becoming

by anachronist

Summary

There used to be a girl who took the essence of others into herself, copper and velvet ambrosia on her tongue, until she was them and they were wholly hers.

That changed when she let the tide sweep her away.

[Sidestory for little talks, set vaguely between the end of No Save Points and Currencies. Can be read separately.]

Notes

Here goes nothing.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Overkill.

That was how Himiko liked it when she had to break off from former loves when her heart started beating for another. But she was not ungrateful of the time they’d spent together, and the passionate declaration of her past adoration painted and filled her glass jars with deep, rich crimson.

In memoriam. Memoriam in caritate. [1]

Oh, if only jerkass detectives and cops would get off her case - it’s not as if they understood the special connection between her and those she admired.

She craved for her love’s dreams and despair, joy and sorrow, life and death. She cried when they cried. She laughed when they laughed. She shared their pain and delight, and held them close when the light of their eyes went out.

All they were became hers, all they were was her. She collected their very essence - their isness - into herself, coppery ambrosia on her tongue, and was transformed. Nirvana and enlightenment, for the fleeting hours that constrained her Quirk until only Toga Himiko remained.

Why was something that gave her pure happiness so reviled by others? Why did they seek to disturb her peace?

Well. She knew what they said, the same message echoed by teachers, classmates, cops, pedestrians, heroes, rescuees, newscasters: taking an identity not of your own was criminal, and taking another’s life was deplorable.

Such blanket statements failed to consider the fundamental uniqueness of individuals. Hence, she ignored them.

They never understood her as intimately as she’s come to recognize the true natures of people.

If they were more honest with themselves, looked into their souls deep down past their lovely bones and straight for the marrow, they’d see their own capacity for obsession (dedication) and possessiveness (caring).

(But when local authorities began to narrow down her present location, she was forced to hide her face and flee.

Her devotion did not extend to stupidity.)

- 1 -

Yokohama was just one of those places people went to disappear in.

Himiko had wondered how effective that was, until she found herself chatting away with the villain Lemon Bomb in a jazz bar that catered to the underground, neatly tucked away at a back alley of the eclectic Noge district.

She remembered the news coverage after Maruzen Building got bombed. Various media personages and experts tried to make sense of him: engineering student that went on a year’s leave of absence for
medical reasons. Returned, added extra units in human biology to his plate. Worked a few years at a private bioengineering firm before quitting.

His old classmates were under the impression he was prescribed antidepressants sometime during his leave, as he’d become more comfortable expressing his outlandishness. Not a big deal at the time, when university life was stressful and the engineering department had its fair share of mad tinkerers.

His old mentor, on the other hand, could not be reached for comment, and the company Lemon worked at had closed a year or two after his resignation.

Such details paled in comparison to how vivacious Lemon was in person, as he lectured her with gusto on the most efficient way in draining blood.

Loose wisps of blonde hair swayed as Himiko nodded to show she was still listening, her groomed fingers flying through the keyboard of her smartphone as she took notes. The wide, sharp-toothed grin on her face did nothing to hide her flushed cheeks, and a shiver of delight ran down her spine. Oh, Himiko was going to have so much fun when she found a new target for her affections.

“You’re likely using DIY equipment,” he finished with a huff and wagged his finger. “Trial and error is the only way to go and I am proud to see another’s appreciation for experiments. However! You must also have a healthy sense of doubt to avoid complacency. We must always progress!”

“Sloppy won’t do at all.” Himiko giggled breathlessly as she cradled her phone to her ample chest, the attached string of clear, colorful beads ending in a plastic pink heart bumping on the back of her hand. “Thank you so much, Lemon-san.”

“No need for that.” Lemon gave her a wide grin. “The beauty of any scientific process is in its replicability.”

Sounded typical of him to say that. Himiko took a sip of her soda, lips puckered around the striped straw. “Y’know, even most villains hate talking about stuff like this in public. Don’t get me wrong - I’m happy you’re okay with it - but doesn’t it make talking to others more difficult?”

“Who cares?” Lemon gave a derisive laugh and made a forceful sweep with his hand, knocking over a napkin holder. The bar’s amber light shone on him, highlighting his features and the whiteness of his lab coat. Gravitas expressed in the mundane. “In the face of the problematic trivialization of scientific understanding before the doors of Death and the Infinite, why should anything else matter?”

Instead of giving a direct response, she clinked their glasses together, and gave a twisted little smile with a hint of teeth.

“To bodies?”

“To bodies, and our pursuits.”

They drank.
The narrow, paved streets glowed dully with the white and red of shop signs and lamps. Music and laughter tinkled from the establishments still open, washed every now and then by sizzles from yakitori stands, and punctuated by stall owners’ greetings as customers entered hungry and nourished.

There was no need for the noise of neon lights and glam in eclectic Noge.

“You’re new here,” Lemon said as they walked towards the torii marking the district, “so I’ll be your welcoming committee and say two things - first, don’t do anything to draw outsider attention. People here are strict about that.”

Himiko shot him a puzzled look. While nothing was on the news, the Lemon Bomber’s style was loud and explosive. He also claimed he had work instead of answering whether or not he’s been this quiet in preparation for a bigger project.

It was a notable shift: chatty about the many ways human bodies expired and decayed in one moment, dodgy about his plans the next.

Lemon wasn’t obligated to tell her anything, sure, but didn’t he also rig Maruzen’s PA system to announce his grand experiment, date to be confirmed, several times before the actual bombing?

He discreetly showed her a photo on his phone, the device cradled by his broad hand, and gave her only a few seconds to make sense of the image before tucking it away.

“Second - if you see this guy, stay away and don’t do anything stupid. Especially if he looks pissed off.”

Now that, Himiko couldn’t let go without comment.

“What makes him special?”

Lemon looked entirely smug. “If you find out, hope you aren’t on the other end of it.”

The next time they met wasn’t at Noge, but at Port Mafia’s main base.

“Welcome to the best R&D lab in town,” Lemon cackled, rubbing his hands in visible glee, and nudged Toga Himiko, the Organization’s latest recruit, inside. “We have a betting pool for villain recruitment, so I need you to answer: who got to you first, Hirotsu-san or Tachihara?”

The man’s workspace reflected his personality. Assorted bric-a-brac and half-finished gadgets were scattered around, and a toolbox was within arm’s reach of the PC. The wide bookshelf on the other side of Lemon’s working desk was crammed to the brim with an assortment of reference books and blueprint cylinders, save for the top shelf - that one housed a fishbowl full of marbles with three pinwheels in primary colors sticking out.

Beyond the office area was another space with white walls and a clear glass window - it was probably some sort of testing area.
“Shove it,” Himiko scowled, brushing his hands off her shoulders and stomping in. She’d gone with pigtail instead of her usual twin buns, and her hairline wasn’t neatly separated. “Did you have anything to do with this?”

“Of course not.” Lemon gestured for her to have a seat near his PC before opening a couple of folders at a rapid pace. “Told you to keep your head down for a reason. So why did you sign up, when the only way out is through aging, mission-related death, or execution?”

Himiko crossed her arms and glanced away. Her gaze landed on a sketch taped to the wall comparing a hyper-realistic lemon to a galaxy’s cross-section.

“You stopped going public and that bugged me.” Himiko said finally, and poked Lemon’s arm. “Getting noticed doesn’t matter to you as long as you get your tests done, but blowing up things isn’t stealthy. Are you seriously fucking happy like this?”

Lemon’s uproarious laugh filled the cramped room, making Himiko wrinkle her nose.

“That’s it?” He grinned, and entered a few more passwords before a blank form labelled QUIRK and EQUIPMENT appeared.

It was one reason, sure. The other was Hirotsu answering a phone call from someone named Akutagawa.

The man on the photo Lemon showed. The Silent Rabid Dog as other independent villains called him, in equal parts awe and terror. They were quite happy to share what their friend’s sibling’s aunt’s neighbor’s third cousin removed told them about his fighting style, and she didn’t care if some of them stared at her tits or thighs as long as they understood that touching meant missing fingers.

Violence packed in such a frail form - that’s how they saw him. How people feared the bogeymen and failed to see their souls.

Himiko wanted to see how he painted. Desire was the only justification she needed. Even if he was the type she wouldn’t be able to sneak up on and only watch from afar -

One peak. Just one. Couldn’t hurt, right?

(Her devotion didn’t extend to stupidity, and her kind of adoration was never without risk. Himiko accepted, confident in her own ability to disappear should reality not meet tantalizing expectation.)

“The Boss’ setup is methodical,” Lemon was saying. “As long as we stick to orders, get the job done, stay loyal, and not step on anyone’s toes, we’re virtually free to do whatever we want.”

“Even blowing up people?”

“Even studying the effects of explosions on corpses, yes.” He sniggered. “It’s great for testing bomb varieties. Of course, you should’ve figured out by now that the Organization likes its secrecy, so nothing gets out. Now, I’ll need to get your details so we can build something for you. Full name?”

Himiko gave her name, sighed, and let Lemon take notes on her Quirk.

“Just call me Motojirou, by the way,” he said once they were done. “Motojirou Kajii. Only outsiders use our monikers.”

Motojirou Kajii. Lemon Bomber.
Himiko sucked on her lower lip as she decided on a nickname.

“You have crappy copycats, Mocchan.”

“Eh?”

“Some dumb guy left a toy lemon at Maruzen to get back at his ex who works there. The cops had to bring in a bomb squad.”

Mocchan looked scandalized. “Not even for science?”

“Not him, no. But you’ll be glad to know someone managed to make acid that smelled like lemons and sent it to his precinct cell. Melted him and the bars.”

It was the ex. Tracking her down was what landed Himiko here in the first place.

-M-  3  -

Most in the Organization, she noticed, carried about them the sense of blood. It wasn’t the physical stench of copper that clung to clothes repeatedly soiled by it, when the reason why they had suits in uniform was to make burning old sets unnoticeable.

Rather, it was their familiarity of its role in their duty of killing. There were those that bore its weight better than others, and among them were the beautiful Lady Kouyou and the perpetually silent Gin.

“Begin,” Kouyou declared, and both Himiko and Gin made for each other, knives drawn, feet silent on the wooden training room floor.

First blood, as with all their sparring sessions to date, went to Gin. Solitary, unreadable Gin, silent as a shadow, a streak of black that cut through cream walls and flowing calligraphy wall scrolls.

It’s been a long while since Himiko encountered a person with the opacity of slate.

Her interest in the Silent Rabid Dog could wait. This was a different puzzle altogether.

-M-  4  -

“Mocchiin.” Himiko cradled her chin in her hands, pouting. She was at R&D again, watching Kajii’s fifth attempt at making lemon-flavored mochi with pasted Carolina Reaper filling. “I don’t get her at all!”

Tachihara wasn’t the best person to complain to about this when he and Gin somehow riled each other up. Himiko watched the handful of times it’s happened in front of her with rapt attention, utterly fascinated with Gin’s shift from distant to hotheaded and deadly. However, she didn’t want to deal with Tachihara's irritated snark today, which was why Himiko was back down here.

“Observation is the first step in the scientific process,” Kajii reminded, pausing as he checked the thermometers of four steamers lined up at the counter, and glanced at the timer. Nine minutes, thirty-
three seconds, and six hundred twenty one milliseconds to go. Satisfied with the experiment’s progress, he nodded to himself. “Didn’t you already say your first few missions turned out well?”

“Ish.” Himiko sighed and pushed herself up at the corner of the stainless steel table top not yet dirtied with baking ingredients, and well away from the tray of syringes with chili-and-herb puree prepared for ‘variety’.

It wasn’t that Gin was a problem to work with - the other assassin was a pro. Good work ethic, clean kills, no fuss.

On the other hand, they were mission partners, Partners. Didn’t that imply the need for some sort of understanding between two people?

“She doesn’t talk. Only uses hand signs, but not something like JSL - I checked. Half the time her hair covers her eyes, and I can’t see her mouth through her face mask. Doesn’t stick around too long when I’m around for me to spot any tells. The most I can take a stab at is her gait. Even when we spar, her fighting style is entirely efficient and impersonal. Just - how?”

“Gin-san’s communicative style is impersonal.” Kajii lined up three bowls of sugar, each holding a cup and a third, near the stove. Almost time to cook the mochi. “That’s your hypothesis. Now test that by gathering quantitative data. List everything you’ve described, take note of the frequency of each factor, and analyze. It’s simple!”

Himiko’s first reaction was objecting to Kajii making her sound like a stalker, but she stopped herself. He’d shoot down that line based on her own history, dammit.

“Sounds like a weird way of going about it.” She pointed a wooden spoon at him. “If it doesn’t pan out, I’m not helping you look for test subjects.”

Predictably, Kajii puffed his chest and opened his arms in a grand, sweeping motion to his audience of one. “Trial and error is a core component of experimentation! How do you think modern science progressed this fast in the last three centuries?”

The timer went off. Kajii shouted in triumph, and scrambled for the steamers.

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The mission had gone to hell, and they only completed the objective by the skin of their teeth. How petite, skinny Gin hauled her useless ass out the escape route, Himiko couldn’t remember. Might’ve been the adrenaline. It was a long run.

Tachihara bailed them out at the extraction point and drove them straight to the Port Mafia’s closest secure medical facility for treatment. The back seat was a mess as Gin steadily worked on isolating the bits of cloth that clung to Himiko’s skin, and left everything else on the floor.

“Y’see me naked ev’ry time I use my Quirk,” Himiko tried to joke. “Making up for the mission quota?”

Gin didn’t reply. As usual. Nimble fingers carried the meaning of urgency. Too focused on making sure that whatever they’d doused her clothes with wouldn’t spread, even if it probably had dried out by now.
(Not that Himiko could complain, really. To have Gin’s intense gaze, visible mostly during missions, focused on her in cleanup - if she tilted her head, she could imagine she was being pampered. Far better than just seeing opaque glass, and she’d take it for as long as it lasted.)

Burn injury. There was a first time for everything. This one sucked. She was sure she’d leave permanent teeth marks on the side of her other hand, when Gin’s knife worked around the burns, leaving the stuck bits of cloth for the doctor to work on. (Where were scissors when you needed ‘em?) Anything to stop herself from making a sound.

She’d knifed the neck of the rude fucker that caused it. His pal, too.

Whatever they used, at least it wasn’t acid. Small mercies.

Tachihara cursed up a storm along the way after making a couple of phone calls, and risked rolling down an inch from the passenger’s side window so they all wouldn’t choke from the acrid smell of chemicals, singed cloth, and flesh.

They would’ve done without, if it was only blood and gunpowder.

Between the noise, her lightheadedness, and the throbbing pain radiating from her arm and stupid thigh, Himiko pieced together the situation: they were given tampered intel from a double-crossing informant, who was now in the tender, loving graces of Lady Kouyou’s T&I division.

*Serves ‘em right,* was her last thought before finally passing out.

(Something light brushed the corners of her eyes, and there was the faintest of whispers: *you didn’t have to.*

But she had to. No one insulted what was hers.

*Their.*)

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Washing and dressing the skin with prescription ointment was easy, even as she grimaced every time she stared at the blotchy, reddened skin and the blisters.

(The blisters. They bothered her more than the wooziness from painkillers and the risk of infection - she liked having smooth skin!)

Wrapping gauze around her arm took a bit more practice, but she got the hang of it.

For the three weeks it took to recover, she avoided going near R&D. The one time she did, Kajii tried pestering her into using several concoctions he mixed. She’d given him a sheepish laugh, waved him off, and slowly inched her way out the door.

Chuu-san somehow got wind of the situation - probably from Tachihara - and they ended spending a couple of hours talking about the most annoying mission-incurred injuries while eating through boxes of Pocky.

(The ghost of a deserter lingered in Chuu-san’s words. Himiko learned to not ask for details, if only to avoid seeing *frustrationsorrowregret* in his eyes, but she always wondered. Chuu-san deserved to
smile more.)

Gin, on the other hand, was more distant, if that was even possible.

They were back at the training room again, with Lady Kouyou overseeing how well Kyouka, a new stray she found, performed against Gin as a baseline. Himiko sat beside the older woman, absently scratching the back of her wrist, well away from the bandaged portion of her arm.

Kyouka’s footwork was improving. Forced to improve. Fragile dolls with haunted eyes had to be stirred to action for the sake of survival, lest they drown in their own darkness. For the unwilling who slipped through the cracks and ended in the underbelly, spite was as good as any other fuel to kindle the soul.

Gin, on the other hand, was still not out of breath, even after Lady Kouyou asked Kyouka to activate her Quirk.

(And wasn’t that another series of odd details - why did Kyouka freeze every time Demon Snow as summoned? Why was a cellphone needed to use a Quirk that allowed her to use a familial spirit guardian? Wouldn’t Kyouka get in trouble if someone sliced the phone strap?)

Where Kyouka’s hand still trembled around the blade hilt, Demon Snow never faltered.

And oh. Oh. This pace was brutal, even if Demon Snow didn’t use more complex sword movements like Lady Kouyou’s Golden Demon. Despite the amount of maneuvering Gin had to do, Himiko could not hear the distinct patter of footsteps on the floor. Was this how she originally trained to be so fast? How many years did it take for her to reach this level?

Amazing.

But Himiko never got the chance to ask questions - as soon as Lady Kouyou dismissed them, Gin bowed and sharply turned her heel to the exit, pausing only to wait for a visibly shaken Kyouka to trail after her.

Himiko visibly deflated. Maybe this was pointless, after all.

Her original blood collection jars were gathering dust at the back of her closet, weren’t they?

“Kouyou-sama?”

“Hmm?”

“Why was I assigned to Gin?”

“The both of you work well for infiltration and assassination.” Kouyou’s painted lips curved upward. “But that’s not what you’re asking, is it?”

Himiko shook her head and kept her hands folded on her lap. Kouyou would not admonish her from picking at her skirt’s hem, but Himiko would be aware of her distaste.

“Why, indeed.” Kouyou slipped a hand under Himiko’s chin, tipping the girl’s face upwards with gentle strength. “Even if we chase the mirroring horizon, the sea and the sky are wholly unto themselves.”

“But that doesn’t mean they can’t see each other,” Himiko blurted insistently.

“Perhaps.” She stroked the swell of Himiko’s cheek with a pale thumb, her crimson eyes clear as
they were striking. “But do you see, Himiko-chan?”

On the beach, where water met land and gentle waves lapped at one’s ankles, the illusion of the horizon broke: up close, the water need not reflect the sky.

Serenity unto itself that lay bare the underneath.

- 7 -

So pink.

Himiko sat alone in the ladies’ changing area, fresh from showering. She’d been alone in the training room as well earlier, working herself back into shape. Three weeks wasn’t enough to dull her knife work, but she’d be lying if she didn’t notice the heaviness in her own movements.

It wasn’t as if she’d lost muscle mass or gained weight. Rather, it was trying to recall the rhythm of a dance for sly hands and nimble feet, and she was off half a beat. Step in with an overhead strike, upward slash to the neck, slide back with a defensive block, press forward with a downward slash, bring back up, bend the knee and jab to the front - [3]

There was a reason why most preferred sniper rifles and guns for assassination: they didn’t require the assailant to get up close and personal with the target. The beauty of using knives in spite of the inherent risk, however, was clear: immediate confirmation of a kill, zero chance of missing a target, easier to disguise as murder during thievery. Access to guns was still limited to most of the public, but anyone could buy a kitchen knife from the department store, or a switchblade from an outdoor goods shop.

Get in, stab, walk away. Deceptive in its apparent simplicity, absolute shit if the timing and circumstances were off. You either succeeded taking them out, or risked landing a foot in the grave.

Her fingers traced the edge of the discolored skin - pale pink where it had been an angry red, definitely less painful, and utterly hairless. Too bad it was almost winter. The thought of exposing her newly grown skin to the cold made her cringe: fresh from a frying pan, into the freezer. Or something like that.

Himiko reached for her blouse in her clothes basket, and found a note pinned to it. Her eyebrows shot up in surprise when she read the unfamiliar handwriting.

Warehouse 14. 6 PM. No signature.

Well. Someone knew she hadn’t kept to ‘light to moderate physical activity’ today.

- 8 -

“Tachihara?”

“Yo.” Tachihara smirked and raised his hand in greeting. Then, he pinched her cheek. “It’s Tachihara-san, brat. San! What did we teach you about respecting your superiors?”
“But you won’t let me call you ‘Takkun’ or ‘Hara-san,’” Himiko pouted, rubbing her sore cheek. “And the usual ‘Tachihara-san’ is just plain and a mouthful.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll take plain over your cutesy nicknames.” Tachihara glanced behind him. “Oi, you gonna stay there or what?”

Gin emerged from the shadows of the warehouse, gloved hand tucked into her billowy left sleeve, a dark glare levelled at Tachihara, before turning impassive.

They weren’t at the alleyway where Tachihara and Hirotsu-san first found her, but it was beginning to feel like it. Himiko narrowed her eyes and straightened out her right hand, knife ready to drop from its hidden sheath with the pull of a string.

“So,” she said, her smile showing a hint of teeth. “What’s this really about?”

Tachihara ran a hand down his face. “I’ll give the lowdown, but first - hands away from the knives. Or guns. Or anything you’ve got. You too, Gin.”

Himiko’s gaze darted to the other assassin. Gin stared back impassively, ignoring Tachihara ordering her around for once, and slowly slid her empty, pale hand out her pocket.

Tachihara was in field commander mode today? She followed suit and crossed her arms, cocking out a hip as she waited.

Finally, Tachihara cleared his throat. “Right. So. Y’know how we ask publicly identified villains who cause too much of a mess to either scram or join?”

“Yes?”

“Obsessive stalker types like you don’t get on board for no reason.” Tachihara looked at her squarely. With how his fur-lined collar stuck close to his hair when he raised his shoulders, he reminded Himiko of a bristling dog trying to be a wolf. “Nor do they stick around long. Don’t think we didn’t notice your interest in Akutagawa-san, either.”

“Yes,” Himiko said, disinterested. Everything Tachihara’s said so far was nothing new to her “So? Doesn’t that just mean you’ve been keeping an eye on me?”

“You dropped asking around about Akutagawa-san, and you haven’t left.” Tachihara cocked his head. “Hell, you didn’t have to goad Sugimoto’s ugly mug either - got you burned and all. What gives?”

Himiko couldn’t help it - she laughed.

“Is Hara-san that confused?” Giggling, she leaned forward, hands clasped behind her back, and skipped around him, ending with a twirl for flourish. “It’s not as if I’ve changed - I’ll still go after someone if I find them interesting enough, but I haven’t found anyone new. Besides, apart from all the annoying rules, this isn’t a bad life. Lemon-san might’ve been on to something in joining. As for Sugimoto, well.” Her eyes gleamed. “He was being kind of a dick.”

Oh, Himiko knew Gin was close enough to cut his femoral artery, but Sugimoto had gone on and on and on about how Port Mafia should get rid of their ‘inept, Quirkless clods’ altogether.

Ignorant fucker, really. Half of Himiko’s previous targets had wonderful Quirks, and not all of them were skillfully used. Besides, they were just add-ons - what ultimately made people interesting was what they made of themselves.
Tachihara grimaced uncomfortably as she invaded his personal space. “Saying this isn’t a bad life isn’t enough for us to know you won’t hightail and run.”

“I know one of you’ll hunt me down if it comes to that. Nothing personal on both sides.” Himiko gave him a little crooked smile. “So don’t give me a reason to leave, and I won’t.”

There was a world of difference between the cockiness of her youth and having gone through the hoops: when she started, she believed she’d be able to disappear if it she wanted to. At the present, she couldn’t be bothered. Why should she, when hardly any of them were fazed when her bloodlust showed itself?

(They were hers, even if they didn’t know it, but not to take into herself. They simply were.)

“Right,” Tachihara sighed, and turned to Gin. “Well?”

Gin tipped her head imperiously, casting an assessing look over Himiko. Then, to the blond’s surprise, she slid her knife out her billowing left sleeve, swept her right foot behind, and extended an open palm a challenge.

“That’s that, I guess.” Tachihara clasped Himiko’s shoulder and walked off to stand at a safe distance. “Welcome to the Black Lizard. Akutagawa-san’s our boss, so unless you have a death wish, don’t chase after him. One devoted fangirl’s enough.” He smirked at her from over his shoulder. “Don’t get us wrong, by the way - this was for your sake as much as saving his temper. If you tried talking to him with how you were when you joined, you’d be in so much damn trouble.”

*Black Lizard, eh?* Himiko’s brow furrowed as she pieced it together, ignoring the jab at her supposed airheadedness. In all her mission briefings, Tachihara only described them as a ‘Special Ops Unit,’ not part of a specific group. And since Tachihara mentioned villain recruitment earlier - did that mean she just passed some sort of secondary screening?

Well, given how strategic the higher ups were and factoring her own criminal record - that was to be expected. Rather, what was surprising was her own easy acceptance of the situation. Had she become this comfortable trusting the higher ups’ decisions, in exchange for the freedom afforded to her?

The one thing she was unsure of was why Tachihara mentioned a fangirl in that introduction, and she nodded uncertainty. She’d get in in time, maybe?

Tachihara continued. “Warehouse Fourteen is where we actually train, by the way. Things get messy, and Kouyou-san hates it when we wreck her floors.”

And suddenly, Gin was in front of her, knife glinting in the warehouse lights, forcing Himiko to start with a parry.

(The intensity took her breath away -)

It was the little things she noticed, now that she saw Gin more often.

The other girl moved more fluidly in the open. Or was it more accurate to say that she wasn’t as
Was it from the lack of shadows, or the general stiffness from the aversion of fucking up? The latter was true for most of the lower ranks in the Organization - there was precious few the Executives were not aware of within their seat of power, and Boss Mori has a reputation for being thorough - but not necessarily for Gin herself.

Their clashes against the Armed Detective Agency aside, the Black Lizard dared not incur Mori’s displeasure by failing anything else. In Gin’s case, that meant having a high success rate of solo missions. Her very stoicism heightened the Mafia’s image: people feared bogeymen, if they were ever seen at all.

As for the former: Gin knew how to navigate the base’s ventilation shafts like the back of her hand, and she’d taken to remapping the building’s nooks and crannies whenever little Kyouka decided to hide - nothing good would come off leaving her alone, untouchable as she was to most as Lady Kouyou’s ward. So that couldn’t be it, either.

Himiko figured she’d get it eventually, similar to how she now managed to tell apart Gin’s shut-up-I-have-a-headache face from shut-up-you’re-noisy and I’m-fine-stop-staring.

With how often she stared at them now, she wondered how she missed the sheer expressiveness of those black eyes, from how they darkened in anger, and shone in quiet delight. Those thin eyebrows and long lashes accentuated her already perfect features, down to the sharp jawline that her facemask couldn’t hide.

(And if Gin’s eyes sometimes lingered on her arm and her thigh, the limbs she’d cut the cloth away from, Himiko didn’t make anything of it. Her fellow assassin took her job seriously, after all, and that extended to her assigned partner’s recovery.)

Himiko wrapped her arms around her own waist and exhaled softly as she sank back onto her bed. It was warm.

Her heartbeat was the ebb and flow of the tide instead of the violent crash of a wave.

“Does Gin-chan like sweets?”

“Traditional ones,” Hirotsu replied after some consideration. Then, carefully, “Are you planning on taking her blood? Because if you are -”

“No, nothing like that,” Himiko giggled, hiding the flush of her cheeks and her mouth behind her sleeve: the very image of a coquettish high school girl. “Gin-chan’ll kill me if it’s not job-related. More like, she’s kinda sweet when she isn’t serious, and even when she is she’s still cute, so I figure I’d give her something to match. Y’get what I mean?”

“I can’t say I do.” Hirotsu looked faintly alarmed, for reasons unrelated to Gin’s food preferences. Commander of many as he was, teenage pining was not part of the usual scope of advice he gave. “Wouldn’t you rather ask her in person?”
“Aww, but that’s no fun.” Himiko pouted. “How’s it gonna be a surprise if I do?”

(Somewhere behind her, Tachihara caught Hirotsu’s eye and gave him a quiet salute before tiptoeing out the door. He’d already been subjected to a similar line of questions earlier that day, and had no intention to linger for round two.)

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“She had the longest stare-off with the box of baby castella until Tachihara-san asked if she was gonna eat them.” Himiko couldn’t stop giggling at the memory. Gin booted Tachihara forcefully out the room after that, before slipping a piece of castella under her mask, the flush on her cheeks spreading to her graceful neck. “It’s adorable!”

Chuu-san ran a hand down his face and sighed. “Gin’s not used to being the constant center of someone’s attention. Hell, she’s not used to being visible this much, period. Give her a break sometimes.”

“She hasn’t stopped me yet.”

“But have you considered she might not like what you’re doing?” Chuu-san raised a challenging eyebrow. “Didn’t you say you used to corner people you were interested in, screw everything else?”

“So I did. And that’s before.” Himiko beamed and took a sip of her strawberry slushie, the liquid staining her lips and tongue red. “But Chuu-san. This is already different from how I’ve shown people I like them, and I’m fine with showering her affection even if she doesn’t like me back. Besides, Gin-chan knows I’ll let her take me out anytime if it becomes too much, no strings attached.”

It wasn’t in the sense they’d go on a date, but if given the chance, Himiko would be more than happy to oblige. She’d take whatever Gin chose to give.

Instead of being satisfied, however, Chuu-san looked troubled. “Glad the two of you have an agreement of sorts in place, the fallout of having two members kill each other aside, but you gotta stop that self-sacrifice failsafe bullshit. No one ends up happy from that, and you’ve proven you can work things out with her, haven’t you?”

Himiko was positively charmed. “Chuu-san cares so much!”

Chuuya crossed his arms and glanced away. The shadow of his hat brim wasn’t enough to hide the flush of embarrassment on his cheeks. “Just. I don’t want either of you to end up hurt and getting distracted. It’s not unreasonable.”

“It isn’t,” she conceded, and smiled apologetically. “But is it really self-sacrifice when we’re both just going where our selfishness takes us?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know how outside of orders, Gin-chan doesn’t do what she doesn’t want to do? I’m kinda the same.”
Kyouka-chan started training at Warehouse 14. With that, Himiko finally saw Akutagawa Ryuunosuke himself, if only in glimpses.

How that match up formed - with little, determined Kyouka a step behind the purposeful, silent Akutagawa - Himiko never knew. The Black Lizard was always asked to step out of Warehouse 14 when Akutagawa arrived, and they were only allowed to re-enter once Akutagawa left.

The concrete walls and floors bore scars from when they used their Quirks. The cuts were deep, twisted where they were from Akutagawa, and even the roof had to be repaired a few times.

Destructive capacity. Kyouka’s Demon Snow had that, but if Himiko had to only go by the sheer variety of marks Akutagawa left - he possessed the versatility in spades and the drive to continuously improve his craft, all for the sake of a burdensome goal no one dared speak of.

The ghost of a living man haunted him, and it was the same one that Chuu-san grappled with towards the summer’s end with his pale-haired villain associate. Fingers, in so many pies.

She knelt and traced a newly-formed hole on the floor with childlike wonder. The cone was bigger than her fist, and the thickness of the concrete it tore through wasn’t anything to sneeze at. Had a human been impaled by it, they would’ve been ripped to shreds.

Gorgeous. This was the kind of power wannabes on the street could only dream of, the seed of truth that sprung so many rumors outside the Organization. Was it worth her initial curiosity?

Yes, Himiko was gratified, though the qualifiers for her satisfaction had changed. The expectations of one who peered in from the outside tended to be less nuanced, with a too narrow frame of reference.

She stood up, dusted her knees, and skipped deeper into the warehouse to look for other fresh marks, whistling an upbeat pop song as she went.

“Doesn’t this remind you of something,” Tachihara remarked to Hirotsu with a crooked smile as they surveyed the aftermath.

Hirotsu exhaled and lit a cigarette. “Training leaves marks,” he replied, “and Akutagawa-san is… efficient.”

Gin and Himiko took turns escorting Kyouka back to the base. Lady Kouyou’s thin lips were always curved in a grim smile when she received them, and her scarlet eyes were unreadable.

Kyouka never voiced a word of complaint before, during, and after she was cleaned up. In times when she had to walk with a limp, she always waved off any offers for assistance.

“I don’t get why you’re in such a hurry,” Himiko told her on one of their trips back to the base. At this point, she was used to holding one-sided conversations. “I mean, sure, failure isn’t an option once you’re on the field and it’s kind of a tall order for anyone only starting to get their feet wet, but you don’t have to keep breaking yourself day in and day out. Your body needs rest too, y’know?”

Kyouka merely glanced at her, and it was a look into emptiness and hunger.

Himiko sighed and crossed her arms. “Suit yourself. Just don’t blame anyone if you burn out.”
“You misunderstand.”

Himiko’s eyes widened - she hadn’t expected a response. “Huh?”

Kyouka bowed her head and looked at the backs of her clasped hands. There were cuts above the arm guard, and calluses began to form on her knife hand’s fingers. “For me, there is no other option. With my Quirk, my only worth is in killing.”

Himiko honestly didn’t see any problem with murder, but different strokes for different folks. “That’s just for now,” she replied, bracing an elbow on the door armrest and cupping her cheek. “Part of the job and all, whether we enjoy it or not. But sooner or later, you’ll figure yourself out, and it won’t be all that bad.”

Kyouka gave a morose shrug, and toyed with the hem of her red sleeve.

Solo missions were added to her plate. Most of them were recon - the stuff Gin avoided like a plague when possible - and Himiko was having a blast.

It was the thrill of stalking targets all over again, minus any feelings of personal investment. Find the least suspicious person she could use, knock ‘em out before bedtime, harvest a pint of blood, inject them with sedatives to buy more time, and made sure everything was in order before they woke up.

Ensuring she could carry enough supply for extended missions was easier too, when Kajii had been nice enough to design her equipment, though she’d had to argue that some improvements he made were unnecessary, and Chuu-san had to put his foot down before Kajii went overboard.

Well. At least Mocchin got something out of it, too. Not that he ever got bored with the million-and-one experiments he had lined up, ranging from the mundane to the impractical.

“...and they’ll be headed for Hokkaido on the twenty-fourth,” Himiko said, finishing her verbal report. A USB drive carrying the same data and more details was on Chuu-san’s table.

“Excellent.” Chuuya jotted that last part down with a smile and nodded at her. “Good work. Get some rest, and see you tomorrow.”

Himiko gave him a cheery salute and waltzed out, a bounce in her step.

When she turned at the corridor, an arm reached her from the shadows, and she found herself pinned against the wall. It was Gin-chan, with a glare that was a cross between infuriated, concerned and something Himiko couldn’t identify.

“Hey,” Himiko said with a breathless giggle, before she remembered something and clapped a hand to her mouth. “I’m sorry - it was my turn to bring Kyouka-chan back today, wasn’t it?” She smiled sheepishly and twirled her fingers. “I’ll make it up to you?”

Gin-chan shook her head sharply and tightened her grip on Himiko’s shirt.

“Not that?” Himiko sucked on her lower lip thoughtfully, unmindful of the weight of Gin’s arm on her breastbone and welcoming the closeness - how she’d craved for the warmth and strength now
pressed up on her, and Himiko took what she could.

Still, it was rare for the other girl to be this forward with her, and she honestly didn’t know what she did to set Gin off today. “I know I told you I had an assignment. Were you actually worried? It wasn’t super dangerous or anything!”

At least, not in comparison to half the runs they’d been out on together. To say that spying in itself had no risks would be foolish.

There was a sharp, audible hiss from behind Gin’s mask and the dark-haired girl leaned forward. The air next to Himiko’s ear turned warm and moist, making her flush, and her heart beat faster in her chest.

“Gin-chan?”

“Don’t you dare lose yourself,” Gin said a quiet, high-pitched voice, and Himiko almost melted then and there at hearing her speak for the first time - such a cute voice! - until her brain caught up with the actual words.

Don’t lose yourself: The reason Gin hated recon was because she refused to act as anyone but herself, whereas Himiko was used to assimilating other people.

Oh. Oh.

Himiko, in a moment of daring, rested her forehead on Gin’s shoulder. When the other girl didn’t shrug her off, she let the tension bleed from her shoulders with a sigh.

“I won’t,” she promised, and allowed herself a tender smile, confident it wouldn’t be seen. “Even if I always look tipsy after - it’s only work, yeah? They’re not mine, and I don’t want them to be mine.”

Gin stepped back and slid her fingers under Himiko’s chin, and Himiko let her do as she pleased. Their eyes met, stormy black against clear amber, and Himiko let out a fluttering sigh.

“Don’t tease,” she whispered, almost plaintively, looking to the side. “Either you do, or you don’t. I don’t mind, whatever you choose.”

“Lie.” Gin slid her thumb up Himiko’s cheekbone in a silent demand to look, and tugged down her mask with her free hand, and oh, she was so strikingly beautiful Himiko forgot to breathe. “Your heart isn’t saintly, Himiko.”

“Neither is yours,” Himiko said, voice faint, sliding her arms around the other’s shoulders when Gin leaned in for a kiss, and let herself be the one drawn into the tide.

Somehow, it went back full circle to Aku-sama.

Himiko was pleasantly surprised to find Gin chose to let her hair down and wear dresses on days off, and on more than one occasion the blond couldn’t keep her eyes off her partner, a goofy smile on her lips.

More importantly, Gin told her to behave today, as her older brother would be joining them at the
cafe.

Her brother, who turned out to be Akutagawa Ryuunosuke, tall and imposing even without his Quirk flared about him like a menacing shroud.

Really, there were times when Gin’s sense of humor was just no fun.

“Gin,” he greeted his sister, before his eyes, faintly obscured by smokey purple sunglasses, slid to her. “Toga Himiko.”

“‘Nii-san,” Gin replied, as Himiko bit down a squeak and bowed.

Akutagawa looked away in dismissal, taking the empty seat reserved for him, and didn’t address her directly until Gin excused herself and went to the ladies’ restroom halfway through their light lunch.

“I don’t claim to know her reasons for choosing you,” he said in clipped, measured tones, “but be aware I will gut you if she gets hurt.”

Protective without being overbearing. She liked that.

“I don’t doubt it.” Himiko gave him a lopsided smile, knowing full well just how much pain he could dish out without having to lift a finger. “You’re more than welcome, Aku-sama, if she’s left anything of me after.”

Akutagawa gave her a quizzical look at the nickname, and huffed in irritation when she simply grinned.

They were at Gin’s apartment that evening, relaxing after dinner, when Himiko broached the subject. There were some topics they only talked about well away from the base or training grounds, and this was one of them.

“Commander, huh?”

Gin cracked an eye open from her spot on Himiko’s lap, looking faintly annoyed that hand on her head stopped moving. The blonde smiled in apology and resumed carding her fingers through Gin’s long, dark hair.

This. This was contentment, and it was pure comfort. In a lifestyle that was society’s dirty laundry list, where the both of them risked death every time they were sent on the field, Himiko wouldn’t mind this being the one constant of her heart for as long as it lasted.

“You deserve the spot,” Himiko told her fondly, “and I guess that’s why I’ve been handed a lot of solo missions and reassigned to Hirotsu-san.” A pause, and she giggled. “Don’t scare your underlings too much, hm? They might die from a heart attack.”

Gin rolled her eyes - preparing them for surprises is necessary - and reached up to poke her partner’s forehead.

“Yeah,” she breathed, taking Gin’s hand and kissing each exquisite digit in slow, loving adoration. “I always return, don’t I?”
There used to be a girl who took the essence of others into herself, copper and velvet on her tongue, until she was them and they were wholly hers. She no longer had the need to do so when instead of possessing the one she desired, she let her lover draw her in and set the pace.

They still influenced each other, little habits meeting over time, but not to the point of warping fundamental nature. The both of them were stubborn where it mattered.

(An agreement left unspoken: Gin would be where Akutagawa was; and where Gin went, Himiko would follow. Commitment, as natural as breathing, as unquestionable as the sky over sea.)

From the pillow of her thighs, Gin examined her features with a dark, careful eye. Satisfied, she slid her hand up Himiko’s cheek, her wandering touch feather-light, and reached to undo the hair tie holding the blonde’s hair coiled.

Himiko’s smile turned secretive as her hair tumbled down her shoulders.


End Notes

I hope the progression was believable x.x Please let me know what you think, it's very much appreciated <3

Also still looking for a beta - drop me a line here if you have questions/are interested.

[1] Figured Toga to be a biiiiit of a romantic, so i took liberties >x>. Ran an automatic translator for “In memory of love” + the definitions of caritas were fitting. If, by any chance, someone reading this knows Latin, please lemme know if the translation is correct.

JSL = Japanese Sign Language

For Maruzen - people apparently used to leave lemons in Maruzen’s bookshelves in homage to that last scene in Lemon. Thought it was cute xD the marbles and pinwheels were also made in reference to the story.

here it is if you want to read.

[3] Kata loosely from here

[4] in vivo veritas = “in a living thing (there is) truth” + “A pun on in vino veritas.” link. Won’t go into the biologist bit + picked as a contrast to the meaning and use of in memoriam.

In vita non est caritas. Supergressi in caritate. = in life there is love. In love we transcend. (both run through autotranslate, please lemme know if it’s incorrect). [edit: many thanks to aurla0 for the correction!]

The last bit’s cheese, I know.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!