

For those who know how to listen, nature is hardly a quiet place. Cherry trees whisper to each other in a language long forgotten, their soft pink blooms carried by the breeze of early April. Birds sing as they weave between branches thick with leaves. Demons roam about, invisible to the naked eye. The only indication of their presence may be an ignition of one's soul; a sudden fiery feeling that inspires, or a cooling down of the most pervasive anger. These sweet spring days are deceptively safe. Even a cunning Alp or mischievous Obariyon cannot resist the allure that sakura bring. Raidou's work duties relent somewhat; a respite during this most tranquil of seasons. He strolls in the early morning dew, taking notice of a kasuga torii as the coral-coloured sunlight of dawn shines through the dense foliage above. Maybe, just maybe, he could take her here one day...

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Her hair is growing back.

Raidou finds himself scrutinising the girl's hairstyle. It's gotten longer; the beginnings of another hime-style cut forming from the roughly-hacked bob. The nightmare of the Presence Within possessing her is becoming a distant memory, and the fourteenth Devil Summoner of the distinguished Kuzunoha clan should have long forgotten this case, memorable as it may have been. Or, he tells himself, he shouldn't still be thinking about it so often.. She insisted on continuing her secretarial work for the Narumi Detective Agency, so Raidou sees her quite regularly. She is dusting the titular Narumi's desk, humming a familiar tune as she carefully cleans around Shouhei's latest creation; a pagoda made entirely out of matches. Does that man ever do actual work?

As she finishes her task and turns to face him, her expression warm and caring as always, Raidou can't help but let the smallest smile form upon his lips. She asks about his day and wishes him well, making saccharine small talk whilst paying the utmost attention to Raidou's responses. As she is telling the Summoner of her latest escapades - did he know that she took Rin to the Western-style restaurant for the first time? Yes, she did! The pair tried the hayashi rice and some fancy dish called Navy curry; it was all delicious! - Raidou unconsciously shifts closer to her, fully absorbed by her story. He reaches out and twirls a bit of shiny black hair in between his fingers.

"R-Raidou! What.. w-what are you doing?!"

The girl's eyes widen like saucers while her hands clutch her chest, frozen like a doe in Oboroguruma's headlights as Raidou takes a moment to comprehend what he has just done; his eyes ever-so-slightly widen, his heart beats just a touch quicker.

"Nice going, Raidou! You can't just reach out and touch dames' hair whenever you please, you know! Do you have no manners?"

The black cat's tail twitches angrily as he spits out his sentence. Gouto-Douji, the well meaning but acid-tongued mentor to all those who bear the title of 'Raidou Kuzunoha;' an ever-present voice of reason for the teenaged Summoner who is usually the first to scold him, as well. His emerald green eyes narrow as he glares at his protégé.

Raidou regains his obstinate composure and pulls down the brim of his hat, a move the young Summoner often does when he is feeling uncomfortable. Or polite, or serious. It really is a multi-purpose action.

"I apologise, Miss Daidouji. I had just noticed your former hairstyle beginning to return, that's all."

Kaya Daidouji, only child of the influential Takeshi Daidouji and heiress to her family's fortunes (both good and bad), is not as practised in hiding her feelings. Her cheeks flush almost crimson, and she cannot bring herself to look Raidou in the eyes, instead turning her head to the side and speaking to the wall -

"Y..you.. n-noticed?"

The only sentence she can muster is a stuttery performance of two simple words, but her emotions are clear as she attempts to pull herself together. Raidou Kuzunoha the XIV is generally prepared for anything and can plan accordingly, but this scenario is outside his realm of expertise. This Kaya - the real Miss Daidouji - is vastly different from the uncompromising girl who stared him in the eyes and called him by his birth name, bossing him around the Capital before performing the Ritual of Entry right before his very eyes. Raidou finds himself drawn to this genuine Kaya even outside of work, but why? He knows exactly why, but stubbornness prevails and he fervently attempts to repress it all.

"Yes. I noticed."

A slight chuckle escapes the watchful feline lounging atop Narumi's old bookshelf; it still holds a faint scent of the hinoki cypress it's made out of. Well-worn copies of famous works, such as those by Soseki, Kawabata, even 'modern' articles by Hiratsuka populate the impressive monument to Japanese literature. Gouto rolls around onto his back, stretching out over the edge of the furniture.

"A truly suave answer, well done! That will surely win her over!"

Biting sarcasm aside, the little cat has a point. 'Suave' isn't exactly on the list of descriptors that Raidou would choose for himself. In the absence of time, taking notice of girls was last on his list of priorities. But this one, oh this one sticks in his mind like the most stubborn of thorns, perpetually embedded into the very fabric of his thoughts. The metaphor is fitting, for Kaya is the most beautiful rose Raidou has ever laid eyes on. He's beginning to have trouble ignoring it, if this social blunder today is any indication. Raidou takes a deep breath and plots his next move. The deafening silence is broken by Kaya, still beet red but distinctly trying her hand at summoning; not a demon, no no, but some courage.

"H-Have you ever had hayashi rice, Rai...dou-kun?"

The question catches him off guard, what on earth does some foreign-inspired stew have to do with anything? Seeing his confusion, the girl's bravado seems to drain like the whiskey in a drunkard's cup.

"You are a real idiot, you know that? Answer her!" Gouto hisses. Thankfully so, as his cutting tone snaps Raidou back to reality. He pulls the brim of his hat down, lower still; it almost obscures his eyes at this point, but it's necessary for even he is beginning to blush, an unfamiliar heat colouring his cheeks and scrambling his mind.

"No... No I can't say that I have. Perhaps.. you could take me to try some, as well."

The Summoner reaches up and plays with the strings on the back of his hat as he asks; it's a comforting gesture that he picked up somewhat recently. Not every day results in such a delicate situation; first crushes, the beginnings of what may blossom into love standing right here in front of him. Kaya's eyes sparkle and any bravery shatters as she can no longer speak. All she can do is steal a quick glance at the Devil Summoner towering twenty centimetres over her petite frame, before darting her eyes anywhere else; Narumi's desk, the cobwebs in the corner she is too short to reach, the gramophone seated firmly on top of the paulownia wood side table. She nods, first marginally, then a couple times more to truly hammer the point home. She would adore for the two of them to have dinner together, yes Raidou, please understand this as she can't find her voice at the moment!

"I suppose it's settled, then." Thankfully Raidou did notice, his deep voice conveys a more gentle tone than he is accustomed to hearing from himself.

Before the pair can fully descend into innocent giggles, bashful looks, perhaps even sheepish remarks of budding affection, Narumi unceremoniously stumbles through the front door; he looks tired but is immaculately presented and dressed, as usual.

"Raidou, look sharp! We have a new case!! I got an advanced deposit, so I've ordered a brand new suit from France. Don't look at me like that, you'll get paid too... Mostly. I think. I just had to have it, alright?"

He looks at Kaya, who has used the distraction as a way to try and relax. 'Look normal, look normal,' she thinks.

"Hello, little bird! You finished cleaning? Ah, you have.. What a stellar job! I told you Raidou, having a dame around here was an excellent idea! I don't think this office has ever been so organised, and the little broad makes a mean java, as well!"

The girl smiles and nods politely, the intense burning in her face has finally softened, at least for now.

"Raidou, what are you waiting for! Chop chop!! Oh, and little bird, can you please make me some coffee? I'll have some toast with butter, too."

The duo of highschoolers both nod and quickly get to work on their aforementioned tasks. Raidou sneaks one more look at Kaya before resting his hand lightly on his katana's grip and opening the front door. Their dinner plans have been delayed, but he has a hunch that it will be a wait most worthwhile. One doesn't need detective experience to deduce that.