

lift me like an olive branch (i'll be your homeward dove)

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by [synchronicities](#)

Summary

Nokoru/Tomoyo, Arranged Marriage AU.

"A good match, his parents call them. She might have believed them had she had any say in it."

Notes

Oh, man, I don't even know. This started as a Tomoyo character study then ended up as *this* for which I have really no excuse except for the fact that they were childhood friends in Tsubasa's Piffle World and I just really like the CLAMP School Detectives okay.

Everyone's a little older in this (mid-teens, probably), and Syaoran's back from Hong Kong, which //waves hand JUST GO WITH IT GUYS

Title from Leonard Cohen's "Dance me to the End of Love."

- Translation into Polski available: [jak gołąb lecący do domu](#) by [terpsychora](#)

(i)

Tomoyo is escorted to her first high school dance by the most beautiful boy she's ever seen. That much she can admit to herself, although she doesn't think she'll ever get used to it: not to the perfectly-coiffed hair (he tells her it took two minutes when she can tell it took two hours), not to the perfectly-fitted, sharply-pressed, silk-lined suit (he has six others exactly like it), not to the vaguely patronizing smile and the warm hands, not everything that makes up Nokoru Imonoyama.

He's lovely, really; he hands her a red rose when he picks her up, compliments her beauty tirelessly, chooses the finest shrimp to pop into her mouth, escorts her to the comfort room and waits patiently outside, and spins her and her friends carelessly around the dance floor all while her mother had fawned in the background, probably smiling proudly to herself.

A good match, his parents call them. She might have believed them had she had any say in it.

(ii)

Sakura likes him.

“I think he’s a nice boy, Tomoyo-chan, and kind,” she says, after an entire evening of watching him compliment Rika’s dress, give Takashi dancing tips, and escort Naoko to the clinic after she’d sprained her ankle on her high heel. “Just like a prince, or a knight in shining armour.”

She merely smiles back and manages a *thank you*, because unlike darling Sakura Tomoyo has long since disabused herself of romantic notions like prince charmings and mothers who saw you for who you were, and princesses who would look your way once you had done enough for them.

(iii)

“Tomoyo, my darling daughter, there is nothing worse than growing old alone.”

And unloved, she adds silently, but knows better than to say it out loud.

(iv)

Her friends try their best to hide it and so to not disappoint them Tomoyo pretends she never hears the whispers at school. She knows they are there all the same.

“I didn’t even know they had arranged marriages anymore.”

“They do it to the really rich and Daidouji’s old money. Her mother owns that company, too.”

“I hear he’s the youngest son of an insanely rich family. They probably own the company that made your clothes! They set it up to rein him in, I hear. One of those people who’d do crazy stuff for the heck of it.”

“So he’s got a top IQ yet is totally off his rocker?”

“Poor Daidouji! I heard she doesn’t even want the marriage!”

“Didn’t he escort her to the dance?”

“Ehh? So he was that lovely boy? He’s so handsome and charming and rich – I’d be more than happy to take him off her hands!”

By all means, go ahead, Tomoyo thinks primly, but smiles and waves at them in the hallways all the same.

(v)

Syaoran thinks he's pretentious, but that's to be expected.

"You're too good for him," he mumbles into his scarf one morning when the air is cold and they're both on classroom duty. She hums to herself and pretends not to hear him, instead turning her attention back to the blackboard.

"Don't tell Sakura," he adds hurriedly. "She likes him."

"I know."

A pause. Tomoyo knows Syaoran is evaluating what to say next.

"But if anyone can make this work, it's you!"

She turns and beams at him. "Thank you, Li-kun," she says. "That means a lot."

(vi)

Nokoru's mother has the good grace to invite her to tea, and the gall to run off to a meeting ten minutes into it. He escorts his mother to the door with gracious aplomb, assures her that of *course* he wouldn't run off and that of *course* he would accompany his darling fiancée home. As soon as his mother closes the door behind her he turns to her and grins, but it's too late – she has already registered the stiff set of his shoulders, the reluctance in his fingers when they hold on to the doorknob, the twitch of his mouth ruining his effortless smile. A sick satisfaction settles itself in her stomach, the knowledge that at least she was not the only one uncomfortable with this arrangement.

“You'll have to forgive my mother. She's very busy.”

Without missing a beat, she answers, “It's no problem. My own is much the same.”

The smile on his face grows. “Is that the reason you're always in the company of Kinomoto-san?”

“Sakura-chan is one of my best friends,” says Tomoyo. “My mother does not usually allow the degree of freedom she gives me, but she likes Sakura-chan—” *very much*, she neglects to add, “—and considers her company better than that of my bodyguards’.” *But she is so much more than – my muse, my protector, my oldest, dearest friend.*

That, at least, elicits a chuckle. “Bodyguards?”

“Yes.” Tomoyo smiles despite herself. “Don't you have them?”

“I—” The smile falters. “No. My mother believes that just the one is enough.”

“You must trust him a great deal, then,” she replies with utmost sincerity – she, too, knows how dangerous it is to be young and rich, and how it feels to completely believe in one person.

“I do, Tomoyo-jou.” His smile falters again, but she wonders if she'd just imagined it.

(vii)

Perhaps out of courtesy, she receives an invitation to his private birthday dinner; and perhaps out of consideration, he encourages her to bring one person. She asks Sakura, but the latter tells her that her father had planned a trip the weekend before; Syaoran offers to go with her but she thanks him and assures him that she could handle it when she sees the worried look that crosses his face.

Her mother drives her to the restaurant herself, clucking all the way and reminding Tomoyo to be on her absolute best behaviour. Tomoyo smiles and kisses her on the cheek when they get there, because despite everything she knows Sonomi Daidouji means well.

“Tomoyo-jou.” Nokoru rises up to greet her, pristine and charming as per usual. He makes a big show of kneeling and kissing her hand, which makes the two girls and one of the boys at the table smile. “I’m glad you could make it. A pity Kinomoto-san couldn’t make it.”

“So am I,” she says, not unkindly. She regards the group – two boys and two girls, a group she thinks uncharacteristically small for someone so charismatic. *Wouldn’t it be funny if, underneath it all, he was really quite lonely?*

“My fiancée, Tomoyo Daidouji,” he says to them, an arm at her back. “Tomoyo-jou, I would like you to meet Nagisa Azuya-san. She’s a very gifted flutist.” He gestures to a girl probably five or six years younger than she.

“You speak too highly of me, *Kaichou*,” says Nagisa Azuya, dipping her pretty head at Tomoyo. “*Kaichou* says you’re a wonderful singer. Perhaps we could collaborate one day.”

“Her friend, Utako Ohkawa-san.” Utako Ohkawa nods her head, her dark hair falling around her face like a curtain.

“Akira Ijyuin.”

The dark-haired boy perks up and waves at her. “Nice to meet you!” He turns to Tomoyo’s fiancé. “*Kaichou*, you never said she was so pretty!”

Nokoru laughs nervously, perhaps to humor him. “And last but certainly not least, Suoh Takamura.” A guileless smile crosses his face. “He’s looking sourer than usual today, but don’t let him get to you.”

“You’re acting a lot more restrained today yourself, *Kaichou*,” Suoh Takamura replies without missing a beat. “Perhaps you should hang around him more, Daidouji-san; he needs the good influence—”

“Why don’t you take a seat, Tomoyo-jou?” Nokoru cuts in, smiling cheerfully in a way she’s never seen. “The food will be arriving shortly.” He pulls up the chair beside his, seating her between him and Ijyuin.

“So, Daidouji-san, tell us about yourself,” Ijyuin says blithely. “So you sing?”

“Yes,” Tomoyo replies. “I lead my school’s choir.”

“Then you must be really good!” says Ohkawa, clapping her hands together. “You have to invite us to the next show. I’m sure we’d all love to hear you.”

“Most certainly,” says Tomoyo, Ohkawa’s cheery mien already growing on her. “The next recital is two months from now,” she adds, smiling a little at the other girl’s grin.

Azuya leans forward, plants her elbows on the table, and perches her head on her hands. “Kaichou told us you make clothes, Daidouji-san! That’s really amazing.”

“Thank you. He must speak a lot of me, then,” Tomoyo teases.

“Of course,” Nokoru adds, flashing the signature too-practiced smile. “It is entirely my honor to speak of such a great lady, Tomoyo-jou.” Ijyuu, Ohkawa, and Azuya all laugh, while Takamura sighs and rolls his eyes.

“Suoh,” says Azuya, grinning and tapping the older boy on the shoulder. “Lighten up a little! Daidouji-san is going to think we’re a bunch of sourpusses if you keep that up.”

The change is instantaneous and hardly perceptible, but Tomoyo notices it – the sudden gentle light in Takamura’s eyes, the way the corners of his mouth twitch upwards at Azuya’s words.

“Apologies, Daidouji-san,” says Takamura. “I was just utterly distraught at the thought of such a nice lady having to mind Nokoru all the time. You don’t have to worry, though, that’s my job.”

He raises an eyebrow at Azuya in an *are-you-happy-now* kind of way; Azuya beams at him and Suoh shines in the way Syaoran does whenever Sakura manages to do her math homework by herself, the way Rika does whenever Terada-sensei praises her handicrafts. Expecting a witty rebuttal, she glances at Nokoru and realizes that he sees it, too.

(viii)

“If you’re unhappy about it, Tomoyo-chan,” says Sakura at lunchtime, her tone half-joking, “I could just bring out Sweet and turn them all into pastries for you. We could feed them to Kero.”

Tomoyo gives her what she hopes is not a very sad look. “I don’t think so, Sakura-chan,” she says in all seriousness. “I would say that Nokoru-san and I are more alike than he would like to admit.”

“You can’t be serious. You’ve got nothing in common with that guy,” Syaoran puts in, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

“That’s not true!” says Sakura. “Imonoyama-san and Tomoyo-chan are both really nice, and smart, and loving!”

Loving. Perhaps that’s the word, she thinks as the bell rings and the conversation is promptly forgotten.

(ix)

True to her word, she invites him and his friends to the next school concert. Her classmates gape at the limousine that pulls up to the auditorium but ultimately say nothing of it.

Afterwards, Nagisa Azuya comes up to her on Takamura's arm, nothing but smiles and praises. "You were phenomenal!" she squeals, running towards her the instant she sees her. "Our school's high and mighty choir would kill to have you on their team. I know!" she says suddenly. "I'll invite *you* to our next show in return!"

"Nagisa-jou is part of the school orchestra," Takamura explains. To her, he says, "She is right, though. You did really well."

"Thank you both," Tomoyo says, feeling an unusual rush of pride at his words. "That must be a tremendous compliment, coming from you." To Azuya, she says, "I would *love* to see you perform, Azuya-san."

Azuya laughs. "He's not as big a grumpy bear as you think, Daidouji-san," she says. "He's actually quite kind."

Takamura says nothing, but a grin finds its way onto his face.

Nokoru chooses that moment to present himself along with a giant bouquet of roses, singing her praises and choosing every opportune moment to slip in a compliment.

"You seem beside yourself with pride, *Kaichou*," Takamura notes, smirking. "I guess I should have known you'd pull out all the stops with your lovely bride sooner or later."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Suoh," Nokoru says through his teeth. "Tomoyo-jou, you were wonderful."

She supposes she hears it as clear as day, now, the small slip of resentment behind every *Tomoyo-jou* and the woodenness at Takamura's every jibe. She knows now that Nokoru will never let her know; that, like her, he has too many hard-drilled social graces and senses of duty to not play the part of the perfect fiancé, and that he, like her, knows that it's not her fault. But Tomoyo likes to think she knows how to read people, and she can read Nokoru's mocking tones and his practiced smiles well enough.

"Nokoru-san, I'm feeling quite tired. If it's not too much trouble, could you accompany me to the car?"

As if driven by some unknown instinct Nokoru instantly straightens and flashes her his best smile. "Of course, Tomoyo-jou," he says, extending his arm. She takes it, her fingers light on his suit sleeve, and bids good night to Takamura and Azuya.

"You were absolutely wonderful, Tomoyo-jou," he says when they're safely in the hallway and out of hearing distance. "Beside me, Akira was nearly moved to tears."

“I’m disappointed I did not make him go the whole way, then,” she replies. A safe answer. “Didn’t I elicit such a reaction in you, Nokoru-san?”

“I do try my best not to cry in public, Tomoyo-jou; it would be unseemly for me to be seen sniffing over a song.” He smiles. “But I *can* tell you that you were very, very good.” He’s looking at her oddly, now – not in the way Syaoran looks at Sakura, but how, perhaps, Meilin looks at Sakura now – as someone to be trusted, not hated. Gone is the resentment behind the honorifics – it’s a nice feeling. She begins to wonder what had brought it about, before she realizes.

“What do you think of when you sing, Tomoyo-jou?” Nokoru is half-smiling.

She was right. He *had* realized.

Tomoyo takes a deep breath and measures her words. She thinks of the last song again, a soaring ballad of a woman betrayed by her own feelings, and feels the old feeling of her heart sinking momentarily. “I think of a person going through what’s described in the song, and I put myself in their shoes.” Not that it had taken much shoe-wearing to pull off that song.

“That must be difficult without any faces,” he replies, his smile unmoving.

He certainly wants this conversation to go somewhere. “It’s not like you’re implying.” Tomoyo smiles a little. *But then, so do I.*

Nokoru looks – or pretends to look – stunned. She expects him to pull a *so there is someone you love more than me, Tomoyo-jou?* with his typical flair, but he instead says, very softly, “Surely that person, whoever they are, would be honored to be loved by someone as lovely as you, right?”

Her eyes widen slightly, and she looks at Nokoru, who’s looking away. “Like, they wouldn’t see it as a burden, or feel troubled, because they care about you a lot anyway. And you’d trust them with your life. And they’d protect you.”

Tomoyo closes her eyes, and gently places her hand on his arm. By now they’ve reached the parking lot, and she can see her chauffeur waiting patiently beside the car. She takes a deep breath. “I’ve come to know over the years, Nokoru-san, that the greatest happiness one can have is seeing the one they love happy.” She doesn’t remove her fingers and laces her voice with meaning. “Even if it’s not with you. Even if it’s with someone else you love very, very much.”

His eyes widen. “You knew.” The accusation is uncharacteristically hard and biting, all at once sad and angry and out of place on his pretty face. This, Tomoyo knows, is someone entirely different from Nokoru Imonoyama in all the ways she has come to know him – not Nokoru the Chairman, with his flighty, grand ideas and rippling laughter; not Nokoru the Dutiful Son, with his elaborate companies and gentle kisses on his mother’s cheek; not Nokoru the NASA-standard genius, who solves mathematical circles around everybody; not Nokoru the Perfect Fiancé, who chooses the finest shrimp to pop into her mouth and escorts her to the comfort room and had once spun her around the dance floor with all the grace and

elegance expected of him. This, perhaps, was just *Nokoru* – all those faces discarded to reveal what he really was: a teenage boy with a heart bigger than he would like.

“I did.” Not knowing what else to do, she smiles up at him. “I suppose you did, too.”

Nokoru’s face undergoes a million different emotions before finally settling on reluctant resignation. “You’re sharper than I gave you credit for, Tomoyo-jou.”

“As are you, Nokoru-san.”

He laughs. “This is quite the mess our parents have gotten us into, isn’t it?”

Tomoyo smiles again. They’ve reached the car, now, and Tomoyo’s chauffeur is making hasty bows. “No mess is unfixable, Nokoru-san. Thank you for the flowers.”

“Good night, Tomoyo-jou.”

(x)

Eriol sends a card with *Congratulations!* written on it in gold, embossed letters over a picture of wedding bands, the accompanying greeting surprisingly as blasé and generic as the card itself. Tomoyo resists the urge to roll her eyes in displeasure and disappointment, before she finds the words scrawled on the back – *You'll do well. I've seen it, but I didn't need to do that to know.*

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