing the Noble Detective hasn't discovered — Reiko simply likes nice underwear. If he has any reaction to the twin scars above her breast, she can't see it in his face.

Her bra clasps in the front, and he seems to like that too, making swift work of it, exposing her. She lies back as comfortably as she can on the loveseat, praying that his noise-canceling gadget truly works because she lets out the most pathetic moan when his tongue flicks against her nipple.

It's chilly in the tent despite the heat happening between them on the loveseat, and her exposed skin is soon covered in goosebumps. She pants, trying not to lose herself too much in the simple feeling of his mouth on her breast, his fingers kneading and stroking the other.

The Noble Detective claimed that he was only interested in mutual satisfaction, but so far it seems as though Reiko's is more important to him. When he's finally seemed to have enough fun kissing her there, sucking her nipples into his mouth until she gasps at the energetic tugs, he moves lower, kissing his way down her abdomen until he finds her belt.

She hums in approval as he unbuckles it, slides it through the loops and tosses it somewhere else. His fingers tease her zipper down, and with a lift of her hips, she helps him to tug them off to join her belt on the floor. She's a little embarrassed by how damp her panties are, but it's been a long and lonely four months.

Most gentlemen wouldn't remark on it, but she feels a firm press of his mouth to the inside of her thigh, the soft and teasing rumble of his voice. "Let me taste you."

He's moving her again, his touch gentle but insistent. He has her sit up, her blazer and shirt askew and wrinkled as he kneels on the floor before her. He tugs her panties down, and she whimpers as he kisses slowly, so painfully slowly up and up and up from her knees to the sensitive skin of her inner thighs.

His mouth and tongue against her sex are a revelation, and she cries out, four months of hurt and anger and frustration pushed aside at least for a moment. He rubs with his fingers, teasing and tempting, before moving his mouth into their place. She kind of hates the sound of it. So improper, so crude. Proper posture is an afterthought, and he angles her so she's lying back flat, exposed to him with her legs resting on his back. He's still got on his fancy, foolish coat, the material itching against her ankles, her calves as he licks so perfectly at her clit.

She comes before she wants to, body trembling. He doesn't seem to mind if she squirms a little, moves her hips, pushes her sensitive flesh more firmly against his unrelenting mouth. He lets her rest for a moment, pressing soft kisses against her stomach, letting her shudders recede. But it doesn't last long, and he goes back, hoping to prolong her experience, to send another wave of it crashing over her.

Reiko's lost in it, lost in how badly she needs this. It's so good. It's so good, she doesn't want it to end.

Soon she's covered in sweat, a mess, barely able to keep her legs apart any longer. His mouth and his tongue haven't tired yet, and he's got two fingers inside her, stroking in time with the flick of his tongue. She's somewhere between coming a third time and a fourth when she can't control herself any longer.

She forgets where she is. She forgets who she's with. It's too much, it's suddenly way too much.

She thought it would be easy. She thought it would be nothing more than scratching an itch. Taking pleasure where she could after such an unfair absence. But at this point, it's not difficult to replace the mouth between her legs with another, at least in her own frazzled, fractured mind. It's not difficult to imagine that it's not the Noble Detective.

It's "Kageyama!" she cries when she gives in, "Kageyama...Kageyama..."

To his credit, her current companion withdraws only when she's finally coming back to Earth, her jaw trembling and her face streaked with tears and sweat. She's ruined this, hasn't she? She's ruined this completely.

She can't move, sprawled pathetically on his loveseat, wet and uncomfortable and her heart banging around in her chest. The last time she felt this panicked, this desperate, this *alive* it was when she was fighting for her life.

She's back there on that dark night, chin hitting the pavement and rattling the teeth in her jaw. She didn't cry that night and she didn't cry when they rode in the ambulance together. She

didn't cry when Papa said Kageyama had given him a formal letter of resignation and she didn't cry when Kageyama told her they ought to "remember themselves."

But she's crying now, she's hysterical now when she ought to be basking in the afterglow of the most amazing...

"Bravest Reiko-chan."

She looks down, sees the Noble Detective's gentle smile. Before she can apologize, he presses a soft kiss to her knee.

"Take a break from your bravery, if only for tonight. Tell me everything. I'll listen."

—

Reiko will never admit it out loud, but she had a rather sheltered childhood. She grew up learning about happy ever afters, about finding the right person and getting married so the Hosho Group's legacy will continue.

She barely knew anything about sex until halfway through high school when she was almost laughed out of the girls' locker room for thinking a "blow job" was something to do with a visit to the hair salon. With her Papa's protectiveness, she doesn't have a boyfriend until college, but only for a short time because she wants to wait until it feels right. She decides to give in when it's her second college boyfriend, but that doesn't last either once he finds out how rich she is and resents her for it. She breaks it off with the guy she dates during the police academy because he's too selfish.

So it's only with Kageyama that she finally receives a thorough education. If he's lacking in patience with her when it comes to solving crimes, it doesn't transfer to her bedroom. She wonders if it's because he's in service that he spends an extraordinary amount of time concentrating on putting her pleasure before his.

Reiko doesn't know what she'd do without him by her side. Maybe it's foolish to want that childhood happy ever after with a servant. Maybe it's naive. Maybe it's even unfair to Kageyama.

But that's all for her to worry about another day.

—

For some reason, he's not remotely offended, and he puts her back together as best he can. He cleans her up, helps her dress, and moves with her across the tent to a different sofa, one that doesn't smell like sex.

He sits with his arm around her, and she leans her head against his shoulder, embarrassed to take even more of his freely-offered comfort. "You won't sell your stock, will you?"

He chuckles at that, rubbing her arm gently. "Not a chance."

Reiko knows it's late and that his servants are likely dozing in the car waiting for their master to complete his latest conquest, but she starts from the beginning because she has to. She tells him about Kageyama's arrival in her life. His infuriating nature, his insults and his teasing. The first cases they managed to crack together, the two of them alone in the sitting room after dinner. How normal that became, how expected it was for them to meet that way, spend time together that way, learn more about one another that way.

She tells the Noble Detective how long it took before she even made a move. She tells him how happily it was received. Her doubts and worries had been unfounded. Kageyama, annoying as he could sometimes be, was her perfect match. He indulged her whims, prodded her along the right path, helped her with her work. He loved her with his heart and with his eyes and once Reiko granted him permission, he loved her with everything else he had, snarky comments notwithstanding.

And then one night changed everything. She could have been paying better attention to her surroundings. Kageyama thought he might have prevented it entirely if he hadn't been late, his attention that evening given over to love rather than duty.

But Ichimatsu Yuto was a variable they couldn't have controlled. If he hadn't followed Reiko that night, intent on harming her, he might have done it another time. The only one at fault that night had been Ichimatsu Yuto. Kageyama, being her stubborn Kageyama, had felt differently.

"When I needed him more than I ever have, he stepped back," she tells the Noble Detective. "I can't comprehend it."

His hand strokes her arm tenderly. "I can't say that I fully understand. I won't lie to you, Reiko-chan. Finding love with a servant, I just can't wrap my head around it. This is a person in your employ, a person whose sole responsibility is to serve you."

"It's never been quite as simple as that..."

"You say this, but you say this from the perspective of the employer, not the employee. I have Yamamoto, Sato, Tanaka...among others." His voice trails off briefly before he clears his throat. "There is an understanding between us. I see that they are well-paid and treated respectfully. In exchange, they are my tools to wield as I see fit."

"A servant is a human being," Reiko interrupts, but he keeps going.

"Well, yes of course they are. But it doesn't erase the fundamental nature of our contract, our obligations to one another. You can have a servant, or you can have a lover. But you cannot expect that person to be both. From what you've said, it appears this Kageyama fellow reached his breaking point, seeing you hurt and feeling responsible."

"But it wasn't his fault!"

"No, it wasn't. But he had to make a choice. Probably the hardest he's ever had to make. Won't you at least consider it from his side?"

She's quiet for a while, mulling over the truth of his words. Things might have been easier for Kageyama when he was only expected to perform the duties he was hired for. She's hardly ever stopped to think about what burdens she was adding on, expecting him to come to her bed but still rise early to make her breakfast. She's hardly ever stopped to think because he did it all without ever complaining. Like most things, Kageyama's always made it look so easy.

But now she realizes that he was working harder than she can imagine, juggling the task of making her happy as both his employer and the person he loves. Reiko's spent the last few months resenting his decision, but only because she's grown accustomed to him taking on twice as much responsibility for her sake. For her happiness.

"Will you always love me, Kageyama?"

"My lady, are you blind? Look closer. Pay attention. And you'll have your answer."

She shuts her eyes, trying not to start crying all over again. And failing miserably in the attempt.

The Noble Detective already has a handkerchief out, gently patting it against her face. "Don't be too angry with yourself, Reiko-chan. You've been through quite an ordeal."

"I've been so selfish."

"The heiress to the Hosho Group deserves nothing but the very best. I'm sure this Kageyama would agree. Any man lucky enough to meet you would agree."

She looks up, sees that wicked look in his eye has returned. It makes her laugh despite her tears.

"I'm sorry to cut our *adventure* so short."

He presses his lips to her temple, kissing softly. "I'd be happy to find time to embark on a new one with you after my trip to Niigata is complete. But I have a feeling you won't be available."

Her smile is bittersweet.

He gets to his feet first, gallantly holding out his hand. She doesn't mind it too much when he steals a few more kisses before escorting her to the exit of the tent and bidding her farewell.

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The stone she kicked smacks into the limousine perfectly and she panics, hurrying over as the driver emerges to inspect the damage.

"I'm terribly sorry! How much to repair the damages?"

The man in the tuxedo answers her question immediately. "About 700 to 800 thousand yen." He steps closer. "It is but merely a scratch."

But then he bows to her, an almost amused look in his eyes when he straightens up again.

“My lady.”

“Goodness!” she complains. “Don’t frighten me! I thought this car belonged to someone else.”

“My apologies.”

Relieved, she takes a fresh look at him. He’s not much older than her, wearing glasses that lend him an almost aloof, intellectual air. “Are you Karasawa’s successor?”

“Yes, the name is Kageyama,” he says, pulling out a pocket watch. “I thought it was about time you would be heading home, so I have come to pick you up.”

She smiles. “Hmm...sharp intuition, Kageyama. You’d make a great detective.”

“Far from it,” he replies, looking almost embarrassed. “I am only a butler. I cannot even compare myself with an intelligent noblewoman such as yourself, my lady. Detective? Hardly.”

Reiko beams with his compliment. She’ll miss Karasawa, but she has a feeling that things will work out well with his successor.

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Sato puts up the divider to give her privacy when she makes a phone call on the drive home. It’s nearly 2:00 in the morning, which makes it the perfect time to call her father. He’s in Lagos, Nigeria on business, and it’s only 6:00 PM.

She doesn’t want her decision to take him by surprise.

Kageyama is still awake and waiting for her when she arrives, opening the door and locking it behind her. Surely he knows the Noble Detective’s reputation as well as anyone, but if he’s feeling jealous, she can’t see it in his eyes. Maybe he’s even misguidedly happy for her to some extent.

She walks up the stairs, wanting to sleep before she says anything, but when she hears his steady footfalls on the steps behind her, she feels like she shouldn’t delay it. She’s already made her mind up, and Papa has reluctantly agreed.

Reiko stops at the top of the staircase, turning to look down at Kageyama. He’s dressed in his usual livery, the tuxedo and bowtie, not a hair out of place. Whatever turmoil might be brewing under the surface remains hidden from her for now.

She does and doesn’t want to do this. Because if she’s miscalculated, she has no idea what she’ll do.

She can only trust that he was being truthful the day she asked him if he’d love her forever.

“Kageyama, I need to speak to you.”

He nods. “Of course, my lady.”

Instead of going to her room, she goes to his study at the end of the hall. This was Karasawa’s room before, but Kageyama has made it his own. The books are his, the leather-bound notebook that contains his daily thoughts and comments on household issues sits on the desk.

Reiko moves around the desk to sit in his chair, and he remains standing just on the other side, watching her with curious eyes.

“I want to thank you, Kageyama, for your years of loyalty and service.”

He doesn’t say anything, watching her carefully.

“I’ve never complimented you enough for the work you do. It’s likely because everything you do is so seamless and perfect that I don’t even realize the effort behind it. Thank you so much for everything.”

“My lady...”

“Which is why it pains me so much to have to do this.” She looks up at him, gripping the arms of the chair tightly for courage. “Kageyama, you’re fired.”

She doesn’t expect him to laugh, but he does. After all, this is something he’s heard from her hundreds of times.

“I’m serious.”

He steps forward, clumsily bumping into the desk. “May I ask what I’ve done to displease you, my lady? I humbly apologize if my work has been below standards of late, but I beg you, allow me to make up for it. Serving the Hosho family, serving you, it is not a task I take lightly. It has long been my privilege and my honor to do so and...”

She holds up a hand, silencing him.

“Kageyama,” she says, seeing the panic in his face. It nearly drives her to tears, but she doesn’t think she has any more to let out. At least not tonight. “Your work has always exceeded standards, and you very well know it. I am not firing you because I am unhappy with the service you have provided.”

He waits for her response, his arms held so stiffly at his sides.

“I’m firing you because I’m in love with you. I’m firing you because I never considered what that really means. I can’t be in love with the person who also takes orders from me. It’s not fair to you. After what happened to me, after you made your...decision, I was upset with you. I was furious with you. I needed you.” Her lips are trembling. “Kageyama, I *needed* you.”

“My lady...”

“I didn’t need you as my butler. I needed you as the person I love, as my partner. But you tried to resign and I forced Papa to make you stay. I didn’t consider your feelings. I only considered mine and what I needed. I’d grown comfortable having you as both butler and partner that I refused to let you become neither. And I’m very, very sorry.”

He comes around the desk, crouching down beside her. He doesn’t make a move to touch her. Unlike the Noble Detective, Kageyama always waits.

She shakes her head, not looking down at him. “Papa will write you a very good letter of recommendation. You will find employment easily if you wish to remain in service. I just cannot allow you to remain in service to me.”

“I made a promise,” Kageyama whispers. “I made a promise to look after you and protect you for the rest of my days.”

“Then do so only if it is something you truly wish to do. Not because it is what pays your salary.” She gets to her feet, doing her best to stay firm in her awful decision. “The Noble Detective is sending his butler Yamamoto to the house tomorrow to see that I am looked after temporarily until Papa can arrange for your permanent replacement. Please take all the time you need to gather your things. All of the family’s properties are available for you to use.”

She’s at the door to his study when he calls out to her again, his voice desperate and strained. “My lady!”

She doesn’t look back.

“Since your employment here has been terminated, you don’t need to call me that ever again.”

—

She’s half-asleep, tracing lazy circles on his chest with her fingertips. “You were a kid once, weren’t you, Kageyama?”

She likes the rumble of his teasing laughter. “Of course I was.”

She imagines a little boy in a tuxedo and bow tie, and her heart clenches. “Did you want to be a butler when you grew up?”

“Hmm,” he ponders, allowing her to keep touching and tickling him as she pleases. “No.”

“No?”

“I was going to be a professional baseball player. Or a celebrity chef. Or...well...”

She presses a kiss just over his heart, her hair spilling out across his warm skin. “Well?”

“You may not believe this, my lady, but I always aspired to be a legendary detective.”

“A shocking admission! I’d have never guessed!”

He strokes her hair, laughing again. "I'm full of surprises."

Reiko sips her wine, pausing in her recollection of the day's events. Kazamatsuri had been nothing but a nuisance, asking the dumbest questions while they interviewed witnesses. She had barely been able to ask what she wanted before Kazamatsuri decided they had everything they needed.

"I'm convinced it was the ex-wife," she says, having a bite of asparagus. "Her alibi was weakest."

She muses over every detail she can recall, having a sinking suspicion that she's right.

"Well, what do you think? Based on what I've told you, do you have an opinion?"

He inclines his head, reaching for the wine bottle so he might pour her some more.

"My lady, it seems to me that you've missed a few key points. If you'll forgive my rudeness."

She looks up, eyes narrowing. "Is that so?"

Naito looks at her with his teasing smile. "You've forgotten about the U.A.T."

"The what?" she snaps at him. Her new butler has the oddest fondness for pointless acronyms.

"The *utagawashii atarashii tsuma*. U.A.T."

The suspicious new wife.

"And what makes you think the U.A.T. is to blame, Naito?"

He's still smiling that dumb smile. "You'd have to be blind not to suspect her, my lady."

She's had quite enough backtalk from servants for one evening. And much as she doesn't want to admit it, she realizes that she may have dismissed the U.A.T.'s testimony a little too easily.

"What time is my guest arriving?"

"Just in time for dessert, I suspect," Naito replies.

It's been a few months now since she's seen the Noble Detective, and Reiko will be glad to see him again. Not necessarily for romance, but for a sympathetic ear. It's been a tough adjustment for Reiko here in the house. An acronym-slinging butler and an empty bed.

She heads for the sitting room to ponder Naito's hints about her case, waiting for him to return with her distinguished guest as well as the pudding she's been looking forward to all day.

She hears the wheels of the dessert cart and the gentle rumbles of the tea cups as Naito pushes it into the room a while later. But when she looks up, the person pushing the cart isn't Naito. He's not in a long coat and the too-tight trousers of the guest she's been anticipating. And he's not in a tuxedo and bow tie.

Instead he's in a far simpler gray suit with a dress shirt and blue tie. At least he still wears the same glasses.

She gets to her feet, confused as he closes the door, setting the brake on the dessert cart.

"You're not Naito."

"No."

"And you're not the Noble Detective."

At this, he smiles. "I could never aspire to such greatness."

She crosses the room in only a few steps, taking hold of him by the lapels of his suit jacket, giving him a firm shake. "You might have sent a message."

"I wanted you to be the first to see them."

She lets him go, heart racing, as he digs into his pocket for the business card holder. He takes one out, holding it for her to take.

It bears his name, his full name, and beneath it...

"Legendary Detective," she reads, annoyed by his usual arrogance.

He's been consulting with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police for the last few months, but it seems that it was only last week that he's managed to finally set up an office for himself a few blocks away from the Kunitachi police station. Papa had told her that he refused the money offered, that he wanted to save until he had enough to rent an office of his own without help.

He's done a fine job keeping his distance, taking cases separate from her own. He's even clashed with the Noble Detective a few times now, but she's only heard whispers about those epic showdowns.

This is the first time that he's come to the house since that night, though he's never been far. He and Naito have become fast friends, and unfortunately, some of his rudeness has rubbed off on Reiko's new butler.

She hasn't allowed herself to wallow in despair these last few months. Give him time, the Noble Detective counseled her. And so she has, holding onto hope.

"Would you like me to serve dessert? Naito-kun has gone to considerable trouble."

She shakes her head. "No."

He turns, lifting the lid covering the chilled pudding. "It looks rather delicious."

"Then have Naito pack some for you to take home with you."

"He's off for a drive," he says shyly. "I hope you don't mind me giving orders to your staff."

She bites her lip, trying not to shake. She hugs herself, wondering if this really means what she thinks it does.

"Congratulations," she says, tapping his business card nervously against her arm. "I hope you will be very successful, Legendary Detective Kageyama."

He leaves the dessert cart behind, turning to rest his hands on her shoulders, not waiting for her to grant permission. "I can't leave it all to the detectives of the Kunitachi police. Some of them are often a bit...slow to uncover the truth of things."

She looks up at him with a scowl, seeing that familiar smile emerge. Reiko uncrosses her arms, wrapping them around him instead, squeezing him tight. She shuts her eyes, wanting to cry in relief but not wanting to give him the satisfaction of her tears. He's just insulted her and the entire detective squad, after all.

"I missed you," she mumbles, feeling his arms coming around her. Protective and gentle like it used to be. But with something more. It's an embrace without complications, without hesitation.

"Kiss me," he says, demanding something from her for what might be the very first time.

He'll have to wait.

Instead she takes him by the hand and leads him from the room. Naito really has gone, and their footsteps are heavy as they hurry up the stairs to her bedroom.

"Now I'll kiss you," she says as soon as the door is closed. "It will be hard to stop after all you've put me through."

She takes his glasses away, sets them down on her dresser and returns to him, leaning up on her tiptoes so their lips can meet. It's been months and months, but it's perfect and familiar and irreplaceable.

His hands are everywhere now that he doesn't have to concern himself with his dual role in her life. Instead he can give all of himself to loving her instead of only a fraction. When things grow more heated, she pushes him back. But only so she can turn her back to him, letting him brush her hair aside so he can tug on the zipper of her dress.

Old habits die hard and when she steps out of it, he lifts it gently to set it over the chair. When she turns back, she sees the barely concealed hurt in his eyes. He's seeing the scars on her chest for the first time. She reaches out, taking his hand in hers. She brings it there, lets him touch the marred skin.

She doesn't let him say sorry, just stands and lets him take it in. She's still the same Reiko with only those two minor differences. She takes his hand, pushes it lower so instead he can cup her breast through the thin satin of her bra. There's no point in dwelling any further on the result of an incident neither of them could have prevented. He strokes her lazily, twisting her nipple through the fabric as his mouth gets lost along her neck, her shoulder.

It feels so good and so right to have him back here in her room. She hopes that this will be the first of many nights, learning each other all over again.

She helps him out of his suit jacket and tie, moving to his buttons. He's watching her with such intense focus, as though he himself is irritated that he waited so long to come back to her.

With every article of clothing that falls to Reiko's floor, he kisses her, hard and needy, and she wonders if they'll ever make it to the bed. She wants him so badly she'd let him take her anywhere he wanted. But finally she's bared to him completely, and the same is true for him.

She panics briefly when she realizes the box of condoms in her bedside table has expired. But he's got one in his wallet, reminding her without words that he came to her home tonight expressly to have her again after way too long. They lay side by side, her leg up and over him so he can rest his hand between her thighs, his tongue slipping into her mouth in time with his fingers inside her.

She's so ready, has been ready since they started to kiss quite frankly, but he's taking his time. He kisses her as she bucks against his fingers, driving them deeper inside her. It's good, it's so good. She isn't sure how she made it this long without the comfort and warmth of him lying at her side, working hard to please her. He slows a little, slipping his fingers from inside her to focus instead on the too-sensitive nub of her clit. He brings her to the edge and chuckles in contentment when she can't bear any more, begging him in very vulgar and unladylike terms to finish what he's started.

He waits for her to come anyhow, letting the waves subside before he's rolling the condom on, stroking her face and whispering her name.

"Reiko," he calls her, remembering that it's the only address she'll allow now. "Reiko, I've missed you."

"Will you always love me, Kageyama?"

He kisses her lips, and she sees tears in his eyes.

"Are you blind?" he grumbles.

Soon he's moving within her, her hands clinging to the strong muscles of his back, his shoulders. His movements aren't polite but aggressive, showing her a side of him he must have been holding back all those months ago. She loves it, having all of Kageyama all to herself.

She laughs when he rolls them, moves so that she can be on top of him. She gets up, staying balanced with one hand to his chest as she rides him, grinding down against every upward thrust of his cock inside her. He holds tight to her legs, squeezing as she revels in what she's so dearly missed. This position has her own satisfaction in mind, and he starts to say her name, like a prayer. Like a command. Hearing *Reiko* fall so easily from his plump lips swollen from all their kisses, it's not long before she's coming again, clenching around him uncontrollably as he groans in response. She can't take much more of this, and she shuts her eyes, trying not to topple over as he arches up and into her again and again until he can't bear it any longer.

She stays there on top of him, chest heaving and hair wild, strands of it sticking uncomfortably to her mouth. Relief, happiness, satisfaction have her quivering from head to toe. She knows she made the right choice. A butler is nice to have, but love is far better.

They end up in her bathtub, her sitting between his legs and resting her back against his chest. This is an intimacy he never allowed before, not when he was still her employee to command, and she sighs in contentment, feeling his arms around her, his hands pressed so firmly and possessively against her abdomen.

Things have changed, and Reiko is not afraid.

"Naito thinks he's solved my case for me," she mumbles lazily.

"The U.A.T., yes?"

She narrows her eyes, poking at the hands around her belly with the tips of her nails, enough to make him yelp a bit. The words "you're fired" are on the tip of her tongue, but of course they no longer apply.

While some things have changed, Reiko admits with a smile, others may still take a bit of time.

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Reiko receives a handwritten letter the following day, the envelope sealed with the same crest from the flag she's seen flying over a large, elaborate tent.

I'd wish you luck, but I doubt you'll need it, he's written with a flourish.

Bravest Reiko-chan. Best wishes on your grand adventure.

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