Jack Rabbit
by SmutWithPlot

Summary

If you want something a little different (and maybe a lot Western) that's an odd little bar in Koenji run by legitimate cowboy and westerner, Jesse James McCree, who sells his home cuisine of nachos, enchiladas, tacos, and quesadillas with salsa fresca and guacamole that is alleged to be made with tequila. It is a well-kept secret, but don't let his profuse amount of English and Spanish overwhelm you - his Japanese is also quite good, and there is Japanese help to assist you. Just be careful: he flirts back. With anyone.

// In which the Prince of the Shimada Clan finds the weirdest, most unlikely place to hide away from his responsibilities and becomes slowly enamored of the bizarre Gaijin that runs this slice of the Southwest.

Notes

LET'S SEE HOW MUCH JAPANESE I CAN LEARN, SHALL WE? If you are actually Japanese, please know that I am flying by the seat of my pants, don't judge me.

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Also, opening track is "Heaven" by Los Lonely Boys, which I was legitimately jamming to at the time.
Dangerous

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Chapter Notes

LET'S SEE HOW MUCH JAPANESE I CAN LEARN, SHALL WE? If you are actually Japanese, please know that I am flying by the seat of my pants, don't judge me.

By special request and my god damn most-popular fic ever! Yes, I will just sit here and pull my own god damn writing out of the trash and put it back up because I got pinged for bullshit (SMALL PRINT IS VERY SMALL).

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How far is heaven?

A little guitar, a little organ, a good vocal... And a mellow beat that sneaks up on you and sways your hips without you realizing.

"And I know that I need to change... my ways of living."

I drop another case of beer on the bar, the light clinking of glass on glass, my own personal mix of classic rock, western themes, mariachi and a few other favourites bathing my own little paradise in the sounds of home. Even if everyone around me is more yellow than red, and they think I'm a novelty, it doesn't even matter. I'm here, I'm me, and they love me for it.

"Lord, can ya tell me."

"Hey, McCree! Can I have another?"

"Budweiser?"
"You bet!" His grin is so big... I pop a bottle on the rig under the bar and serve it up with a napkin. "Arigatou!"

I salute him with two fingers. "You got it." In the land of kaiju and *Ghost In the Shell* and *Evangelion*, they don't think it's too odd that one of my hands needs oil instead of lotion. They're much more enamoured with my accent and cowboy hat. And that just tickles the hell out of me.

*Just keep on giving... How far is heaven?*

I pull out my front stock and fill up the cooler. I put in the extras, and I have an extra cold one left.

"Oh no!" I proclaim. "I miscounted! I guess I'll have to drink it."

The regular at the bar laughs at me and I wink at him. I pop the top, the cap falling into a bucket full of pretty-coloured caps and twists, and I take a swig of cold, crisp beer.

*Is this the life or what?*

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"GOAL!" I cheer, arms high in victory.

"Yaaaay!" the regular cheers with me.

"I should go in the professionals," I tell him.

"I would vote for you!"

I laugh. "I know you would, Moko-san." I raise my beer to him. "Kanpai!"

He raises his. "Kanpai!"

I chuckle and take another swig. The door swings open, and I see familiar faces. "Konnnichi wa," I greet. They eye me sideways, one nodded. I stash my beer again and march out from behind the bar, all denim and big belt buckle and leather, sun-riped hat. My boots sing with jolly spurs on the hardwood floors I polished and stained myself. I clasp my hands together and bow low. I slide around menus. "[Let me know what I can get for you, sirs.]" They nod and mutter agreement. I move to my corner, where a couple of college kids are enjoying a shared pitcher. "How goes it, guys?"

"McCree-san, you crazy bastard," one of them laughs at me. "What is this stuff?"

"Blue Moon," I answer. And then I translate. "It's Belgian white ale."

"Bejin white ale," he says, and I don't correct him. "It's good!"

"Of course it is. I wouldn't stock somethin' that tasted like shit." They both laugh at me, and I smile. "You boys enjoying yourself?"

"I love this place," his buddy answered. "Plus, is nice to practise my English."

I nod. "Well, I had to practise my Japanese to be here, seems only fair, right?"

They both laugh at me. "You crazy!" the first guy says again.
"Y'all holler if you need me."

Moko chuckles. "Those boys are acting like you gave them tequila instead of beer."

"Right?" We both laughed. "I used to tell people I put tequila in my guac, and they believed me. They get all crazy about it."

He chuckled. "They wouldn't know tequila if a worm danced in front of them."

I laughed. The businessmen waved me down and I took their orders, lime shrimp tacos for one, teriyaki chicken bento for another. One of my monster burritos for two to share, and of course chips and salsa to start. I slip in the back to get it all going, and pepper the chips with sea salt and lime juice before adding a dose of my salsa fresca and homemade guac.

"Here we are, boys," I say, sliding plates onto the table with my chips. "House special. I got those drinks comin', alright?"

"Thank you," one of them says, and the others smile at him, pleased.

I wink at him, and a finger gun. "You got it, darlin'."

I hear them tittering with each other as I go back to the bar.

"Wooow. One of them said thank you," Moko murmurs.

I snicker. "You are so kind to the average man, Moko-san. Can't no one impress you?"

"Please. These people think you are just being an American stereotype to be an American stereotype. They do not know how real you are."

"Well, sure, but you ain't gotta tell no one that." I do my usual bar tricks, flipping bottles as I mix their cocktails.

"If they knew... Maybe they would not laugh so much."

"Well, that's not true. I like them laughin'. It makes it fun. If they were all scared of me, it would be much less so." I lean on one hip as I fill a glass from the tap. "I mean, I'm sure most of them think this arm is cosplay."

He snorted into his beer and I grinned. "They would be wrong."

I shrugged. "It's always better to be underestimated, right?" I placed their drinks on a brown round tray I had ordered online custom for "authenticity". The old, worn wood just felt good on my fingers.

"[You are a scary son of a bitch, Jesse McCree,]" Moko called out to me, loud and in their native tongue where everyone could hear it.

"Don't mind him, he's drunk," I said, waving him off. "Scorpion Bite for you... And a glass of water. Yer gonna need it, trust me." They chuckled. I dispersed the rest and tucked the tray under an arm. "How's the chips, boys?"

"[They are very good]," one answered.

"[Is it true you use tequila in the sauce?]"
"[That's a trade secret]," I answered, winking. They giggled to themselves. "Enjoy."

On my way back to the bar, I gently whacked Moko on the head with the back of my tray. The drunk college kids laughed.

"Moko-san, why you gotta be this way?" I asked him.

"Because you scare me," he said, almost done with his own tacos.

"And yet, you're here at my bar almost every mornin' for a beer or three and my fish tacos."

"Well, the tacos are amazing." We both chuckled. "But also, because although you scare me, I would rather be in your bar than someone else's."

"Aww." I hugged myself. "That makes me all warm and bubbly inside."

He rolled his eyes. "I know other bars where the bartenders would not step in when there is a fight. Also..." His voice lowered. "I am pretty sure you are in tight with the Yakuza."

My jaw dropped. "Excuse me?"

His eyes didn't leave mine. "I have never seen you ever have trouble with them. Some places, they come in like old friends, and you can tell. The man in charge is scared. But you... You do not fear them."

I considered that and sipped my beer, keeping an ear out for the ding of my cooking food. "When have you seen me do that?"

He pointed a finger towards the suits, although he kept his finger pointing at himself so they could not see.

I looked over at the suits and then back at him. I smirked. "You think they're Yakuza?"

"I know they are," he said, evenly. "I've seen them at work."

I looked over at the familiar faces... who were teasing each other about a girl right now. And then back to Moko.

"You need to be careful the kind of things you throw around, Moko-san," I said. Half tempted to drop the honorary.

He shrugged, a nervous smile on his lips. "I am a drunk. No one takes me seriously."

I considered that, and stashed my beer. "I'll be back."

"I'll be back," he said, imitating another robot man.

I couldn't help but laugh.
The Jack Rabbit isn't just a crazy shenanigans bar with a crazy American cowboy dancing around the place being crazy! It is also a safe haven for those who have places they'd rather not be, and people they would rather not be around. McCree-san is protective of his people, and he keeps them with a jealous love hidden under jests and smiles.

Chapter Notes

1. WOW, what a monster of a chapter! Not that you lot will complain. I learned new Japanese for this chapter, so enjoy.

2. Scorpion Bite is a dangerous drink, do not drink it lightly. It's basically a prairie fire, which is a wildly varied shot drink with [insert hot sauce here] mixed with [insert liquor here], with special shout outs to the ones with everclear or whiskey... Or the Mexican variation, which is tequila and orange juice with hot sauce. The Jack Rabbit makes it with everclear AND tequila, "Because fuck reason" says Jesse James McCree. Here in Tucson, I think we'd use Frank's Red Hot because reasons. There's also the Caribbean variation that is tabasco and 151. HAHAHA. I am part of a tradition where we give 21st drinkers a shot of 151. I took my straight, no chaser, a thank-ya kindly. I'm German and Puerto Rican, I CAN DRINK, SON. When my meds aren't screwing with me.

3. I laugh because the 'soda' is basically Italian soda (flavoured syrup + club soda), and creamed Italian soda is the same with cream in it, so Pink Passion is basically a creamed Italian soda, but with tequila rose for the cream and lychee for the syrup. Following my trend of making Hanzo like pink things, because I'm twisted like that.

4. Blow Jobs are actually a signature at IBT's here in Tucson. The usual MC at the Friday night drag shows loves to buy people Blow Jobs for shenanigans. Expect that to come back in later chapters.

5. OMG I LOOK LIKE AN ALCHOLIC! This wasn't mentioned when I was originally pitched this AU, but I really want to take classes to bartend, it's just my kind of job. I know lots of crazy drinks, and I like to modify some into new things. Imagine me as McCree, that's literally me. For serious. Except with plaid and kilts, but still.

I came out of the kitchen with arms full of enchiladas, quesadillas, chips and salsa... and Florida Georgia Line was on the radio.

"[Make way!]", my waitress insisted, the Jack Rabbit on her heavily doctored crew tee earning her the unofficial name 'Usagi' to guests.

Patrons parted as I moved through the crowd, and table 3 cheered, five or six -- wait, seven? -- happy faces smiled at me. "Good lord, y'all are multiplying!" I declared. I set the food with whoever ordered them, the new faces helping dispose of the burden happily. "Alright! Everyone
good? We need more? Mini-chan, you need another beer? Alright, I got you another beer. You, too? ...Margarita, absolutely. Just need ID." She flashed it proudly, and I checked. "Alrighty. And you? ...Yep! ID. ...Perfect." I turned back to the bar. "Two margs and a Dos Equis, Usagi-chan."

"Hai!" she answered.

And I jumped as I felt a pinch on my jeans. "Ooh!" I spun about and table four was in a fit of giggles, one of the older womens looking very pleased with herself, wagging her eyebrows at me. I pressed a hand to my chest. "Obachan. Behave." They laughed again and I blew her a kiss before spinning on my heels to hit table two.

"How's it goin', gents?"

"That old woman has a lot of brass," one of them said, looking to the grandmother who had goosed me.

"Ah, baa-baa does that. Especially after the tequila shooters I know she's stealing from her daughter." They chuckled and I grinned. "Have we decided on drinks?"

"I would like to try this... Scorpion Bite?"

"Yeah? Brave man." I looked to the next.

"[Just a beer for me.]

"Hai." The next?

"Margarita!" He said, with a big thumbs up, and we all laughed.

"Absolutely." I looked to the last.

He was an older man, and he moved like a turtle, eyes blinking as he turned. "I saw this... Tokyo Tea. What is it?"

"It's like a Long Island," I answered. "But we make it with Midori."

His eyes widened. "Oh..." They chuckled.

"Go for it, sofu!" insisted the margarita.

He chuckled and nodded. "Yes."

"Alright, but I'm gonna have to card you," I answered, stern.

He blinked at me. "What?"

"Are you old enough to drink? I don't want to get shut down, I'm gonna need to see ID."

And he laughed, a weird, stunted sound in his throat. But boy howdy, how he smiled at me. "You are so kind."

"You think I'm jokin'." I winked at him. "Be right back."

When I got to the bar, she had three margaritas and the beer.

"You could hear him from here?" I laughed.
"Oh yeah," she answered, smiling.

"And a snake bite, a Sapporo and a tokyo tea for grandpa."

"For Jiji?"

I nodded, laughing. She just shook her head. I took the drinks to the girls, carefully skirting to the other side of the table. "Obachan, I'm watchin' you." They all laughed, and I deposited the drinks. As I went to turn I stopped. "Oh, okay. Just once." And I stuck out my ass for her, and she slapped it. They all squealed. I spun on my wheel and blew her a kiss, and she caught it in her hand, kissing it.

At the bar, Usagi shook her head. "You are a braver man than me."

"They think they're gettin' you, but that's not how it works here." I helped her finish the Scorpion Bite and Tokyo Tea. "You should check those quesadillas."

"Hai."

I took my tray to the table of gentlemen, chuckling to themselves.

"You let her do it again!" Scorpion Bite said, surprised.

I shrugged. "Respect your elders, yeah?"

Jiji waved a finger at me. "[I like you, young man]," he said.

"Well shucks." I slid him his drink, turning it so the straws were towards him. "We gonna eat tonight, or just drink?"

Jiji blinked at his son, who was already sipping his margarita. "Oh! Fiesta nachos, please?"

"We like 'em spicy?"

Jiji shook his head and waved a hand. "No spicy." His son looked put out.

"How about I put them jalapenos on the side?" The one with the beer snorted as I said dja-la-pen-os.

"Hai," the son answered. "Arigatou."

"Excellent. Anything else?"

"The number to the bartender?" asked Scorpion Bite.

"That I can't help you with. That's a dragon you gotta conquer for yourself, pal." I laughed. He complained. "I'll be back."

I slipped behind the bar, depositing the tray. "Heads up," I muttered to her. "Scorpion Bite at table 2 asked for your number."

She complained. "You didn't do it, did you?"

"Would I do that to you?" I asked, hurt.

She smirked. "Maybe. He has a nice suit."
I laughed. In the back, I checked the food, and the enchiladas were just coming out, the quesadillas waiting on the warmer. I dished out a boat of chips and swapped it out with the quesadillas. Lettuce, tomatoes, quac, sour cream. The bell dinged, and I pulled out the enchiladas to do the same. I set them on a tray together, and then dressed the nachos in chili, cheese, onions, chives, salsa... Mild salsa. And I put some spicy salsa and jalapenos on the side with the guac and sour cream. I put it on a separate tray and backed out of the kitchen.

Clay Walker was on the radio, "She Won't Be Lonely Long". It made me glance at the girl at the end of the bar, her lovely red dress covered in a jacket as she poked miserably at her cherry cola.

"Hey, do you want to give these nachos to table two, or the enchilada to table four?" I held both trays to her, tempting. She glanced over at two, where that guy was watching her. Then she looked to four.

And she smirked. "And deprive obachan? I don't think so."

I sighed. "You're a cruel, cruel creature..."

But she just giggled, putting a strut to her hips as she went behind the bar, me following.

"Shake that money maker..." I teased, singing behind her.

She just laughed. The girl at the end of the bar looked up at us, and I gave her a wink. She blushed and looked down at her drink.

"Alright, obachan! You gotta behave. I got food."

"Do not tell me what to do," she said.

"Baba!" her granddaughter protested.

"Do I need to cut you off?" I asked her.

She wiggled her eyebrows at me. "Do you?"

I stroked my chin. "Hmm. I'm thinkin' about it." I turned to go and hopped off before she could get me again. She cursed, and the girls laughed, except the embarrassed one who begged her to behave.

I slipped back behind the bar and settled by the girl. "Hey, you. How's yer night goin'?"

She shrugged. "Could be better."

"Expectin' company?" I idled myself by pouring myself a drink.

She shook her head. "I was... But it got cancelled." She sat up straight, tossing her hair from her eyes. "So... I decided to treat myself."

I nodded. "Reasonable." I took a sip of sprite. "You plannin' on sticking around for a while?"

She looked up at me through her lashes, finger toying with her straw. "I don't know. Maybe. Why?"

I shrugged. "Just makin' conversation. You hungry?"

Her smile is sad. "No, thank you."
I frowned. "That's a weird answer to that question."

Usagi came back behind the counter with a scoff. "That guy is creepy."

"Hey, I gave you the offer," I told her. "You wanted to see me embarrass myself in front of an old lady instead."

She smirked. "It was worth it."

I smiled, and looked back to the girl. "What's yer name, sweetheart?"

She blushed. "Tamiko."

"Well, Tamiko-san," I said. "You are welcome to sit here and endure my crazy shenanigans as long as you like." I sipped again, and I saw her relax a bit. "But I'm hungry. I was gonna make a quesadilla or nachos or something." I look to Usagi. "You hungry?"

"I could definitely eat," she said, pouring another beer for table five.

"Good consensus." I tossed a pretzel in my mouth, and I looked back to Tamiko. "What do you like?"

She shrugged, not looking at me. "I do not know."

"Well, pick something," I said, tossing her the snack bar menu. "I hate making food, I never get to sit and eat it." I watched Usagi do rounds, a special eye for table two.

She looked a little ill, but she took the menu to look, hiding her face.

At the door, another stranger walked in. He was wrapped in a black leather biker jacket, his hair tied back in a ponytail, eyes darting about as he looked for familiar faces. But there was relief, not disappointment when he saw no one. I moved along the bar to meet him as he took a seat.

"Ohaio," I greeted, tipping my hat.

He made a face, baffled. "Ohaio," he echoed, unsure.

I slid him a menu for food, and one for cocktails. "Take a gander. Let me know what suits your fancy."

"Thank you," he answered, eyeing me like I was crazy. Usagi came back behind the bar.

"Five wants a batch of nachos. Extra spicy."

I eyed the trio of kids, watching YouTube videos together, and I shook my head. "I got it." I slid over to Tamiko. "See anythin' tasty?"

She blushed. "Umm..." She pointed at my monster nachos.

I laughed. "Ooh! Hungry?"

She shrugged. "You offer."

"I did," I said. Usagi giggled.

I leaned into Usagi as I passed. "This guy at the bar - he looks like he's avoiding someone. Hide
him in table 6 if you have to."

"Hai." Her eyes went to him, and I heard her ask him for a drink as I slipped into the back.

Two batches of chips, nacho cheese, chili, onions chives, salsa fresca and guac and cream. Extra helpings of jalapeno. I did mine half without. If she liked it spicy, I could always add more. I gathered plates as well, and stepped out, careful to put the right batch down on the bar near Tamiko, and a plate for her, two behind for us. Then I carried the monstrosity to table five.

"Evenin', boys," I said, as one of them tapped at his screen to pause for food.

"[It's huge...]

"[I told you.]

"Arigatou, McCree-san!"

"You got it. You need anything else, holler."

I slipped behind Tamiko and she flinched ever so slightly.

"Just me." I reached over the bar to scoop at some nacho and crunched it. I nodded, approvingly. I looked to her. "Good, right?"

She nodded, smiling, munching as well.

"Let me top that for you," I said, grabbing her drink. I slid around the bar and served her up a fresh one, easy ice, bit of syrup, then the cola and a cherry to garnish. "There you go."

"[You are too kind]," she said, hand over her mouth.

"Hey, I'm a gentleman. I take care of my girls. Right, Usagi?"

She shook her head, pony tail swishing. "Don't listen to him. He's the worst."

I scoffed. "Lies and slander."

But Tamiko just giggled.

I leaned in to her. "Say. Have you been told today?"

She tilted her head to one side. "Oro?"

"Have you been told today?"

Usagi laughed, smiling. "[Say 'no']"

Her eye brightened. "No?"

"Would you like to be told?"

"[Say 'yes']"

She giggled. "Yes?"

"Honey. You..." I made to look her up and down and wiggled my eyebrows. Her jaw dropped in delight. "Are absolutely gorgeous." She blushed. "And anyone who cancels on a date with a dame
like you don't deserve ya." I nodded to her drink. "Tonight you're my girl. Everything is on the house."

Her face changed. She bowed to me. "Arigatou gozaimasu."

I bowed as well. "My pleasure, darlin'. You deserve a good night. Just... don't get jealous, okay?" I nodded to table four, and she looked. Grandma was watching me, and blew me a kiss. Tamiko laughed, and turned back to me.

"I will not get jealous," she said, beaming.

"Much obliged." I grabbed another bite of nacho and gave it a munch.

I moved over to the fellow at the bar, who was now waiting patiently, hands clasped before him. I gave him a smile. "Howdy. Did you decide on anything?"

He nodded, a shy smile on his lips. "The, ah... Tokyo Tea. I will try that."

"Got your ID?"

I know he doesn't need it. I don't do it because I have to (though I should). I do it because I like the smiles it gets.

And also because I get a name. "Arigatou, Hanzo-san."

He looks at me, as if he's waiting for something else to happen as I hand it back. "No disrespect meant, but we go by first names here. Alright?"

He nods, and he looks mildly confused as he pockets his ID again. I do my usual flippery, a careful blend of various spirits that comes out to a pretty light green that, if you weren't in a bar, might be mistaken for an iced tea. I slide it over. "Here you are."

"Thank you."

I give him a wink. I turn back to the end of the bar, and Tamiko is much happier now, her jacket beside her on the bar as she sips on her soda. I blow her a kiss as I go by, and she answers in the same. Table five ordered another pitcher, I gave four a wide birth (to much giggles) and picked up two more beers for three. Two were contented, and the reader in one waved me off with a smile.

I waited at the bar as Usagi served up the suds, and I leaned near the new guy. "So. Master Shimada." He tensed. "...Easy, man. You're safe here." He let out a sound. "I know you've never been here before, so... Just want to let you know. You need anything, just give a holler. You got heat on ya, we'll get you out of here somewhere safe. You just need somewhere quiet, I can tuck you into a booth in the corner," I said, nodding to where the reader was tucked in table one, hard to see but for knowing it was there.

He turned to look, and he considered it. He looked back to me. "Thank you."

"No worries. And please." I slid the menu towards him again. "Check the menu. All kinds of tasty grub. Make it myself."

He gave me a sideways smile, but took the menu again.

I took the singles first, dispersing them to three, and then back to the pitcher for five. By that time I came back behind the bar and fixed up another cola for Tamiko, and she giggled.
"You know, I can put rum in there too, if you like," I teased, a low purr.

She bit her lip. "I will think about it."

"Mm-hmm. You do that."

I grabbed my drink, giving it a sip, and chew on a maraschino.

"It's almost 10," Usagi warns me.

"Mm? Mm. So it is." I sip again and she gives me a look.

"He's late."

"Mm." I check the clock, and it's less than ten til. He should have been here. "Do you wanna be my hero and stay, or do you need to run?"

She shrugged. "I can stay. Just... saying."

I nodded. "Much obliged." I reach for the tip jar and pull out a bill. "Here."

She takes it and pockets it, a pleased smirk on her lips. "You keep trying to bribe me."

"Is it working?"

"Mm. For now."

I finish my drink as she slips into the kitchen. I check the nachos that Tamiko is working on, and there's still plenty. I wash out the glass and give it a quick wash and rinse, and set it to dry. I wipe my hands on a hand towel, and move to Mr. Shimada.

"How goes, Hanzo?" I ask. "Hanzo-san. Man, sounds better without the honorary, but I don't want to be disrespectful."

He gave me a sad smile. "I am not offended." He slides the menu forward. "Maybe I try the cheese quesadilla."

"Absolutely. You like it spicy?"

He rolls his eyes. "Not today."

"Alright." I lean into the kitchen. "Darlin', can I get some cheese quesadilla started? ...Yeah. Just cheese. ...Thank you."

I get to washing glasses, but there's only a couple there. "Usagi" does a damned good job. Of all my workers, she's one of my favourites. She works for me in the nights and goes to school in the day time, pursuing her business degree. I look forward to writing a letter of recommendation for her whenever she goes on to bigger and better things than me, but part of me hopes I can keep bribing her to stay. She makes good money as my bartender, and I know I treat her better than I lot of others do.

The man at the bar drops his glass where I can hear the ice and I look up. "[Would you like another, sir?]

He sniffs in his nose. "[I think I may stay a while. I would like a sake, please.]"
“Hai,” I say, turning to that end of the bar. “Hot?”

“Hai,” he says. “Arigatou.”

I nod. “No problem.”

I grab a bottle of sake and pour out a pitcher. I push it in the back and ask Usagi to warm it up for me, and she trades me for the quesadilla. “Oh! Thank ya kindly.” I lean back out with a grin and deliver the plate to Mr. Shimada. “Enjoy.”

One of the boys from 5 comes to the bar, wallet in hand. He orders a trio of Scorpion Bites, and I give him a warning eye. "Y'all be careful with this shit, alright?"

He laughs. "Of course, McCree-san."

I set out the three shot glasses in a line, and flip bottle after bottle over, pouring in a zig zag over the glasses.

"Don't cross the streams!" he jokes and I laugh. I flip the bottles back, and pull out two more.

"Sriracha or Texas Pete?"

He lets out a sound, not sure, and he looks to the others.

"Sriracha!" says one.

"Pete! Pete!" says the other.

I chuckle. "They're awful unhelpful." He shrugs and I smirk. "I got this." I'm light as I splash a dash of Pete in each, and a tiny dot of sriracha as well. He makes a nervous sound. "I told y'all this shit is dangerous." I splash a touch more tequila on top to upset the sauce, then slide a lime wedge around the edge of each, and then I slide it forward.

He looks excited, and scared. "What is the other thing you put in there?"

"You just saw me do it," I said with a grin.

"But it was unlabeled," he answered.

"That's cos it's home made, it don't come with labels."

He laughs. "I do not know what that means."

I wave him away. "Take that death away from me." He does so, his buddies speaking encouragement. "I hope you lot have a ride..."

They huddle close, and hold up the shots. "Kanpai!" And then they down it. I grimace to myself.

"...What is that?"

I look over to Shimada, who is watching me. He has his sake now, and Usagi is fixing herself a drink... Maybe a Grasshopper.

He grimaced. "Goodness."

"Right?" Feeling inspired, I scooped some glass into a high ball, and grabbed my grenadine and orange... "You wanna try one?"

He chuckled. "I do not think so."

"You sure? They're a lot of fun," I purred. I flipped the bottle of tequila into the glass, watching the colours to make sure they didn't mix.

"I do not think that would be wise."

"It definitely wouldn't." I popped in a maraschino and slid a Tequila Sunrise towards Tamiko.

"McCree-san!" she protested.

"Ah-ree-gah-to," I say to her. "It means 'thank you'."

She makes a face, wrinkling her nose, but she takes the drink.

"You drivin' tonight, sweetheart?" I take a towel to the bar, cleaning up whatever I left there from the Scorpions.

She didn't meet my eye. "I will get a ride."

"Alright. Let me know, I'll call you a cab."

"Arigatou."

I gasped. "See? You know it."

She slips her fingers into the tall glass of her cola and throws an ice cube at me. I chuckle. "Let me get that for you." I snatch the cola from her and she complains at me. I dump it in the sink and start to wash it out.

I feel his eyes on me, and I pretend not to notice. Suds... rinse. Dry rack. I dry my hands, and I feel the eyes leave.

...Just because most people don't say anything doesn't mean they don't stare now and again.

I put the towel down and hit the tables again. Five gives me thumbs up, and I scoop their shot glasses onto my tray. "You guys need any more food?"

"No, McCree-san, we go home soon."

"I will pass out," one says.

The third is just giggling, unseemly drunk. I smile.

"Y'all need me to call you a cab?"

"Oh, could you please?"

"Not a problem, darlin'." I snatch up the empty glass, and move on to four.

"How we doing over here?"
"Baba is done," the one girl said. "Don't give her anymore."

"I do have tea," I said. "Jasmine, oolong... I can do iced matcha?"

"How about White Russian?" she says instead, and I laugh.

"Baba! Ignore her!"

I chuckle. "How about the rest of you?"

"Can I get a box?"

"Absolutely."

"I think we are done."

"Do we need some water to sip on?" I said, eyeing obachan. I shuffled my feet ever so subtle away from her, and she chuckles.

"Yes!"

"I want one!"

"Can I have one too?"

"Alright, waters all around. I'll get yer bill, alright?" I turn around, and Usagi gives me a thumbs up. I collect their glasses and plates. "And I'll be back with a box."

"Arigatou, McCree-san!" They all echo their thanks, and I give them a bow, free hand out.

"Absolutely, ladies. Thanks for coming."

I move back to the bar, depositing the tray. Usagi eyes it and sighs.

"I know, I know," I say. "I'll have him strung up for ya so you can kick his ass next time." I grab a new tray and hit table 3. "How we doing?"

"This is so good," one of them says.

"[Can we get more tacos?]"

"Absolutely. How we doing on drinks?"

Table two ordered a hot sake for grandpa and another two beers. I replaced table one with a fresh pot of jasmine and she thanked me.

"How long you thinkin' of stayin', darlin'?" I asked her.

She hummed, a soft smile on her face. "I don't know."

"Ain't sayin' you gotta leave," I said. "Just hopin' ya don't get so lost in that book life passes you by."

She snorted. "I wish." But she looked up at me. "Arigatou, McCree-san."

"No problem. Holler if you need anything."
"I will."

I left her to her book, and went to help Usagi finish the waters.

"Got more tacos for three. You want to dish this out with the bill, or start that?"

"Ehh. I can do this."

"Alright." I put my hand to her shoulders. "Thank you."

"Mm-hmm." She had a wry smirk to her lips, but she took the tray out. I set up some tacos and got them going, and garnished them all up. I stepped out from the kitchen and I caught Usagi hurrying behind the counter as the guy from table two sat at the bar. I eyed him as I went by, not liking the small line of her lips, as I moved to dish out the meal.

"Here you go, ladies," I said, depositing it in. They thanked me. When I turned back, creep was still at the bar, and she was ignoring him.

"[Come on, pretty girl,]" he purred. "[Let me take you out sometime.]"

"[No thank you]," she said. She took the plates from my tray and took them to the back.

I turned on the sink to clean my hands. "[Anything I can get for you, sir?]" I asked, looking him in the eye.

He looked to me, a smirk on his face. "[I already asked you. Now I ask the dragon.]"

"[And I believe she said 'no'. In case you did not know, dragons bite. I would not test her, sir.]"

He scoffed. "[She is just a girl, anyway.]"

He swaggers back to his table, grumbling to himself. Jiji reprimanded him. I kept to my dishes. I felt eyes on me again.

"And you, Hanzo-san?" I called, not looking up. "How are you doing over there?"

"...I need more sake."

I nodded. "Will do." I rinsed the last dish and set it aside. I grabbed my towel, drying my hands, and poured him another pitcher. "Hot?"

"No, it is fine."

I brought it to him, and took the other. I did not look him in the eye as I did so. As I added it to the rest of the dishes, his eyes didn't leave me.

"How about you, Tamiko-chan?"

"McCree-san, what did you give me?" she whines.

I smile at her. "It's called a Tequila Sunrise."

"It is very tasty," she said. "But it is gone."

I looked up and laughed at her empty glass. "Well, I'm sorry, darlin'. Did you need another one?"

She waved her hand. "No no. That was good. I think I should go home."
"Alright. I can call you a cab."

"I would like that."

"Arigatou, McCree-san!"

"Night, girls!"

I grabbed a wet towel and a tray. I collected the last of table five and wiped it down, checking the seats. I watched obachan watch me from the door with undisguised mischief.

"Jesse, come home with me," she said, in a heavy slur and broken English.

"But baba, I have to work," I said with a smile.

"Oy. Excuses."

"Baba-san, let's go!" her granddaughter called from outside.

"Next time," she warned me.

I chuckled. "I look forward to it." I gathered their drinks and wiped down the table.

"How we doin', ladies?"

"I am full."

"Can we get boxes?"

"And can I get a soda to go?"

"Absolutely." I gathered glasses and took it back to the bar, just as a party of five walked in.

"[This place has the best nachos ever]," one of them was saying. "Hey! McCree-san!"

"Uh oh," I said, grinning. "Kenshin-san, you are always trouble." He shook my hand, strong.

"[This guy is the best.] And he make you practise your English!"

"Well, if I gotta learn Japanese to live here, it's only fair. In my house, we speak English."

"It is nice to meet you!" one of the girls said, bowing.

"Well, howdy!" I tipped my hat. "That's pretty good!" I pointed to five. "Y'all just set yerselves over there and I'll be right with you."

They went to the table and I moved behind the bar. I rang up bills and served up some sodas to go.

"I didn't forget you, alright?" I told Tamiko.

"Is okay," she said, waving at me.

I carried the tray to the girls and left them a receipt. "Come up to the bar when you're ready, okay?"

"Okay!"

Then I moved to two. "Alright, fellers. We all good?"
"I think so," agreed the margarita man. Mr. Trouble had his eye on the kitchen door, which hadn't opened.

"[Anything to go? Soda? Ice water?]"

"[Ice water for me,]" said Jiji. "[Thank you for your service.]" His head nodded to my left hand. I looked down at it, and then to him. "[Thank you, sir.]" I bowed low, respectful. He nodded as well, smiling.

I gathered their drinks and left behind a bill. Back behind the bar, I picked up a phone and hit the speed dial. I ordered her a cab and told them were to find me, and they know me well enough to put it on my tab. I made up an ice water for her, too, and slid it over as I took her glass. "Ride's on its way, sweetheart."

She smiled at me. "Thank you, McCree-san."

"No problem, darlin'." One of the girls met me there with her card, her friend sipping on the lychee soda.

"I love this place," she said, smiling. "It is real Western."

I winked at her and tugged my hat. "Of course it is. Real Western music. Real tequila. Real cowboy...

"Clint Eastwood in the bathroom," one of the girls teased, beaming.

"Clint Eastwood? That one's me," I said, as if offended, and they laughed. I handed her the change. I watched her put a generous tip into my giant pickle jar, and I grinned. "Well, alright. Y'all come back now, y'hear?" They laughed and said a chorus of goodbyes. Behind them, margarita-san stepped up.

"I am sorry for my friend," he said quietly.

"You tell him if that's how he's gonna be, he ain't gettin' no more Scorpion Bites from me, alright?"

"[Of course, sir]," he said, bowing in respect.

"Glad we understand each other." I gave him his change. He put in a dollar bigger than his whole bill, and I took off my hat to salute him. "Well, thank you, sir."

He shrugged, looking back to his grandfather, who watched out of the corner of his eye with approval.

"You got a good one here, sir," I said, putting my hat back on. "You can come back anytime."

The old man nodded. The young man held out a hand to me and I shook it. "I will definitely be back. Thank you."

"My pleasure."

"Jiji-san. [What will Baba say when she hears what you were up to tonight?]"

"[She will not be surprised. After all, she married me...]"

I chuckled to myself. I looked to Mr. Shimada. "How we doin' over here with the sake?"
He gave me a thumb up. "The quesadilla was delicious."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that." I moved over to take his plate and add it to the stash. "Want some more?"

He smirked. "You are a very good salesman."

"Wee, gee, I try." I give a wink, and he just shook his head.

I ducked my head in the kitchen, where Usagi was 'angry cleaning', as I liked to call it. "Kaiju is gone. I got a mess of dishes if you want to stay here, or a party of club crawlers if you want to flirt."

She snorted. "I think I will stay back here." She looked to me. "Is he here yet?"

"Nope. You want to leave me, I won't blame you for it."

She sighed. "No, it's fine..."

I stepped in and gave her a hug from behind and she laughed.

"You are the sweetest, most perfect, wonderful little Usagi in all of the whole wide world," I told her, squeezing and swaying.

She giggled. "And you are the most ridiculous cowboy I've ever had the misfortune of working for."

I let her go and peeked over her shoulder. "You work for many ridiculous cowboys?"

She wrinkled her nose and splashed me with some soap water.

"AAAH! You can't wash me! I'm supposed to be rugged and dirty from hard work, you'll ruin my aesthetic!"

She laughed behind me as I wiped at my face with the bottom of my shirt, backing into my swinging door. "Devil woman."

Mr. Shimada was watching for me as I stepped out, and I dropped my shirt real quick. I jogged the length of the bar, and skid to a halt when the phone rang. I doubled back and picked it up.

"Jack Rabbit, McCree speaking," I answered. I wiped my face with the towel and smiled. "Awesome. I'll have her right out. No no, thank you." I dropped the phone, and stepped around the bar, hands reaching for Tamiko's jacket. "Alright, pretty lady." I opened it for her, and she giggled, stepping from her stool. "Your chariot awaits."

She slipped her arms into the jacket and leaned back against me, humming with a smile. "I think maybe next time I come without the missed date."

"Hey, that's entirely up to you," I said, hands staying at her shoulders.

She turned in my arms and her eye glistened. "Thank you." She leaned up for a kiss and I turned my head so she caught my cheek. She still giggled.

"I do appreciate you comin' to see me, though." I held out my arm, and she took it, a nice sway to her steps. "Always nice to have a pretty girl on my arm."
She cooed, swaying her shoulders. I opened the door for her, and released her. She spun on her heel, clutching her bag, and she bowed low.
"Arigatou, McCree-san."

I bowed right back. "Arigatou, sweetheart. You get home safe, alright?"

She wiggled her fingers at me and skipped off to the cab, and I sighed, closing the door behind her.

I jogged through the bar and approached table five as they were laughing.

"Hey! McCree!"

I mimed pulling out finger guns and shooting the whole damn party, and half of them played along, all of them laughing. I twirled my guns in a decidedly Doc Holliday fashion and pocketed them.

"[I told you, this guy is a real cowboy.]

"[You did not say he would be so cute,]" one of the girl purred.

"Hey, come on!" Kenshin laughed. "McCree-san! Five Scorpion Bites for me and my friends."

"Oho! [Challenge issued!]

"[What did you say?]

"[Scorpion Sting]," he said, miming the strike of a scorpion's tail with one hand. "[It is amazing.]"

"[It's dangerous,]" I said, chuckling.

The girl who called me cute looked horrified, clapping a hand to her face, smacking Kenshin. "[You did not say he knew Japanese!]

"[He lives in Japan! What do you expect?]"

I laughed. "[I did not mean to surprise you.]

She bit her lip, blushing. "[I am so embarassed!]" Her friend fell on her laughing.

"I'll be right back, folks."

I went to the bar to collect some shot glasses, and I saw a stern-faced Usagi come out for the dishes.

"Yer not supposed to eat the limes by themselves," I teased.

She looked at me, and her lip pursed, trying not to smile. "[Crazy Gaijin.]

"That's Gaijin-/san/, little missy." She giggled.

I carried the tray back to table five. "Alright folks. Ready for a show?"

I served them a glass of ice water first. Then I lined the shots in a row, and flipped my bottle of tequila and everclear, and ran them down the gauntlet together. I flipped them back, and presented the hot sauce. "Pete or Sriracha?"

"Pete," Kenshin said, raising a finger. "Has to be Pete."
"Well, alright then." I tossed a dose of hot sauce in each, then flipped the tequila to give another run and back. Lime slices smeared and set, and I served the girls first. We each had a drink, and I held mine up, lime wedge in the other hand. "Alright. Y'all ready?"

"Kanpai!" They all cheered and we downed it together. I took a bite of lime and swallowed that down. "AURGH! How's that?!"

One of the girls started crying, and they all laughed.

"[Oh my god, that is too much]," she hissed, grabbing for her water and gulping.

Kenshin cried out. "[God, that is terrible! How do you do it?!!]"

"Cuz I'm a real cowboy, son! YEAH! Tequila and everclear! Just a bit of Texas Pete for flavor!" I snatched at it and cheered with it.

"[He's fucking crazy,]" one of the guys said, gesturing to me with disbelief.

"I know!" Kenshin laughed.

"Alright!" I whooped! "That's how you get a party started." I made sure everyone had a menu. "Y'all recover and let me know when you're ready for more, alright?"

"More? [Not for me, no! That is crazy!]

I gathered my bottles and turned, returning to the bar. I saw Usagi at the door.

"[You yell so much, I think someone got shot,]" she complained.

"They did," I answer, holding up a shot glass. She laughed, shaking her head and going back to the kitchen.

"[Crazy man,]" he called.

I coughed, slamming a fist into my chest. "Eurgh. That burns so good..."

"...I think maybe I want one now."

I looked up at Mr. Shimada, who was still watching me. And now... there is a dark look in his eyes. The wildness of a man who is drinking to escape from something else. The kind of man that wanted to get fucked up, and was perfectly prepared to do so.

"You want to take the Scorpion Bite challenge?" I asked, a smirk to my lips.

He nodded. "I think I can take it."

"Well, alright." I washed my hands, dried them, and set the shot on the bar where he could watch. I blended the tequila and everclear, and held up the bottles.

"Texas Pete."

I obliged, dropping a couple splashes, and another dollop of tequila. I slid the lime around, and left it. I present it to him.

He took the drink, removing the lime. "Why the dollop at the end?"
"I like it with a little more tequila than otherwise. Plus, there's just a little more anticipation that way. When I'm not presenting, I just put the sauce on top."

"Oh. Well. How nice." Brave and daring as he was, he still braced himself for a moment before he downed it. His body seized, and he took a bite of the lime, his face twisting as he swallowed again.

I laughed. He made a face.

"That is horrible," he said.

"It's hot sauce and tequila, what did you expect?" I asked. I slid him a glass of water.

He shook his head. "I do not know." He took a grateful sip, and made a face.

I chuckled. "Well, I'll leave you to question your life's choices," I teased. Spurs sang as I marched over to table five.

"Well, folks?"

"Can I have another one?"

I laughed. "Sure." I collected orders for more drinks and food, and carried back to the bar. I was mixing up drinks when I spotted the louse sneak into the bar. I glanced at the clock, and it was almost 12.

"[Are you here alone?]" he asked, concerned.

"Am I?" I asked. "What time were you supposed to be here, Toka?"

"12?" he asked, as if he wasn't sure himself.

"It was supposed to be 10, son," I told him, clenching my jaw. I nodded to the tray of shot glasses. "Take those back there and tell her she can go home."

"Hai," he sighed, head down as he did as I said.

I reached for the tip jar, and moved to the register. It popped open and I dumped the contents in before putting the jar back. I rearranged dollars and ordered them. Usagi came out, and grabbed a towel to drive her hands.

"[It's almost midnight]," she growled.

"I know."

"[And I still have to bus home.]"

"No, you don't." I offered her the $50 (my brain will always translate them as dollars, I'm not sorry) the old man's son had given us in apology and her eyes widened.

"Really? McCree-san, I can't--"

"It's the third time in two weeks," I said. "You earned it."

She swallowed, pulling out the $20 I'd given earlier and slid them next to each other. "Thank you, McCree-san."
"Finish those for me, will ya?"

She finished the drinks and served them while I counted out the dollars, and then counted out half for her. She took it gratefully. I pocketed the other half for myself. I dug a coin machine from under the counter and dumped the change in. We watched it settle, and I dished out cash for her. She gave me a shy smile. I held out my arms, and she jumped me for a hug.

"[Do not listen to my lies, cowboy]," she murmured into my shirt. "[You are the best]."

"[I know.]" She laughed. And then she reached for my hat, and I ducked away. "Nope! Not today."

She cursed, but there was a grin on her face.

"Do you want a drink or food to go?" I asked.

"[Do I pay for it?]" she asked, grabbing the seat Tamiko had earlier.

"[Do I usually charge you when you stay late?]"

She swayed on her stool, and I'm sure she was kicking her feet. "Nooo..."

I pick up the phone to call her a cab, and let her think about it... "So?"

She sighed. "Quesadilla?"

"[With onions and extra cheese?]"

"Pleeease?"

I chuckled. "You got it, chica."

In the back, Toka was washing dishes, looking miserable.

I started the quesadilla.

"[I... I'm sorry.]"

"[That's the third time this pay period. If you had difficulty reading the schedule, I would expect you to have fixed it. Or at least still have the wrong schedule to be consistent.]" I'm going to have to fire him, I know that. But if I tell him that, he just won't show up. "[You cannot keep doing this. I need you to be on time. If it was Ami instead of Meiko, I would have had to do three full parties alone.]"

"[I am sorry, sir.]"

I don't speak to him anymore as I finish the food and bring it out, already in a to-go box. "Drink, my dear?"

"Lychee soda?"

I nod, and mix it up for her. I hand it to her and she thank me, just as the phone rings.

"Jack Rabbit, McCree speaking?" She mimes at me and I nod. She wave to me, and I hang up the phone as she glides through the bar. I make myself a note and stash it in the register.

"...She does not strike me as much of a dragon."
I look up to Mr. Shimada, who is watching me. "Yeah? Why not?"

"I know dragons." He chuckles.

I shrug. "It beats being a rabbit."

"Her name is not Usagi, though," he said.

I glance to the kitchen, and then to him. "[You like to sit and listen, don't you?]

This time he shrugged. "[I do a lot of listening. Here, it is at least entertaining.]" He sips at his mostly empty water.

'[Would you like another drink?']

'[Maybe one of those lychee sodas. Is there anything else in them?]'

'[I can if you want me to,]' I tease with a wink.

That catches him by surprise, and his eyes go wide.

I reach for a tumbler and fill it with ice. '[Yes or no?]'

He swallows. "...Hai."

I nod, adding the lychee syrup and a nice splash of tequila rose, and then I rock the glass as I fill it with seltzer. I add in a long straw and top it with a bit of whipped cream. I present it to him, and he chuckles.

'[That is very pink,]' he said.

'[Lychee is very pink.]' I smirk. "You want something really embarrassing to drink, you should try a blow job." He chokes on his drink and I grin to myself.

The 12:00 comes in, and Toka and I are busy the rest of the night. Kenshin and his friends stay until closing, but Mr. Shimada left after finishing his drink. Toka cashed him out, and I watched him leave.

"You know who that was, right?" Toka asked me as I joined him behind the bar.

"Who who was?" I ask, my focus on the tap I'm pouring.

"Your Pink Passion," he says.

"Hanzo Shimada," I answer. "Why?"

He scoffed. "Shimada." And he blinked at me. "You really don't know, do you?"

I raised a brow at him. "Son, if his name ain't Eastwood or Cash or Presley..."

He cursed under his breath in Japanese. "[Ignorant Gaijin.]

"You watch your mouth," I growled.

"He is Yakuza," he hissed. "Not only is he Yakuza, he is firstborn son to the boss of the Clan."

...And then it clicked. I had such a hard time learning all these Japanese names, some of them still
blended together. I shut off the tap and looked at him. "Shimada Clan?"

He nodded.

...I should have remembered that name. I owed a Shimada my life here. I set down the beer and started the next one. "Thank you for the heads up, Toka-san."

He preened a little at having earned his honorific back. "I am surprised Meiko-san did not tell you."

"To be fair, she was a bit more pissed off about you being late," I told him. "And also, she didn't know his name."

I put on a smile as I delivered the beers, but in the back of my head, I made a note to treat him like royalty if he should come back. I owed his family much, even if he couldn't know it.
Blood Maria

Chapter Summary

To McCree's surprise, Hanzo Shimada comes back. But so does Moko-san. Every day.

Chapter Notes

1. A Bloody Mary is a pretty typical "brunch" drink. Up there with screwdrivers (vodka & orange juice), mimosas (champagne & orange juice), etc. Bloody Mary is usually made with tomato juice and vodka along with tabasco and a variety of spices (including stuff like pepper and worcestershire sauce and a variety of nummies, depending on your specific recipe), and usually garnished with a celery stalk. A Bloody Maria substitutes the vodka for tequila. Because that's a thing McCree would do.
2. Yes. This is a food porn fic. You're welcome/get over it, however you slide with that.

"Now, son, you know I don't sell Bloody Maries here. It's a Bloody Maria."

Moko laughed. "Do not call me 'son', I am older than you!"

I just smiled. "I tease. You know me. I love my tequila."

"What are they giving you for every drink of tequila, eh, McCree-san? I bet they make a fortune off you... Scorpion Bites. Tequila Sunrise."

"Pink Passion."

Moko cackled. "Yes! The... the pink one!" He slapped a hand on the counter. "Madness!"

I served him the Maria, a sprig of celery for garnish, as proper. "Take that, old man."

"Son, old man... You cannot decide. Heheh."

Come to think of it, a Bloody Maria sounded tasty... I heard the bell of the door ring, and the familiar face caught me off guard.

Hanzo Shimada. The Yakuza prince I had given one of my frilly pink drinks.

"Ohaio," I said, tilting my hat with a mischievous smile.

He snorted. "Yes, now it really is 'ohaio'," he said, taking a seat at the bar.

Moko watched him, chewing on his celery. "What can I get for ya?"
He took a breath... And looked to Moko. "Is that a Bloody Mary?"

"Maria," he said, mouth still full of celery.

"Same thing, but I use tequila instead of vodka," I said. "I'm making one right now if ya want it."

He considered me a long moment, long enough for me to finish and give it a stalk of celery. "Hai."

"Well, alright." I slid it forward. "Welcome back."

"I do not know this face," Moko said, bemused.

"I am stunned," I drawled, deadpan. "Tacos, Moko-san?"

"Hai. Get me... four." He nodded slow, as if he were betting on a horse.

"Woah, now. Don't go overboard on me." I smirked. I looked to Mr. Shimada. "Do you want the menu again?"

"Yes, please," he said, stirring the drink idly. I slid him a menu and slipped back into the back. I prepped the tacos, squeezing lime over everything and garnishing with the shredded lettuce and tomatoes, cream... no guac for Moko-san. I returned with the tacos, and Moko was leaning towards Hanzo.

"[Do I know you, son?]" he drawled, slurring already from whatever he had for breakfast before he came here.

Hanzo Shimada did not answer him, eyes looking at no bottle in particular on my wall.

"[Moko-san, eat your tacos. Leave him be.]

"[He's my customer, same as you. I keep you safe by keeping you out of trouble. I expect you to likewise not cause trouble.] Comprende?"

His jaw dropped. He waved a finger. "Do not use Spanish on me! English is enough for my old brain." He tapped the finger on the side of his head and I gave him a smirk.

"Mira. Then behave. Come."

"Come," he muttered. But he took up his taco.

I moved towards Shimada. "[I am sorry, Shimada-san. I can seat you at a private table if you like.]"

He eyed me, wary... And then he eyed the old man. "No. I am okay."

"Okay," I echoed. I got myself a fresh tumbler and poured an orange juice instead. Living in a bar is a beautiful thing. I licked my lips and stashed it under the counter. "Do you want something to eat?"

Shimada smirked. "You have so many options... I hardly know what they all are."

I leaned on the counter. "Well, nachos are pretty self-explanatory. Chips, cheese, chili, onions... You can get sour cream and guacamole and jalapenos, extra cheese, go for the full monster. Quesadillas are what you had last time. But I can make them with a salsa sauteed shredded
chicken, serve that with guac and salsa. We also have just... chips. I like to put some lime juice on top and serve salsa on the side. Burritos are like a..." I huffed, trying to think of a Japanese equivalent. "A hot sushi roll."

He snorted. "Burrito is a sushi roll," he muttered. "That is ridiculous." He smirked at me. "That is the worst example I've ever heard."

I shrugged. "Hey, if you don't know what a burrito is, that's all I can think of."

The way he smiled and looked over the menu at me with... rather pretty steel-coloured eyes, told me he was just fucking with me.

"...I remember once telling someone a quesadilla was a Mexican grilled cheese sandwich," I added.

He chuckled, but his smile grew. "That is ridiculous."

"Pretty much." I realised I was leaning over the bar like a high schooler talking to a cute boy and stepped back. I grabbed my orange juice and took another swig.

"McCree-san," Moko called.

"Yeah?" I asked, looking to him.

"If you don't make Bloody Maries..." He nodded to my juice. "What do you put in your screwdriver?"

I snorted. "Screwdriver." I downed the rest of it with a satisfied sigh. "Yanno, believe it or not, not everything needs tequila in it. Orange juice is just good for you."

"[So is pineapple juice,]" he said with a lecherous snicker.

"Hold on, now," I purred. "You talk like that, you better buy me dinner first." I smiled as he snickered again, and I rinsed the glass out and set it in a soapy bath I had on hand for the slow shift.

"...Does this say you do fish tacos?"

"Yep. Fried is cod, usually, but I think I have some salmon for the grilled."

"Go for cod," Moko said. He held up a thumb as he chewed, speaking with food in his mouth. "Is the best."

I nodded to Moko. "Moko-san likes his with extra lime juice. No guac, just sour cream. And today he's eating four of them."

Moko nodded, like he was a badass for doing so.

Shimada laughed, but it was so quiet it barely left his chest but for a sniff in his nose. If I hadn't been standing right near him, I wouldn't have known he'd laughed at all. "[He's just a crazy drunk,]" he muttered.

"[You are sitting in a bar at 1030 in the morning.]" I said quietly.

"That is fair." He inhaled... and exhaled. "I think I will do that."

"Fish tacos?"
"Hai. With the cod. Normal amount of lime juice."

I smirked. "Right on." I collected the menu and made for the kitchen. "Moko-san, keep an eye on him."

Moko nodded, turning a suspicious eye to Shimada. I glanced over my shoulders to see him look at me with a 'did you have to do that?' look on his face.

*I'm an evil man.*

I made the tacos, but it was quiet enough, I could hear them.

"So. What do you do?"

There's a pause as Shimada debates if he even wants to humour this conversation. Then, "Accounting."

I snorted, dropping the fish to cook. "Yeah, accounting. Sure."

"Accounting, eh? You work in big business building? Eh?"

"Sometimes. Usually I work from home."

"Ohhh. Fancy. Must be nice."

"Mm. It has its advantages and disadvantages."

The fish had to be watched, it could over cook or get too greasy if you weren't careful. I pulled it, letting it drain, as I dressed the shells with a chipotle sauce we made in house. I mentally chided myself for not wearing gloves, knowing it wouldn't stop me. Tongs for the fish, lime. Lettuce, tomato, guac and sour cream on the side.

*Not today, he said.*

...Then I added my spicy salsa. I collected a rolled napkin for it and pushed my way out of the kitchen, the two men quiet. I presented the plate before Shimada, and the silverware. "Try that salsa," I warned him. "Make sure you like it before you put it on everything." I felt his eyes on me as I searched the sink to see what else I'd put in there to rinse it off. When I looked up again, he had not only tasted it, but put a good helping on his taco. I heard the familiar *crunch* of fish and his eyes closed as he tasted it. I kept myself moving, not wanting to get all caught up in if he liked it or not. Then I heard another crunch, and I allowed myself a smile.

"See? Is good, eh?" Moko snorted. "I know how to do tacos."

"Oh, I'm sorry, are you makin' the tacos today?" I said.

"McCree-san..." He pouted. "[You knew what I meant.]

"Sounded an awful lot like you're tryina steal my thunder, old man."

Moko laughed. "Old man again. What am I, McCree-san?"

"Jackie Chan?"

He gasped. And then he snickered. "Drunken fist! That is a good one."
I gave him a mock bow, my hands drying the glass. I looked to Shimada, who seemed to be greatly enjoying his food. I half wondered if his legs were kicking on the other side of the bar.

"I don't know, Moko-san. I don't think he likes them."

"Good. More for me," he said with another chuckle.

His storm grey eyes flashed open to me, narrowed. He swallowed. "It is good." He took another bite.

"Well, hell. Long as he eats them, I'm happy."

"McCree-san," Moko called. "Are you not hungry?"

I snorted. "Oh, please. I eat tacos every day I'll make myself sick. Even my gut needs a break from them peppers now and again."

Moko snickered. "I do not believe you." He chomped on some spare lettuce. "What do you eat, then?"

"Well, I make breakfast. Today I had... home fries. That's fried potatoes. With some onions in there, garlic salt, black pepper. Then an egg scramble, more onions, with crumpled bacon and cheese... Serve that with some toast. Sometimes I go all out, add in some beans and bangers."

"Banga-what?" he asked, a grin on his face.


"Oh, sausage!"

"Yeah, but I make bratwurst. Toss them with the potatoes, get that grease on in the pan. Blackened on both side, half the time I smoke the whole damned house out. And I use a seasoned skillet, naturally."

"Mm. That sounds good. You should make that here!"

I laugh. "Even if I did, who would eat English Breakfast? Hell, I got huevos rancheros on the menu, and chorizo with eggs. Almost no one orders them."

"What is chorizo?"

I turned to Shimada. He seemed to be listening with interest, half way through his second taco already. "Sausage, technically. But it's spicy. Mexican-style."

"Well. Next time I order that," Moko said.

I snorted. "Oh, sure. I heard that before."

"For real this time." He downed the last of his drink and licked the rest of it off his lip. "That was good."

"Nice departure from the beer, eh?"

He shrugged. "When is on special, why not?"

"That's what the special's for," I agreed. I leaned back on the counter, another drink in my hand.
"What are you drinking now?" Shimada asked.

I smirked. "Lime soda." I toasted him, and sipped it again.

"You like lime," Moko said.

"I got a lot of it lyin' around," I answered. I sipped again.

I relaxed, patient, just being here for the morning... Shimada carved his way into the third taco, while Moko tooled around with his second. Moko liked feeling like the popular kid at the cool kid's table, up on the bar by himself. It could get tiresome, but for the most part he wasn't any trouble. I waited for Shimada to polish off his last taco before I approached.

"Double or nothin'?" I teased.

He waved to me. "No, no... No, that was very good. I think I am done." He gave me a small smile. And he finished off his drink with an impressive gulp, too. "Ah."

I chuckled. "I'm not rushin' ya, honest."

He shook his head. "No, it is not you." He looked to his phone, and sighed. "I have to get back to work."

I nodded. "Understood. You want something to go?"

He eyed me sideways. "How about a soda?"

I grinned, devilish. "Same as last time?"

"Mm." He put his chin in a hand, debating. "...Yes."

I nodded. "Alright." I saw Moko lean forward out of the corner of my eye to watch me. Ice, lychee syrup, a nice helping of tequila rose...

He gasped. "Oh, McCree-san, what are you making?"

I smiled. "It's called Pink Passion," I drawled. "Lychee soda with tequila rose."

"Tequila rose?" he echoed. "What is that?"

I chuckled. "Tequila. Duh. And a strawberry creme liquor." I capped it. It was a styrofoam cup, and no one would know what was in it. I looked up at Shimada. "Unless you prefer the whipped cream?"

He hid his face in that hand, a sly smile on his face. "I will live without it."

I nodded. I served it to him with a straw, and he picked himself back up. I rang up his total, and he watched it pop up on the register, holding out a bill. I took it, and sorted out his cash. I handed him his change, and he left a handsome tip in my pickle jar.

"Arigatou," I said, bowing.

He only nodded, sipping on his drink. Fingers wiggled at me a he slipped out of the bar, and I tried not to scream out loud.

Moko, too, watched him go. He turned back to me, eyes narrowed. "You know who that is,
"McCree-san." It wasn't a question.

"Of course I do," I answered, collecting Shimada's plate and drink, then wiping down his place.

"Then... who is he?"

I looked at him sideways. "He's one of my customers. And, by the looks of it, a new regular. So be nice."

He 'hmphed' to himself. '"Be nice'. I was your first regular, you know."

I sighed. "And I've tried so hard to get rid of you, too..."

"McCree-san!" he protested.

"Stopped buyin' yer beer, stopped serving fish tacos..."

"You said you ran out!"

"...Closed on your birthday..."

"McCree-san!"

"...Smack you around, call you old, tell everyone to ignore you because you're a drunk..."

"But I am old! McCree-san, you love me!"

I chuckle. "Trick you into drinking poisoned Bloody Marias--" I stop, eyes wide, as if I wasn't meant to say that last part.

He gapes at me, horrified, and then to his drink. Then to me. "McCree-san! You didn't?"

I snickered, and he protested, throwing a sprig of his celery at me and I bat it away.
Chapter Notes

1. ...I know I said Slow Build, shut up. Be happy with what you got. That's usually the end of the fic, you have better angst coming, be happy. I mean, shit.
2. And yes, Rabbit's Revenge is a real drink, I didn't make that one up. And White Russians are TASTY AS FUCK, BTW. As someone who has spent way too much time in food service, ONE DOES NOT SIMPLY CLOSE IN 20 MINUTES, HANZO. GOD.
3. By the way, the "monster nachos" are listed as KAIJU, because fuck you, this is Japan. Why wouldn't they be kaiju nachos?
4. Coyote Ugly reference for the win!

The third time Hanzo Shimada came to the Jack Rabbit, it was a Monday night. Generally a dead night. I had actually scheduled myself off, but Toka decided not to show up (again) and Ami really had to go. And I wasn't going to leave my new hire to run the bar by herself.

"McCree-san?"

I stepped behind her, and checked. I pulled one of the Bites and tossed it back. She grimaced, and I growled as it went down, burning...

"Mmf. Too much everclear, baby." I told her to set them aside and set new ones. "Watch." I poured both spirits into one shot and stopped short of the top. "Stop early..."

"Hai..."

"Hot sauce."

I watched her do it.

"Woah! Three shakes, babe."

"Oh."

"And..." I topped it with tequila. "Only tequila on top."

"Ohhhh..."

I gave her a reassuring smile and handed her the bottles. "Try again." I watched her pour... and stop, but she didn't flip her bottle fast enough. "That's... a little high, but that's okay. Remember to flip your bottle, sugar."

"Hai," she answered, her eyes worried.

"Go ahead and sauce those." She did three dashes this time and I gave her a smile. "There you go, you got it. Now do the last one." I watched her, and she flipped it better. She looked to me for assurance and I nodded. "Atta girl. Sauce and top those, and you are good to go."
She bit her lip, pleased with herself and practiced her flipping.

That's when he walked in.

He looked a wreck. There was no sexy leather jacket this time, hair tied back neat and tidy, mischievous, I-am-lord-of-all smirk to his lips. He looked strung out, haunted, and he almost stumbled as he got on a stool. I looked to my new Usagi. "Don't forget your limes, Usagi."

"Hai!" She liked that part, and unlike most, he didn't crush the lime wedges.

"Beautiful. Go get 'em, girlie." She put on a sway to her hips as she went (damn) and I tore my eyes away to the other end of the bar.

"Evenin', stranger," I said, sliding him a napkin. It had been a couple weeks since I'd seen him, and he'd never looked like this before. I offered him a kind smile. "You look like you could use a Bite or two."

He let a noise from his nose that may have been a humorless laugh. "Actually... That sounds good."

I nodded. "Got a new Usagi training if you'd like one a little extra sharp? Half price."

He blinked at me, as if trying to sort out what I meant... His eyes looked to the girl on the other side of the bar, chattering with the clientele. And then his eyes looked to me. They looked like a snowstorm, cold and unrelenting, and it made me shiver. He nodded finally. "Hai."

I nodded. "Alright." I moved over to the unfinished Bites and rimmed them. I brought one to Shimada, and waited, holding my own.

He took a deep breath like he was steeling himself. He took the lime and then looked at me.

"Kanpai," I said.

"Cheers," he answered, with a hint of the smile I was used to.

What had this poor dear been through?

I tossed back the bite and bit on the lime, and he did the same. "Woo! Get it!" I tossed the shot glass into the sink and it clattered.

In the lobby, Usagi turned back to me, concerned.

I gave a satisfied, "ah!" and gave her a thumbs up. "Good job, kid. But that's why we don't put too much everclear in them."

I looked to Shimada, and he was coughing, a hand hitting his own chest. He wheezed, but there was a smile on his lips, his face red.

"Need a chaser?" I asked him.

He shrugged, those eyes looking at me. They were already a bit brighter, as if he'd found a shelter from the storm.

I fixed him up a shooter with a smidge of lychee and washed it with soda. I popped it in front of him, and he let out another laugh that was almost a laugh.
He shook his head. "[It's pink.]

I shrugged. "What's wrong with pink?"

But he took it happily, and downed it in two gulps. He brought it down with a pop and sighed... "Arigatou."

I smirked. "You're welcome." I took both glasses and bussed them. "Feel better?"

"I do," he purred, leaning the bar, his head down.

I put the glasses back in the sink, and my new Usagi came back behind the bar.

"Table three wants a pitcher of..." She looked at the taps. She frowned and looked at me. "Sapparo?"

"Ahh... We don't have that on tap," I told her, shaking my head. I looked over at the table and got a head count. "Tell them we have that in bottles, or they can pick a different beer." She bounced off. "Usagi!" She stopped, turning back. "Grab a menu, darlin'."

"Oh!" She grabbed one and then headed to table three to correct them.

I sighed, taking my hat off to scratch the back of my head.

"...You have a new girl?"

I looked to Shimada, whose eyes were watching me over his arms.

I smiled, putting my hat back on. "Yep." I looked over at her, pointing out the selection on the menu for them... And they seemed agreeable and forgiving to her mistake. "Supposed to be my night off, though." I sighed, looking back to Shimada. "That doesn't really happen when you run the place."

He laughed, low and throaty behind his smiling lips. "I know that feeling."

I checked the clock - it was getting after 1 now. "You just gettin' off work yourself?"

"Mm... Something like that." He let out a gentle exhale through his nose as he rose himself to prop his chin on one hand, his other arm tucked under on my counter. He looked like a lazy cat who had just caught a fat mouse, languishing in the kill and meal and just... contented.

I slid him a menu. "You hungry?"

"Hm-hm-hm," he answered. "I am." It came out almost like a hiss. But he did not take the menu, instead watching me.

...I wasn't sure how to take that. Usagi bounced back, smiling.

"Okay! He says he want that one," she said, pointing to the right tap.

"Alright. So we get the pitcher..."

She readied it, holding it before. "Grip it tight."

"Yep. She's gon' get heavy."
She pulled the tap, and adjusted it so the suds hit the side. She looked to me, and I nodded. Her smile got bigger.

"...And just watch so as you don't spill too much on the floor." She stopped it, and tilted it upright, presenting it to me. "Little more. Top it off. Presentation, darlin'." I watched her do so, and when I gave her a nod of approval, she went to deliver. "Hold on, now! Where you goin'?"

"Oh! Right." She set it on the counter, checked the table, and got out three glasses.

"There you go. Napkins, too. And get them some orange slices, goes real nice with the Blue Moon." She put it all on the tray. "Both hands, now." It shook a little, but she had it. "There you go."

She giggled, a little frantic, and carefully moved herself over to table three.

I let out another sigh. "...Damn, that girl is scary."

Shimada-san was watching her, too. "How long have you had her?"

"Oh... Almost a week, I think," I said. "Yeah. Be a week tomorrow."

"Hmm." He turned back to me, those eyes dark and drunk. "You are a good teacher."

I snorted. "I fuss over them too much, I know."

"No no," he insisted. "Is good. It means you care. That attention..." He trailed off, his hand gesturing in an unsatisfying flop. "It is good." He shifted to the other arm with a pleased sigh. "I wish I had a teacher like you."

I chuckled. "That's just cuz I give you liquor."

"Ha ha... That is nice."

I watched Usagi as she left table three and went to four to check on them.

"...What time do you get off?"

I looked back to Shimada and blinked at him. "Sorry?"

His eyes flit to the clock, and I followed them for a reason I couldn't say. "What time you close?"

I swallowed. "2, usually. Last call is a little before that."

"And what time you get off?" he said again, a little sing-songy, a very drunk, teasing smile on his face.

I narrowed my eyes, trying to gauge him. "Depends on how much mess I have to clean up."

"And how much mess do you have?"

...I was saved from having to answer when Usagi came bouncing back. "Table four wants more nachos. But with more jalapenos this time."

"Alright. You remember how to do the monsters, right?"

"Hai!" She bounced into the kitchen -- good god, she really does bounce, it's the cutest fucking
I could feel Shimada's eyes on me. It made me nervous. He was watching me like I was the canary, and he was hungry, alright... Just for something else. I didn't know if I could say no to a Yakuza. Especially not when he came into my bar like that. Made me want to take him under my wing and get him some liquid courage and send him back out there ready to take on anything. Which had me understandably conflicted when I was the thing he wanted to take on.

"Don't forget the side fixin's," I reminded her.

"Hai!" She scooped the guac and sour cream and displayed a plate.

"Beautiful." I pushed my arm back and she marched out past me, proud of what she'd made. I returned to the bar and grabbed the plates she'd forgotten, and napkins.

"Kaiju nachos!" she announced. "[With the jalapenos this time.]

"[Let me get your plates, folks.]" She saw me with tray and plates and let out a sound. I chuckled. "You're good. In fact..." I looked at the clock, which was just about half past. "Go make yourself something to eat. We're gonna close soon."

"Yeah? Arigatou!" She patted at my shoulders and skipped -- no, bounced -- past Shimada and into the kitchen.

One of my patrons laughed. "[That one is a real usagi, eh? She has a lot of energy.]

"[Bah, she's new.]

"[I'll get her drinking Bites every shift, then she'll be a surly, whiskey-guzzlin' monster like me.]

They laughed. "Yes! You are kaiju! You so big and scary."

"Right? I gotta keep on a smile, or folks think I'm gonna eat 'em." They laughed. "You folks need anything else, holler. But we're gonna close up soon."

I told myself it was just the end-of-shift pleasantries. I wasn't avoiding the bar at all.

My reader in booth 6 answered me by rising and taking a hug. I gave her a kiss on the head and a shoulder rub, and another request that she be safe. She handed me a bill and told me to keep the change. I gathered up her teapot and cup on my tray, and carried it back to the bar.

"Who is that?" Shimada asked.

I tried to tell myself there was no jealousy in it, because dear god, I did not need that right now.

"Just another customer, same as you," I answered. That was always my answer. Unless I had some reason to feel that he had the right or need to know, that would always be my answer. I made her change and put the difference in the tip jar. I grabbed the stash under the till and started counting it out. I was just reaching into the jar when she bounced back out.

"[Is quesadillas okay?]" she asked.

Her eye widened. "For me?"

I smirked. "I get good tips."

"Hai..." she muttered in wonder. "[This job is amazing.]

I laughed. "Yeah, I'm glad you think so. You remember that when I ask you to come into work, alright?"

"Of course!" And she jumped me with a hug, and I squeezed her back.

"...Yeah, you're gonna do just fine."

She giggled, bouncing back to her own feet. "This is so exciting!"

"I'm just pleased I finally have an usagi that hops."

She blushed. "I'm sorry..."

"No no, it's fine," I said, grinning. "I think it's adorable." I closed up the register. "Do you need a cab, or you got a ride?"

"Oh, my boyfriend is already waiting."

"Aww, shucks. When do I get to meet him?"

She leaned close and whispered, "I think he's scared of you."

"Who, me?" I scoffed. "I'm a big ol' teddy bear."

"No, you are kaiju!" she teased, hands like claws towards me.

"Then Tokyo is doomed," I purred.

She giggled. "Oh! I should go!" She grabbed her food and waved at me as she hopped out.

I chuckled to myself and checked the clock. I finally had the courage to slide towards Shimada, but I made a show of wiping down my bar while I did it.

"You gonna want a last drink?" I asked him.

"Hm-hm," he hummed. "You did not answer my question."

"I don't have an answer," I answered, not looking in his eye.

He sat up, licking his lips. "What is your favorite?"

"Tequila," I answered. "...Then maybe some whiskey."

His eyes looked to me with a question in them. "Whiskey?"


He smirks. "I take the Jose."

I nodded. "You want it in your usual?"
"Pfft," he said, waving at me. "Hell no. Give it to me straight, cowboy."

I obliged him and handed him the shot. I watched him down it and I took a deep breath before turning to the bar at large. "LAST CALL, FOLKS! And make it snappy! I want to go home sometime this morning."

"Hey, fuck you!"

I returned them with a flying bird of my own, and they laughed. "Don't have to go home, just can't stay here! Get one for the road, no hair off my balls. Just get the hell out of here."

I turned to Shimada, who was on fire after that last one. I took his shot glass and tossed it in the soap bath. "You done?"

He nodded... then shrugged. "How about it? When you getting off?"

I tried not to roll my eyes at him as I sighed. I scratched my beard. "I don't make a habit of going home with patrons." It was a hard rule.

"Really? I came in here just to pick you up, though."

I raised a brow at him, and he pulled out a set of keys. "Honest."

I tell you, he had a Cadillac keychain. Swear to god.

"You are way too drunk to drive," I said, snatching them from his fingers.

"Maybe you drive, then," he teased, in what he probably hoped was lusty.

I tossed the keys aside and worked my jaw. Table three came to pay their tab and I occupied myself with them. A last Rabbit's Revenge for the birthday girl, and then table two closed up, too.

Which just left me with Shimada.

I sighed, turning to him. "You really want to stay here?"

He was starting to sober up, and that sadness was creeping up on him. "I can be patient."

I shook my head. This is breaking all my rules... I reached under my counter and pulled out my cold brew, and I mixed it with a simple syrup and milk. I tossed it with ice, and filled a tall glass. It almost looked like a White Russian, and I almost wanted to make two.

I put it on the counter for him. He blinked at it, and took it... sniffing. He made a face. "I do not drink coffee."

"Tough shit," I said, and I pocketed his keys before he could stop me. I grabbed my pickle jar and unscrewed it, dumping the cash onto the counter. I reached in my back pocket for my stash and organized it all together. I closed out the register, letting the computer compile all the orders, and I printed out an inventory list and sales manifesto. I pulled out my money counter and broke it down.

I pulled out a cloth envelope, sleek and discreet and stuffed the scary wad of cash inside along with a copy of my sales and my note of tips made. I pulled out my note for cab fares, comped drinks, refunds, all the fuck ups my new Usagi had made and food I had given away... Shoved that in, too. I zipped it up and ripped the drawer out before I shut it, empty. I snatched the envelope with me, pulling out the keys I kept on my left side on a zip tie and unlocked my office. I flipped on the light and rolled in the chair to my safe. Magnet key fob, pin code, and she beeped open. I put the drawer
back in, and left the envelope on the desk, locking the door behind me.
Shimada was still there, and he was obediently sipping the drink. He looked to me, expectant, but I said nothing.

I went to the kitchen and set about closing up shop, covering things that would be saved, tossing things that wouldn't. I dumped the last little bit of a bag of chips and tossed on some cheese sauce and chicken and salsa and set it under the warmer to keep. Fridge things, pulling out new chicken from the freezer to thaw in the fridge. I grabbed a six-pack of tomato juice under my arm and a sleeve of eggs. I backed back into the bar with them and stashed them in the fridge for the brunch crowd in the morning. I checked my bottles, taking note of three... four bottles that needed replacing. I went to the back and fetched them, marked dates on the bottom with a sharpie, and screwed on pouring spouts. I know I sighed a good three times, tired as all hell, but needing to do this...

When I finished with that, I grabbed the drink he wasn't drinking and took a good swig, and put it back on the counter. I didn't fucking care at this point. If he wanted to sit here and make my night longer, he wasn't going to get my nice side anymore.

I wiped my mouth with a napkin and tossed it in the trash and collected the bag. I dragged it to the kitchen trash, and hauled it all outside, tossing it in the dumpster. When I came in through the front door, Shimada was watching me with something like alarm. I looked at the clock -- 2:47 -- and sighed again.

I grabbed more tequila and hot sauce to stock. I grabbed the daily specials and erased it, and scribbled in the new one. I grabbed my nachos and brought it out to the bar, and I think I wolfed down half of it. I tossed it on the bar for him to snack on if he was going to still be there. I did the dishes and set them up to dry while I restocked the bags. I sighed a last time and grabbed a to-go cup and poured the rest of the coffee drink in it and topped it.

"You want anything else?" I asked him, finally looking him in the eye.

He seemed nervous. "You seem angry."

"I'm tired," I said, growling. "Tonight was my night off. I haven't slept a full night in over a week and a half." I popped a straw in the drink and tossed the wrapper away. "Where do you live?"

He told me and I cursed, rubbing my eyes. "I can call you a cab. I don't trust you to drink." I blinked. "Drive."

He sniffed softly. "Are you okay to drive?"

"Probably not," I admitted, taking a swig of sweet, sweet coffee... "Mmmm. Go ahead and not drink coffee. That's fine with me."

He smiled, shy. "I am being too forward."

"Definitely," I agreed. I took my hat off and just ran my nails through my hair, scratching at my scalp and I grumbled softly. I squeezed at my own neck and growled in my throat. "So tired."

"...Maybe we call a cab?" he said.

"Could. Or I can give you a lift." I pull the keys from my side and twirl them in my fingers. "You can come get your ride later." My shoulders slumped. "I really don't want to drive all the way to Asakusa."
He slipped off his stool and leaned at the end of the bar. "You do not have to do that, McCree-san," he said gently. "I will get a cab." There was no joy to his reassuring smile. "It was foolish to come anyway."

"I am not going to send you home in a cab," I muttered. "You're a fucking Shimada. You deserve better than that." I headed to my office to grab the cash and lock it back up, and he is not looking at me. "Come on."

I step out the front door and wait for him, and he follows, but his eyes are flitting about like he is trying to figure something out. I lock the door behind us.

"--God damn it." I unlock it and reach in to turn the sign around, one boot holding the door in place as I mark it to 10. I sigh again. "Yep. I'll be right back. Just going to take a quick nap, eat breakfast and be back." I locked it this time, and I bang my head on it. "...Why do I do this?"

"Because you love it?"

I tilt my head to look at him, making my hat all lopsided. He covers his mouth to not laugh at me. I rise, fixing my hat and head around the corner.

"Alright. This way." My boots jangle on the concrete, his boots somehow so quiet I can't hear a thing from him. In fact, I look over my shoulder to make sure he's still following, but a semblance of excitement -- even if reluctant -- is back in his smile.

"You can't be doing this on the regular, mind you," I said, sidling up to my beat up old white Mitsubishi I had picked up shortly after coming to Japan. I opened it up, flipped the manual lock, and climbed in. "Come on in, Shimada-san." I hit the clutch and started her up, some talk radio chattering out of the speakers. I slammed the door shut and buckled, and I waited for him to do the same.

"I didn't do this," I told him, waving a finger at him. "You don't know where I live, you hear me?"

I know he's laughing at me, but he nods.

"Good. Because this didn't happen." I checked over my shoulder for traffic and hit it in reverse to turn her around.

He didn't say anything as I drove. The radio station was a local radio station run by college kids, and a lot of the time they talked about nonsense and foolishness, but they were repetitive with their phrasing, and it was a good way to pick up the language.

"[...He makes me look like I know what I'm doing, it's nice.]

"[I still don't know how he got a show here.]

"[Because! They let anyone work on radio.]

I chuckled. "Ain't that the truth?" I checked my rear as I changed lanes, and I glance over at Shimada.

He's watching me. He has that soft, contented smile of a man on a good date.

*Why did he have to pick me?*

I swallow hard. 'I warn ya. I don't live in no fancy mansion or temple or nothin'. Just a tiny little
apartment that gives me space to eat and sleep, alright?" I turned into my neighborhood, the not-so-great shocks bouncing us as I go over the speed bumps. "But you don't know where I live, so you don't know this, alright?"

He laughed, that silent thing that was just a whiff of breath, and you only heard it if you were close enough. "Hai." His eyes looked around in interest.

I sighed. "Alright."

I turned in at my apartment, squeezing my white whale into the parking. She braked with a jolt, and I switched her into park. I pulled out the keys and the radio died. I looked to him, and he already had his hand on the handle. *Come on, Jesse, you idiot.* I opened my door and stepped on down. I waited for him to shut the door before I locked it and shut my own. I bowed my head, sorting through the keys before I found the one I needed and opened the painted green wrought iron gate, and then shut it behind me. Another key for the front door and I gave him a dim smile. "Security is top notch," I told him.

You could hear his laugh this time. "I can see."

I touched a finger to my lips for him to be quiet, and I pulled off my boots, hugging them in my arms. He took his shoes off as well and I crept up the stairs...

As much as a monstrous man like me can creep in a place like Japan. Shimada did a better job of it than I did.

"And another..." I muttered, pulling out the key for my door. He laughed quietly and I smiled. "You'd think we had crown jewels or something." I unlocked the door and stepped in and he followed. I dumped my shoes to the side and shut the door.

"Give me a second, alright?"

"Hai," he said softly, looking around. I tried not to look, but I did -- my box tv in one corner, some obnoxiously bright green squishy chair I had picked up at a yard sale from a college dormmate. A bookshelf stuffed with Louis L'amour and The Dark Tower series, my Clint Eastwood collection and Tombrestone, even a stash of home movies and ripped rodeo tapes. My kitchen was the neatest thing in the place, and even that had a coffee-stained mug in the sink with my breakfast dishes. I rinsed out the coffee pot and refilled it with filtered water I kept in the fridge. I poured it into the coffee pot and set it for 9. I checked the clock and cursed.

"Damn. Damn!"

Shimada turned to me, in concern. "Alright, cowboy?"

"No, just my usual crazy," I replied. I went to the bathroom to brush my teeth and--

"AH!" I turned back around, going to the bedroom instead. *What am I doing?* I didn't have space to entertain! He wasn't going to sit and sleep on a fucking bean bag chair, what was I...?

I kicked around clothes, scooping it into a laundry basket I only seemed to use when I was actually doing laundry.

"Damn it."

I straightened up the bed and pulled off my hat to sigh.
What am I doing?

I rubbed a hand over my face. I didn't even know. I was too tired to think. I hung my hat up on the coat rack that held my old biker jacket and the brown one with real sheep's wool for the winters.

"Look. I'm not used to guests," I told him. "But if you want... You can share the bed. Just... I'm tired, I'm not going to be bothering you, so don't worry about that, okay?"

Why is he even here? I asked myself.

"I don't know," I said, not realizing I said it aloud. I grabbed my toothbrush and started my routine, post-haste. Like always. Teeth, piss -- DOOR SHUT, THANK YOU VERY MUCH -- piss, no time for a shower right now. Damn it, I was just gonna have to stink, I'm going to get less than six hours again, damn it damn it damn it...

"Darlin'... I'm sorry. We're gonna have to wake at..."

I trailed off. Hanzo Shimada was sitting on my bed, and he had taken off his shirt, ripples of muscles peppered with scars and stories... His fingers had taken out his hair tie and were massaging his own scalp. He looked at me over his shoulder, eyes wide and listening.

I leaned on the door jam, and plum forgot what I was saying. "...Sorry." I blinked, looking at nothing in particular. "What was I saying?"

"We... are going to wake at...?"

"...Right." I moved to my clock, and checked the alarm. It was set for 9. I swallowed again, and tapped that damned button to an inch of its life. "...You know, even Moko won't get there until after 1030, we can wait." I set it for 945, knowing the coffee would wake me before then... And yet, I did it. I set it back, and I turned to him.

His eyes had the question of 'is this okay?', and damn it, I couldn't remember the last time someone actually gave me that look. I mean... lust, sure. Flirting, drunken, always. But in my bed and unsure? That... That didn't happen.

"I need you to know I don't make a habit of this," I said, my voice suddenly thick and raspy.

He smiled. "It did not happen," he said, teasing his chin to one shoulder.

"God damn, yer pretty," I whispered. "You really want a stinky ol' cowboy like me?"

He turned away. "It was the idea." I heard him fiddling with his belt and something in me twitched.

"You're drunk. I'm tired. You sure?"

That little sniff of laughter. "I am not that drunk." He looked back at me with dark eyes... a brewing storm, beckoning you to come out and dance in the rain. Grab your surfboard and swim out to meet your maker.

I swallowed hard. "I'm tryin' ta be a gentleman here," I growled, even as my eyes followed the lines... That spot on the hips where I knew I was prone to leave bruises... That wide expanse of yellowed parchment skin, waiting for red stripes...

Then he stood, and I watched him drop his pants, and I think I whined. "I do not want a gentleman. I want a kaiju." He slipped on to the bed and turned those dark eyes on me. "Do I need to jump you,
or will you come and jump me?"

"Hell, I don't much care either way," I said, fingers making quick work of my belt. "Just oughta warn ya. Been a while for me. It's gonna be mighty embarrassing."

He did that silent giggle again. "I will make the second time better."

"Well, shit yeah." I tossed off my shirt and dived in, and he moved to meet me... My hand moved over his skin, warm and taut and perfect, and I ate every inch with my eyes... "Fuck, you are gorgeous."

He smirked, a hand slipping into my hair. I melted into his touch, eyes flickering. "You are still wearing pants." His fingers twisted and I gasped.

"Oh, hell no," I said softly. "Th-that's wrong a me. I'll fix that right quick."

He let go, and damn that smirk was sexy.

"You hold on right there," I said, holding up a finger. I took off my pants, and my underpants, and I even hopped around like a fool taking off my socks, too. "There. That's better."

His eyes brightened and his smile got bigger as he saw. "That is better."

I chuckled, climbing back in next to him, a hand moving to his hip, and I went in for a kiss. He answered, hot and heavy, and a hand went straight to my cock, and I hummed, kneading at his gorgeous ass.

I sighed. "Damn." I hissed as he squeezed at me, his hands moving quickly. I sighed, my own fingers squeezing at his arms. "Mmm..." My eyes watched him, watched his face, that sadness and tiredness still weighing in the bags under his eyes, but replaced with this. I licked my lips and let my fingers wander. They touched his neck, and his eyes flit from what he was doing to my face.

"You're beautiful," I whispered. "I don't know if anyone ever told you that."

The flash of pain in his eyes was enough to break your heart. But he shifted closer, begging me for a kiss and I obliged him. I moved over him, one hand propping me up, and the other pulling up a leg. Our lips and tongues danced, teeth catching on flesh, and soon I was grinding on him.

"I wanna be inside you," I hissed against him.

He only nodded. "H-hai... [Please.]

I groaned. "Oh, baby... Don't beg me. You'll make me destroy you." I reached over in my bedside table for a bottle of lubricant and brought it back. I eased it against him, and pressed a finger inside.

The moan he gave me... "God damn."

"McCree-san..." His eyes flashed up at me, raging storms, his body moving against me. "[Please.]

I growled, my metal hand reaching for his throat, and he gasped. "I told you not to do that."

He grinned, and groaned as I slid in a second finger, widening him... He moaned again, throaty and quiet, and I felt my heart racing. My metal hand clawed over his chest as my gentle one pressed my hardness against him. He braced, and cried out in the back of his throat, and bless him, he was trying to be quiet, and I bit back my own groan as I moved, trying to go a little deeper each time...
Before long, we were a moaning, panting mess, his lovely sculpted legs over my shoulders, and I was destroying his neck, teeth and tongue and lips, and I know I was cruel and scratchy, but oh god, he just kept saying 'yes' and 'please' and it ruined me, and I ruined him, and--

"I'm gonna come," I panted at him. I swallowed hard. "I warned you, I--"

"Shhhh..." He pulled me closer for another starving kiss, and damn, he was so hot and tight and...

And damn him, he looked me right in the eye, and he was there with me, and it made my heart ache...

I grabbed his hand with mine, and I pressed a kiss to the palm of his hand, his wrist, the inside of his arm, before I replaced it on my cheek, and I looked him in the eye...

When it came, my breathing was a ragged, mess. And I slammed down a fist, the other clutching at his hips as I thrust, desperate, needing, needing to finish...

"Please..." I whispered.

"Yes," he replied. "Yes..." He bit his lip, his own body quivering under me.

I panted, desperate, and when I finally came, I gasped-- He whimpered, jaw clenched, and I had to bite back a long groan as my body quaked.

He hummed, his legs clinging to me, his hands at my neck, cradling me, and I let out another groan as I spilled into him...

"God..."

"Hai," he whispered.

I met his eyes again, and there was something in them... Something I did not dare to name.

I panted, thin... my fingers clutching at him. I pulled at his shoulder, pulling him to me, and I crushed my lips against his, and he whimpered into me and I spasmed again.

"God damn..." I hissed. His lips snatched at mine, and his teeth tugged at me, and I growled, clutching him close, needing him close...

I pressed myself low against him, every inch of us touching, until I moved my hips to slip out of him with a gasp and a 'pop'.

He let out a soft sound himself, that silent laugh of his, that was not so silent when we were so close, so absolutely touching, and I touched his head to mine as I caught my breath.

"Mmm..." I pressed my head to the space beside him, and I left open-mouthed kisses on his shoulder, and crept to his neck. He let me, his own hands wandering over my back, and teasing, tugging at my hair.

"I guess now..." I panted. "Would be a bad time to worry about a condom."

He giggled outright, and I rose over him grinning. He had a smile that could outshine the sun, a silly, goofy, completely unselfaware thing that just made me want to kiss him again. His eyes searched mine, and I just smiled. I stole another kiss, this one full of a promise I didn't dare say out loud, and we just enjoyed it, embraced. When we parted again, I could feel his heart beat in tandem with mine.
I finally slipped off him to roll on my side, and I sighed, gentle smile still on my lips, wondering at him. "I just fucked a Shimada."

His eyes widened, and then narrowed into slits, accompanied by a wrinkled nose and a playful slap on my shoulder. I laughed. I recklessly rose over him to reach for my dresser again, and his hands appreciatively followed the curve of my hips and back... I smirked at him. I returned with a pack of smokes. I popped it open and slid one in my mouth, and gave it a light.

I let out a deep breath, smiling. I left it in my lips and offered him one.

He seemed to debate it for a moment, his eyes going to mine, and then he took one. I held out the light for him, and he took it. He lay back in the bed, watching me sideways.

I sighed, lying back, cigarette over my belly and metal arm snagging a pillow under me. He gave another small, quiet laugh as he gathered up my comforter as a pillow and sat sideways, watching me...

I smacked my lips and looked over at the clock. And I groaned. I grimaced, rubbing my fingers in my eyes. "Ah, fuck me."

"Okay."

I looked at him sideways, and he had that stupid grin again. I laughed.

I took a drag from my cigarette, just admiring him for a moment... And I let out a stream of smoke. "You keep lookin' at me with that fuckin' smile of yours I'm gonna slap it off."

He just nuzzled deeper into my blankets, his eyes sparkling.

"God, you're gorgeous," I muttered again.

To my surprise, he wormed a little closer, and I obliged him by meeting him in the middle. He wrapped an arm around my middle, fingers playing in my bear fur and I crooked an arm around him, fingers threading through his hair. I sucked my cigarette way faster than he did, and put out the but in a nearby ashtray. I brought it down for him to tap, and I chuckled.

"You ain't gonna finish that, I'll do it."

He took another drag, then offered it to me.

"Thank you, darlin'." I made quick work of it, breathing out the smoke that made my heart race in a different rush than the piece of perfection presently curled up against me... I set the ashtray back where it was and shamelessly reached down to detangle him from my blankets (to much of his giggling) until his legs were tangled in mine instead, and the blankets covered us both.

I moved my metal hand over his back... Noting that he hadn't said anything about it at all. I squeezed at his shoulders, and he answered with a hum, shrugging them. That just made me smile...

And really, I was very tired. I yawned big, and he smiled against me. I crooked my hand somewhere it shouldn't stray from too much, and let myself relax, the night's labors (and the morning's pleasures) letting me fall quickly to sleep.
It's Just What I Do

Chapter Summary

In which #McHanzo is fucking cute as all fucking hell and then surprises of the maybe not-so-pleasant variety show up.

Chapter Notes

1. Title drop is a song called "Just What I Do" by Trick Pony that is playing atm as I post this. Bonus for the Jesse James reference.
2. I love you people speculatin' about Genji-san, it just warms my fucking heart. You're going to figure out where the AU starts and ends, aren't ya?
3. Sober, tired Jesse has more sense than love-drunk, delirious and not quite awake Jesse.
4. Moko is a fucking drunk, I'm not sorry.
5. In which Jesse McCree has a problem with falling in love and getting his heart trampled on.
6. And Toka? FUCK THAT GUY. Hoppin' Usagi-chan is way fucking cuter than him anyway. FUCK HIM.
7. Yeah, there are a lot of F-bombs in this fucking story. Like god damn Swearingen in Deadwood up in this fucking story. FUCK YEAH!

I wake to the aroma of coffee... and cigarette smoke. And sex.

Excellent start, I think to myself, bleary, tired eyes asking me to wait another 20 minutes... I groan, rubbing my eyes with my fingers, and I look down at the body curled next to mine.

Hanzo Shimada. Of all the fucking people.

I sighed. There's a damned good reason I don't sleep with patrons. Limits my options dating wise, but really, dating patrons never ended well. Especially when you were the owner and bartender at a bar. Where you flirt with everyone. Even the most forgiving person got jealous eventually. They would linger at the bar day and night, wanting comp drinks and my attention while I need to be working...

...Or worse, it's wham, bam, thank ye ma'am, and I never see them again.

At least when they were constantly there, I could get aggravated with them. The ones who never called me back were the ones that broke my heart. It was pathetic that I was one of those guys, but it's not like it's a character flaw you get to pick.

I gently brushed my hand over his arm, and he complained.

"Come on, darlin'," I croaked. "You don't gotta get up jes' yet, but I do."
His grip is admittedly impressive as I try to peel myself out.

He whines, tugging. "The alarm did not go off..."

I chuckled. "No, but the coffee did."

Bleary red eyes look up at me, an earnest pout on his lips. God, eyes like those tore me apart.

"Jesus, I can't with you." I grabbed his face and gave him a kiss, which he answered with sleepy, lazy softness. His arms wrapped around me and tugged me back to bed. And damn it, fool I am, I let him.

He hummed, smiling, as his eyes blinked. "Second time is better," he said, his voice also gravelly with sleep. "I promised."

I let out a breath from my throat. "Oh, darlin'..." I rake my finger through his hair. "You are precious. But... I don't have time..." I looked to the clock, and he complained.

"You said 1030," he muttered.

"Yeah, I gotta be there at 1030," I said. "Moko will panic and call the cops on me. He's done that before."

He snorts against me and starts to laugh. And I bite my lip, because damn it, that tickles.

"Heheheh... Yer killin' me, baby." And then he rises over me, and I am speechless at his hair falling around his face and over his shoulders... I swallow.

"God, you're beautiful."

"You have said," he whispers, and then his lips are on mine, and really, it's hard to answer him when my mouth is otherwise occupied.

It's just been so long... The sensible part of me just doesn't have a leg to stand on in comparison.

Once I am drunk from his kisses, his teeth scrape and tease at my beard, at the edge of my jaw, and then he is worrying my neck and I moan in my throat... His hands and fingers venture over my skin, and my breathing is shallow and dizzying by the time his lips have cleared my collarbone and venturing south... I know what he's going to do, and part of me can't believe it, and a part of me is hoping he will, and there's a tiny part of me that hopes he's a tease and he's going to stop so I can get up and go to work, but no one wants to listen to that guy, and then--

"Oh god..."

I am simultaneously on edge and melting candle wax. Claws scratched at my skin, while nimble lips and wet, slippery tongue slide against me. He is hot and sweet and my fingers dig into the oily silk of his hair, and I groan as he begins to swallow me.

"Fuck."

I am lost in his hands and his mouth, and yes it is better, and the world is gold and bright, like honey on a crumpet, butter on fresh toast, syrup on your fucking pancakes, rich and decadent and sweet and hot, and I know I'm not polite, I do not sit and take it. At some point, my claws are digging into his scalp while I am fucking his face, and his whimpers and whines and hands tell me he is not adverse to it. I explode with a string of expletives that I can't even describe, and Hanzo,
beautiful fucking Hanzo, hangs on and takes it all, until I am a puddle of gold syrup, melting in the morning sun, groaning from the sheer perfection of it all.

My eyes insist that, while this was very fun, sleep should be a thing. I need so much more...

And he sidles up to me with a content sigh. Limp arms find him and touch him, without the strength to pull him close, but he does so of his own volition. I can feel his own erection against my leg, and I complain, a noise in my throat. He kisses my throat and rests his head on my shoulder, fingers weaving into my chest hair, and I have no thought, but to go to sleep...

BAH BAH BAH BAH--

--I slap the alarm.

"Fuuuuueck," I groan, clutching my head.

And Hanzo fucking giggles at me.

"I am going to be god damn useless today," I mutter to no one in particular. I close my eyes. "Eurgh."

Hanzo rises, his hand sliding down my front, and I peek out of one eye. He tugs lightly on my metal arm. "Up, Jesse-san. Or Moko will call the cops."

I groan, but I let him pull me up to sitting. I lick my lips. "Damn it all." I look at him. "Damn."

He laughs. "I know what you need." I watch him rise from the bed, and slip from the room to... I don't know. I reach to the alarm clock and switch it off.

I am in so much trouble.

I manage to get myself on my feet, and there is Hanzo, and my lips part as I realize...

"Coffee," I coo, taking the mug, and I take a good whiff and sigh. I sip, and heavenly nectar of the gods...

He laughs. "Hai. Coffee."

"Mmmm." I give him a thumbs up. "I will be back."

I shuffle into the bathroom, shutting the door, and I look in the mirror.

My hair is a fucking mess, like I got in a fight with a hairdresser or... You know. Got fucked by someone who likes to fuck with your hair. And/or a blowjob with such a person.

"Jesus Christ," I swore. I did my needful, which felt a little extra decadent with the orgasm, and I washed my hands, before trying to splash enough water in my hair to make it decent. I fight with it with a brush that usually did little more than keep it in a particular direction, but it's finally passable.

When I get back to my room, Hanzo has his pants on, but his back is to me.

"Sweet Jesus," I say, surprised. "You are all tore up, baby."

He looked at me in surprise, and then smiled. "You too."
I stretched my back and... yeah. I can feel the faint sharpness of the ridges and welts from my own flaming red marks. "Yep," I sighed. "Shit. Did you get anything on my neck?"

I check again, but actually... the little red bite marks I see are at the bottom of my neck or lower... Well hidden by a collar like I usually wear. "Well, I'll be damned."

"Did I do okay?"

I look over at him, waiting in the hallway, pulling on his own shirt. I snort, seeing one of mine a little high to be covered by his shirt. "Yeah. But you might not be so lucky."

He frowned, and stepped in. His jaw dropped, and he let out a sound of concern, checking the other side.

"Well, you don't have to tell them who you got it from," I suggested, and sipped my coffee.

He looked at me sideways, and then back at his reflection, taking in a deep breath... and letting it out.

"It does not matter," he whispered, as if he was trying to convince himself.

I finished my cup of coffee, shaking my head, and there was an invigoration to sex that is pretty damned cool. Nicotine and caffeine are just bonus. I dressed, making sure I had a shirt that covered my collar and then put on my hat. And then I heard something sizzling as I came down the hall.

"Whatchu doin'?" I called, hiding a yawn behind a fist.

He was in the kitchen, sliding some butter on a pan. "I will make you breakfast?"

I chuckled, and I shook my head. "You're sweet, darlin'. But I am already going to be late." I put the coffee mug in with the other. "We'll get something on the way there, alright?"

We stopped for a sandwich each and another cup of coffee for me. I drank my breakfast, and when we pulled up to the Jack Rabbit, it was still just shy of 1030.

I sighed. "Wow. We did good time." I reached for my sandwich and popped it open.

"Thank you for this," he said to me, his breakfast already gone.

I shrugged, mouth full of food. "Come on. What was I gonna do? Send you home when you were all adorable and persistent like that? I mean, come on." I took another bite and he looked at me strangely. I swallowed. "I'm joking, of course."

He nodded... Not understanding.

I shook my head. "Nevermind." I took another bite, resting my head on the seat. "...I'm sleep-deprived and loony. Ignore me."

"Okay."

I'm pretty sure I dozed off again, because I remembered waking with a start, a jolt of adrenaline waking me up. And judging by the strange look he gave me (again? Still?) I hadn't been out long. "I'm up," I claimed. I threw another mouthful in and unbuckled myself. "I need to not be in a sitting position."

I listened to him get out opposite me, and I locked up the car. "Here." He looked, and I tossed him
his keys. The fact that he caught them was impressive because I didn't throw them very well. "Good job, babe." I sauntered to the Rabbit and pulled my own keys with a long and heavy sigh.

I hesitated when I saw he wasn't following me in. "...Right. Sorry."

But he just gave me a smile. "I need to go sleep more."

"Well, shucks, let's do that," I said, making as if to walk off. He laughed and I twisted on my heel, smiling.

He stepped closer, a hand tugging on my shirt, his eyes tracing over my chest, shoulders, neck, lips... Eyes. "I had a wonderful time."

"As did I," I said, tracing a thumb over his jaw. "Would I be greedy if I asked for a last kiss?"

He smirked. "Only if you ask."

It was a wonderful kiss. Sweet... grateful. Gentle. There was no need to it, just a basking-in-it decadent indulgence.

I sighed through my nose. "If I could bottle this, I could make a fortune."

He did that quiet laugh, and I realized I could get addicted to those quiet little laughs. It was a scary thought.

I stepped back, my hand reaching behind me for the door, and I blew him a kiss. He laughed, and I pointed a finger gun at him. "You stay out of trouble now."

"Do not tell me what to do," he said instead. And his hand held his keys, and I raised a brow at him, not remember ever giving them back to him... But that said more about me than him. "Go have some more coffee, cowboy. You need it."

And then he gave me that stupid grin, and I growled, wanting to go... slap it off of him.

Or kiss it off him.

I stepped into the Rabbit, trying to think of what I needed to do. I checked the dishes - all done. Trash was changed. Eggs and tomato juice stocked, bottles stocked... I shuffled my lips and opened the office to pull out a drawer. I checked the schedule to know who was supposed to be here today. I took a good 20 minutes to change the schedule to assume Toka had been killed by ninjas in the night. And also to get me a night off SOON, because I was going to drop.

And I gave myself a moment to think about Shimada... No. Hanzo. To think about Hanzo.

Don't get yourself all excited, Jesse, I told myself. Could be you're just a booty call.

I wasn't sure why that could possibly be a bad thing, but I had things to do right this second. You had one moment, not my fault you fucked it up with self-loathing.

I locked the new drawer into the register and started it up. I hit the jukebox, Kid Rock's "All Summer Long" coming to life around me. I went to the front door, and opened it, expecting Moko there, but not for him to be talking to someone.

"[...He is a good man. A fun man. But he is also scary. You know? He could kill you with one hand!]"
The person he was talking to had his hands tucked in his pockets, his face hidden by a hood, but he nodded. "[I agree. He can be very scary. I've seen him in action."

I looked between the two of them, and Moko startled, belatedly. "McCree-san! I was just talking about you!"

"I heard," I said, and the drun slipped in past me.

And then the other figure turned to me. My jaw dropped. Of all the days and all the people... "Hey. Haven't seen you in a while."

"I know." I smiled. "It's good to see you."

He slipped in, removing his hood. "It is nice of you to lie." His face was covered in scars, some of them puckering and disfiguring his face. It hurt me, because I knew what he looked like before.

"Well, I'm always one for sweet talk," I said, moving behind the bar. "Can I get you a drink?"

He laughed. "What is the special here?"


"Prairie fire? Which one?"

"Everclear and tequila."

"And tequila?" He snickered, pointing a finger at me. "Only you, Jesse."

I shrugged. "How about you, Moko-san?"

"What is the special today?"

"Jim Bean," I answered.

"Bah. Give me a beer."

I flipped a top off his favorite and presented it. "How about you, Genji?"

And Genji Shimada turned in his stool, the smile on his face reminding me of old days. "Do I get a discount?"

"As sponsor of this here bar? You can have anything you fucking want."
I Love This Bar

Chapter Summary

In which Jesse goes crazy over how much he loves his bar. And a heart-breaking conflict of interest presents itself

Chapter Notes

1. Tiny Doctor Who reference in there, if you catch it.
2. In which Jesse is conflicted, because this damned ridiculous bar is still his /baby/, god damn it.
3. Implied domestic abuse. As if you didn't pick up on that previously. If you didn't, shame on you.
4. The 'sexy cowboys in the bathroom' schtick is actually a thing LoneStar Steakhouse does, and my mother and I used to giggle over it all the time. It still tickles me to this day.
5. I said Overwatch /isn't/ a thing, not that it /wasn't/ a thing.
5. Title drop is "I Love This Bar" by Toby Keith.

Genji ended up with a taste of Tokyo Tea as I made Moko his tacos, and a batch of the kaiju nachos for me and Genji to munch on.

"Holy crap, Jess, this is phenomenal."

"Well, thank you." I crunched. "I like to think I can cook."

"I eat his tacos every day," Moko announced with a thumbs up.

I chuckled and nodded. "Pretty much."

"Barfly, eh?"

Moko toasted his beer bottle. "Someone's gotta do it."

Genji shook his head. "You already have a barfly."

"I know. Crazy, innit?" I wolfed down another nacho, the gnawing in my gut from a well-deserved appetite not something to be taken lightly.

"But business is well?"

"Well, I mean, it's a bar. You get dead nights and then you get slammed and liquor is expensive, but... you know. It's good." I munched. "I mean, I've already got semi-regulars, plus Moko-san, the salarymen know I'm here and some college kids. It's a novelty thing, yanno? Did you check out the bathrooms yet?"
He laughed. "No?"

I nodded towards them. "Come check this out."

I showed him the men's first, with a big print of Daisy Duke in her signatures, and another of Dolly Parton. Genji was dying.

"You crazy fuck!" he hissed in delight.

"Check out the girls room." That one had a shirtless Clint Eastwood on one wall, and a Hawaiian Elvis on the other.

"...You are ridiculous," he said.

I chuckled. "It's a riot! People go nuts for this shit." He shook his head as he followed me out, and Alabama came on the radio. "Here, and check the music."

*If you're gonna play in Texas, you gotta have a fiddle in the band...*

"Oh my god..."

I snickered. "It's great, man! I do my own mix, it's all country music and westerns, and damn it, some of them sing along to this shit. In terrible, drunken Engrish, but they do."

"I cannot believe you..."

"Here. Grab a seat, get the full effect." He humoured me, sitting in one of the round, barrel-lined booths.

His hand touched the wine red cushions. "What is this? Pleather?"


"Tequila Sunrise... Rabbit's Revenge... There's that Scorpion Bite. Good god, Jesse. It's all tequila."

"Hold on, watch this." I turned him to the Brunch Menu.

"...Bloody Maria? Good god."

"Hot damn!" I clapped my hands and stopped a boot. "This thing is fucking nuts! The tequila is such a running thing, there's a rumour going 'round I'm puttin' it in my guac."

He snorted. "That's hilarious."

"People come in here thinkin' I don't speak Japanese, so they come in here with English, then I spit out Spanish. They lose their minds. And Genji, baby, I flirt my ass off with grandmas." He facepalmed. "It's ridiculous! It's the craziest con ever, and they fucking love it. They eat it up with a damn spoon."

"I am so glad we decided on Koenji," he said, shaking his head.

"Dude! It works. Kind of run down, all rustic and almost falling apart. It works, man. And the rent is damned good compared to the other places I was looking at. And..." I stomped my boot.

"Fucking hardwood floors. You know how hard it is to find hardwood floors and 7' ceilings in Japan?"
He laughed. "I know that 7' ceilings are not so easy to find."

"This is the best, man. The fucking best. Like, I'd run this place /without/ a job riding on it. In fact, if things go well, I totally intend to keep this place."

"What, and retire? You?" He snorted.

"GENJI." I slide in across from him. "Listen. So I got shirts made for the help, right? Jack Rabbit? So I got them shirts with a jackrabbit on the front. They started calling my girls Usagi." He cackled! "Right?! I didn't even write that! They did that themselves! And I've got some great help, man. I mean, Taka is a piece of shit and I'm going to have to fire him, but Meiko is a college kid. She studies in the day, works at night. Ami is amazing with customers, but she's got a kid and her babysitter has to go home by midnight. But I have one kid who does his hair like Rufio and does the whole Harujuku thing..."

"Jesse McCree..." he says, shaking his head and wondering at me. "I haven't seen you this excited about something in a long time."

I look away, and I can't get rid of the grin on my face. "Well. I had a good night last night. I mean, I didn't sleep, but..." I wiggled my eyebrows.

He chuckled. "Oh boy... I know how you get."

"Exactly. And speaking of knowing." Biblically. SHUT UP. "I do have someone from your old crew coming in now. Not common or often, but he pops in. Figure he'd be a good contact for your operation."

He raised a brow, sipping his drink. "From my old crew?"

"Yeah, he's a Shimada," I answer. "Which normally I wouldn't suppose, just from the name, but apparently he's part of the clan. Could be helpful."

"Hmm." He licks his lips. "That is interesting. There are not a lot of actual Shimadas in the clan. What is his name?"

"Hanzo," I said.

Genji's face goes cold. "Hanzo Shimada?"

"Yeah. I mean, way he came in here, I figure he was trying to find, like, the least ninja thing in Tokyo to hide from the Clan, so... I figure he'd be the kind of guy you could wrangle for the operation... Genji, what is it?"

He is standing, and working very hard to control his breathing. I know it's his anger, his rage... I stand, too.

"...Genji?"

He let out a noisy breath, and he looked to me with a cruel smile. "He is the one we are after. Hanzo Shimada... is my brother."

I felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me, and my heart pulsed painfully in my throat. "...Your brother?"

"Yes," he answered, a red rage flashing in his eyes. "And you say he comes here alone? Hiding
from the Clan?"

My mind flashed to Hanzo, the haunted look in his eyes, the need for a connection so strong he would endure my own boorishness... I swallowed hard.

"W-... Yeah. But, Genji, shit, man! This place is a safe haven! I mean, I got battered wives that sit here and read books, sippin' tea just so she doesn't have to go home to her husband. I got stood up girls having drinks at my bar because they feel safe. Y-you can't be causin' trouble in my bar!" I gave a desperate laugh. "I like my bar. I need my bar. I've grown very attached to my bar..."

He chuckles, his eyes still burning... But he basks in it. "No. This is good. Jesse... You will help me get to my brother. We will find out his patterns, track him down, and when he is alone... We strike."

Genji's gonna kill him. My heart wrenched, and I found myself torn, torn between the blood vendetta of one of my oldest friends, to best the wrong that had been done to him... And Hanzo. That fragile, wild and wonderful, broken and perfect thing we had shared, and that part of me which wanted a chance to have again... To have it destroyed by my best friend was... Something I couldn't even fathom.

"Just... Not in the bar," I say. It sounds so stupid, and yet it's the only thing I think could work. "Promise me."

He rolled his eyes. "Fine. Yes. Not in the bar. No matter! But here we track him."

I nodded. "Of course." My hands worried together. "Um, did I show you the kitchen?"

Genji Shimada didn't leave for another hour or so. I eventually got the reins on the situation, and could bluff better, even though I was still mentally reeling at the compromise of these two characters into one... Fortunately, Genji was reeling over the proximity of his prey, so he was less than aware of my predicament. After he left, I shut the door and locked it, turning the sign around.

"Oh, sweet Jesus, Mary and Joseph," I whispered. I had to bend over in half and breathe...

"So." I squeezed my eyes shut. Fucking Moko. "I see you are with Yakuza."

I took a moment to bite my tongue... He wasn't technically wrong, from that perspective. "...Yeah, Moko. I am." I sighed. "Fuck."

"Did you not know?"

I glared up at him. He sipped his beer idly, watching me, as if we were gossiping about Madonna, and not talking about the Japanese Mafia.

"No, Moko," I said, a bit more of a growl than I originally intended. "I didn't realize. It's a shock, I'm adjusting to it."

He nodded, an appreciative hum in his throat. "Oh yeah. They touch everything, don't feel bad."

I snarled. "Moko-san... I swear to god. If you don't shut up, I'm going to shoot you and throw you out. Comprende?"

He whined. "You mean today."
"Shut up and drink your beer."

The little antagonism got me on my feet again and I took a breath before I opened shop again. As I got behind the bar, I took off my hat to run my fingers through my hair... "I am so dead."

"Can I have another beer before you die?"

I leveled him with a glare. "What I say?"

"Hey, I'm just asking! Gosh..." He muttered to himself. I rolled my eyes and gave him a new beer and went to my office.

I sat in the very comfy rolling chair I had picked up for a steal from some salaryman's yard sale, and I turned in it, trying to get my thoughts in order.

Hanzo... my Hanzo. Was also Genji's Hanzo. The elusive "Oniisan" demon that had beat him to a bloody pulp and left him for dead in the name of 'family honour'. A trip home for 'personal business' that ended up with him smuggling himself to the next island over to send an S.O.S. to Blackwatch. Reye and I had picked him up personally, and stashed him in Switzerland where Angela did to him what she did to me... But everywhere.

How he had the brass to walk around looking like Deadpool, I didn't know, but holy cow, was he strong. I made a vow in the passion of the moment, promising to help him get revenge on the son of a bitch who had put him in traction for months... Rehab for years. His ferocity and veracity was awe-inspiring. Even after Blackwatch had disbanded, the whole mess of Morrison and Reyes ending with both of them in the ground, he still knew where to get to me, and we kept in touch.

We had been planning this for years.

We did our homework, picking a neighborhood close enough to the Shimada Clan hive to get in and strike, but somewhere nondescript enough to not be seen. Quirky Koenji, full of odd-ball cafes and bars in almost-condemned neighborhoods that hadn't been touched by Tokyo's war to upgrade everything, adding a bit of underdog quirk to a crazy cowboy Gaijin opening a bar that would be just as welcome in Disneyland. I had just meant to make it a bar, a front, a place to work out of, but damn. It had turned into something else.

I had fallen in love with the wood. I had refinished the bar myself. I picked up as much as I could from yard sales and the like so I could get a nice selection of spirits, trips to Mexico for the best recipes and ingredients, and bribing a number of produce merchants until I found the perfect partner. I spent weeks debating on those damned pictures in the bathrooms, trying to narrow it down to two faces that fit my cheeky, cheesy aesthetic, but also big enough pieces that were tasteful, not lewd. The Elvis especially had been a godsend -- I'd found it at a yard sale in mint condition, amongst a whole hoard of memorabilia of the King from a recently deceased fangirl. Genji wouldn't notice that it was signed by the King. If this thing was on fire (and god help me if that happened, because the proofs in here...) I was going to grab that damned Elvis off the wall. It could be worth a fortune to the right buyer.

Hell, I'd killed people for less.

...Not to mention the cash register I had paid a university computer sciences kid to custom build for me. Weeks of testing the local taxi services until I found my truck. Sweet-talking the little lady who owned my place to come down on rent - she was the only one who didn't kick me out when I mentioned the late nights, even if she was halfway across the neighborhood. Hunting for shirt printers that would do micro runs, and hunting the campuses for an art student willing to draw a
Jack Rabbit without asking questions. The weeks I had spent staking out other bars for an idea of what was expected, what wasn't, compromising my vision for local tastes...

Genji had nothing to do with Tamiko's smile, her lips on my cheek, and the sway in her hips when I changed her night. He had nothing to do with Mizume-chan, long-sleeves and long hair and perfect make up and bent glasses. Who slipped in on a rainy day to avoid the storm and looked around the place, confused. No one else had been there at the time, and I treated her to a tea, and she taught me how to steep it right. The way she would speak up, and then clam up. The way she flinched around me. When she got into her book and I kept bringing her new pots, until she forgot about her troubles.
And she always had a different book.

Genji didn't have a damned thing to do with the gratitude shining in her eyes. Or her shy smiles when I slipped her a quesadilla on the house. He couldn't touch the quiet Tuesday when it was just me and her and I saw the red and purple rose on her temple she had accidentally worried the makeup off of. When I offered her a drink, and she told me she didn't drink... because her husband did. So I started making sodas, one of my now-more-popular ammenities. He didn't know that she came in three or four times a week, especially on weekends, just to sit in a corner and pretend she didn't exist.

I thought back to the first night Hanzo had come in, how I had carded him, how troubled he'd been. I hadn't thought much of it at the time, chalk ing it up to a nervous first timer, uncomfortable in a new place. How I had seen his name, and yet not treated him different. I realised he had basked in that anonymity. How he had enjoyed teasing me over the bar, and me teasing him back. Enough that he snuck out for a lunch to come back. Even when he had 'work' calling, he had taken the time to see me.

I thought of the haunted look in his eyes, as he crawled home to me in the wee hours of the morning, wanting that safe harbor. Someone who didn't treat him like a Shimada, like a Yakuza, like a cruel prince. Someone who saw him broken and wanting, scared and needing a place to hide. Someone who found him as him before I found him as a Shimada.

I thought about Maria, and her tiny little bar on the Mexican coast. A well-kept secret for locals only. A place where no one knew who I was, that there was a bounty on my head, or said anything about my metal arm. I had been his Maria. My little slice of the Southwest was like hers. I was the sweet escape.

...And I'm in cahoots with his brother to kill him.

I sighed, head in my hands. Saying I was "in trouble" was a colossal understatement. Where did my loyalties lie? With Genji, brother in arms, close enough to be family? How many times had he saved my damn life, or me his? I owed it to him.

But just the same, I had decided the Jack Rabbit was going to be a safe haven for all - be it Mizume or Hanzo or Meiko - and I had a loyalty to my people.

_He's a customer, same as you._

...Anonymity. Safety. Protection. That was part of my aesthetic, too.

...How the hell was I going to do this?
Blessedly for my sanity, customers started coming in. I greeted and chattered, letting my hands go through the motions, my mind simplifying itself to recipes and orders and simple responses. When I wasn't talking to someone, I moved like a ghost. My smiles felt thin and insufficient. When Ami came in, I waved, and she came behind the bar, staring at me.

"[What is wrong with you?]" she whispered, her voice thick with worry.

"Hmm? Mm. Just tired."

She pursed her lips. "[I am sorry about last night...]

"Shh," I said, waving at her. "Stop. You're fine. Not your fault your replacement decided not to show up again." I finished filling a pint and gave it to the man at the bar with another thin smile.

She followed me.

"[When was the last time you slept?]

I rolled my eyes. "[I slept."

She fuzzed. "[I mean slept. Not the close-nap-open bullshit I know you do too much.]

I chuckled. There were days back in Black watch I could go four days without sleep, just coffee and a chattersome partner...

Of course, I was younger, then.

"[Don't worry about it,]" I said. "[Although I did juggle the schedule around a bit to compensate for Toka. I'm not wasting my time with him anymore.]

"[About time,]" she sighed.

I laughed in my nose. "[I had to get a replacement first.]

"Heh. You like the way the new Usagi bounces, yeah?"

"She hops," I said, hopping lightly in my boots. She giggled. "[Hey, watch the bar. It's quiet today.}
If I was going to warn a Yakuza prince that his brother wanted him dead, how would I go about doing so without exposing myself?

We had dealt with the Shimada Clan back in the Deadlock gang (which was... god. 20 years ago now) but I hadn't done too much business further West than California in a long time. Even Genji and I had always met up in North America or Europe...

I'm coming at this from the wrong angle. Literally - I can't think like a Deadlock Gang guy. I need to think like a Japanese guy.

If their fingers were everywhere, then you should be able to follow their touch to the head, right?

I burst out of my office so quick, Ami turned to stare at me. I cleared my throat and shut the door behind me, locking it. I walked around the bar and sat next to Moko. He stank of liquor, including beer. I wondered, not for the first time, where he went when he wasn't here.

"Moko-san," I said, trying to make my smile friendly. "How are you today?"

"[Why? Are you going to kick me out?]"

"[You'd just come back tomorrow.]

He eyed me, trying to figure out if I was fucking with him... Particularly after yelling at him earlier.

"[...I wanted to ask you a question.]

"[What kind of question?]

I looked up to my Usagi, and she moved away from us. I looked back to him. "[A while ago, you made a comment about some salarymen, said they were Yakuza.}" I asked myself if asking the drunk was the best idea... But also knowing, having played the drunk myself for a long time, that it was convenient for people to underestimate you. "[How can you tell which ones are Yakuza and which ones aren't?]"

He laughed, lips teasing at his beer. "[You are upset you got tricked, aren't you?]

I smirked. "[Don't want it to happen again.]

He nodded and took a swig of his beer. He put it down and turned in his seat to me. "[I tell you,]" he said, tapping a finger to his eye. "[Age difference. Oldest guy is in charge, he does not look around, he does not care. It is not his job to look, he is busy doing important things. There will be a young guy who does the orders and handles the money. If you pay attention, he does not keep it. It is given to him, and he gives back the change. They will sit opposite.]}" He said, pointing two fingers towards each other. "[So that the two guards can sweep the room and give a warning if they see anything. That way, they do not look suspicious looking around.]" His fingers twirled, making circles.

"Your friend," he added. "The pink drink one. He comes to the bar and comes to you. But he does not look around as curious. He looks because he is nervous. Because he is not used to looking. He has other people to look for him. He forgets that they are not there, and he panicks. He does not know how to look quietly. He watches you most of all." He smirked. "Because you are the most dangerous man in the room."

I tug on my hat. "You keep saying that."

"It is true," he said, his speech slowed from drink. "You sweep. You are used to looking. I watch your eyes. Your hands are here..." He gestured to the taps with his face and hands. "But your eyes..." One hand moves around him, in a big circle. He looks to me. "You know trouble when you see it. It is why you keep the single girls at the bar where you can watch over them. It is why you keep your Usagi behind the bar and go out yourself. It is why you let them choose what they do, instead of putting them in the line of fire. It is why you let that girl read her book in the corner. Her husband beats her. You keep her safe."

I blinked at him. "How can you know that?"

He gave me a sad smile. "The same way you knew that. Before she told you." He picked up his bottle, and it was empty. He frowned at it. "My beer is gone."

"Let me get you another one," I said. I moved behind the bar and grabbed him another one, popping the cap, and put it before him.

He leaned toward me. "Like I said. I like your bar. You are a dangerous man. But you are *good* man. Until bad things happen. Then you get scary."

"You keep saying that."

He nodded. "I watch you. When a couple is fighting, or if someone bothers an Usagi..." He looks over at Ami, who is pretending to clean a glass over and over, giving us space.

"You guard them, like a bulldog. You get big." He gestured with his arms, widening. "Kaiju. Your eyes get mean. But it is not an angry red fire. It is a cold, simmering flame. It is scary, because it means you have enough anger they had to teach you to be quiet with it. And you look. And..." He tapped a nail on my arm. "You have military service. Have to. But they don't give omnic arms to nobody. You were important enough they got you a new arm." He nodded. "That makes you scary."

...I can not believe this man. "How do you know all this, Moko-san?"

"Because I was scary once, too." He gave me a sloppy wink and took a swig of beer.

...I need a drink. I pulled a beer from the tap and sighed. And I drank.

"Beer is... liquid bread," he said. "Man can live on less."

I wanted to ask him more, but I couldn't put my finger on it... Until.

"...Moko-san. The man with the... pink drink. You said I knew him?"

"I said, 'you know who he is'. I saw the way you watched him. You say, 'just a customer', but you always say that. But with him, you watch him. But you do not watch him for concern. You watch
him to guard him. Like he is a prince, and you are the knight.” He sipped. "So I said. You know who he is. I do not do good with names," he said, tapping his temple. "I see too many faces. But I read well."

My fingers clutched the glass. "What about my other friend? Who was here earlier?"

He nodded. "That man is very scary. Face like that..." He gestured a hand to his eyes. "Most men crumple in themselves when that happens. If they walk so bold, they know something we do not know. They have taken back their power. In someone so young... He must be a truly terrifying man."

I nod. "He is."

"And whoever he is, he trusts you," he added, pointing a finger at me. "He says he knows how scary you are. But you smile and joke with each other. I say you were in war together. Brother in arms. Curious, cowboy and ninja. Not something you see a lot. And your jokes... He does not understand them, but he humors you. Because you are old friends." He reached toward me. "Can I have a lime wedge?"

"Of course," I say, proffering him the bowl. He hesitates... and picks one. He begins to poke it into his beer.

"That man... the ninja. His reason to get up and fight is to seek vengeance on whoever did that to him." He shook his head. "He will not find satisfaction there. The ugliness will linger. He will not be satisfied."

...I hadn't thought it that far ahead. "Yeah, you're probably right."

"If you truly care for your friend," he said, a hand coming near mine. "You will help him, but not to kill. To forgive. Help him forgive the man who wronged him. Because... one of two things. One... the man is a cruel bastard and does not know, or does not care. He is a cold-hearted monster, who is probably not working on his own. There is a whole castle of dragons like that. That will be a life vendetta, and he will never know peace."

I shook my head, wondering... Who the hell is this guy?

"Or two... the man is a good man, and did what he had to. Violence like that is not done on its own. It could be that this man he hunts is also haunted by it. It might do him good to see him live, or hurt him to see the damage. That kind of cruelty, if it pleases him, will hollow him out like the monsters he is hunting." He took a drink, swaying on the stool, but one hand holding the bar in place. "Ah... But, is hard to say. I do not know. I only watch."

"Moko-san, when did you serve?" I asked him gently.

He snorted. "When you were still in diapers, gaijin," he said, smiling. He tapped his nose. "Let's just say... Japan has its own secret service. Fighting wars no one knows about. JSDF, heh. It was a time of peace, and yet Japan still asked for our help. We do not spend so much money to do nothing."

I nodded. "Yeah, I know that story."

He nodded, smiling. He winked, pointing a finger at me. "I knew you would. It is why I like you." He swigged a beer. "Or I would not be here."

I poured him a shot, and I slid it over to him. "On me, old man."
He chuckled, but he took it and tossed it back. I looked to Ami.

"Usagi-chan."

"Hai." She moved towards us, looking between us with worried eyes.

"From now on, when Jiji comes in here," I said, nodding to Moko, "His first drink is free."

Her eyes widened, looking at him like she did not think that was a good idea.

Moko laughed. "McCree-san... [You are a foolish man."

"Sentimental old fool," I corrected him. I moved to the register, and I closed out his tab, marking it as a comp drink. "Your drinks are on me today, Jiji."

"Oh, I'm Jiji now," he said, looking to my Usagi. She gave him a thin smile.

"Mind you. He's swaying. That's his last one." He protested and she giggled.

"[I cannot go against the boss,]" she said, sing-song.

With a little more to chew on, I finished my drink and made myself some enchiladas for lunch before the post-work rush started in. I sat in my office, listening to the old man ramble, and I marveled to myself.

Never underestimate a drunk. There's probably a reason he's drinking.
The Usagis have spoken. McCree-san is not to come to work today. So Jesse finds a few other things to do with his new free time... You know. Like chores. And maybe finding a nearby gun range...

So firstly, I want to say HOLY COW I love this fandom, and especially this shippy slice of it, because you guys are fantastic. I am proud to announce that "Fantasy" has been added into AO3's #McHanzo collection, and quite honestly, I've been writing on AO3 for YEARS, and this is the first time I've had the honor! Thanks so much! Secondly... oh boy. Jesse is in a tight spot, innee? I think you will notice how ironically little alcohol Jesse actually drinks while owning a bar (considering I ALWAYS write him as an alcoholic...) so it's high time we fixed that. Much blessings to the Usagis, whom he has spent months building up into strong, ferocious little dragons, and then turn on him when he needs them to. I pray to one day be blessed with such help, as I've had to bully a manager into eating more than once in the past. DO NOT DIE, MCCREE-SAN! What would the Rabbit be without her cowboy? Lots of Deadlock references, a time in his life that is soured by bittersweet memories of poverty and violence. Doesn't mean there weren't good times. IF YOU LIKE THE RODEO BIT, I definitely have a piece called "Rodeo" where Hanzo is left helpless while Jesse chases that bug. I'm not sorry, and I blame Garth Brooks. You know the one.
And because of yesterday, have some Elvis.

I was left with a quandary.

Hanzo-san did not leave me any way to contact him (and why would he? He was Yakuza royalty), nor did Genji, who told me he would just call the Rabbit when need be. In reflection, I realized Genji didn't know where I lived either, but it wouldn't take much for him to find out.

I itched to find Hanzo and warn him, but I didn't have a daggon clue on how to do that.

Anxiety had me drinking. I had ironically not done a lot since I'd started the bar -- something about having a plentitude of liquor to choose from lessening the effect of the siren's call -- but I found myself tossing back shots. Whiskey. Bourbon. A Scorpion Bite or three. Any time my hand started to itch, I got another drink. It wasn't helping that I was a walking zombie, so then I added a Kahlua and coffee drink here and there. We were finishing with happy hour when Meiko came in, and I frowned.

"Konnichiwa," I greeted, watching the beer in hand, another on the tap. "What's up?"
She sat at the bar, eyes on me. "Ami called me in. She's worried about you."

I glanced over at my Usagi, serving a party at table two. "Yeah?"

"Mm-hmm. She said you're drinking. A lot more than usual." Her eyes moved to my hips. "You're swaying now."

I laughed. "What?" And I looked down, and... my head spun. I blinked. "Nah, I just... You know." I shrugged. "Scorpion Bite. All for the show."

"She said you've had three. In as many hours."

I laughed, but... My smile faded. "...Have I?"

"You keep tabs on the free drinks, you tell me."

I finished filling the drinks on this order, leaving the tray on the bar where she could pick it up, and I moved over to the scrap of paper. It had started with a beer. Moko-san's order. A whiskey. Scorpion Bite. A whiskey. A tequila sunrise that I had fucked up. Another Scorpion Bite...

...And then it stopped being a list. I felt my stomach turn as 'kahlua and coffee' just had three hatch marks under it, and then I scribbled another beer...

I swallowed back bile and I looked for Ami as she came up to the bar to collect the tray. She eyed me, and I opened my mouth to say something, but she just took it and left.

I took a shaking breath, and now...

Now I could feel it.

I took off my hat and wiped my brow. I was sweating.

I took the page and slapped it on the bar. Meiko took it, her eyes widening, and looking to me. "[This was all you?]"

"The sunrise I fucked up." I said, voice shaking. "Because I over-did the grenadine. My hand was shaking." I rubbed my face with my hand. "Christ..."

"This is not like you." She leaned forward, flipping it over, and she shook her head, finding more. "It's liquor and coffee. You drink, it puts you to slur and sleep, you put in coffee to fix it."

I held up my hand, which was usually straight as a rail... and it was shaking. Even the slightest of tremors was terrifying to a man like me.

"...I don't see a lot of food on here," she added.

*How do I get like this?*

I sighed. "I need to eat somethin'."

"You need to go home," she said. "How many nights do you do that close/open nonsense? I know you don't sleep. You can't. There's not enough time."

I stopped at the edge of the bar, looking to the kitchen door. "...Five days?"

She cursed. "And before that?"
"Well... I closed, then came back for night shift after happy hour." My eyes danced, thinking. "Four days straight before that."

"I am surprised you are standing." She did not say it like it was a good surprise. She stood and marched behind the bar, pointing at the stool. "You sit down, cowboy. You are drunk and sick."

I smiled, sad. *I have such good help*, I thought.

"Usagi-chan!"

"Hai, usagi-chan?" I couldn't help but snort. They did it themselves.

"[Monster needs to go home. I will feed him and take him. Then I help you for tonight.]"

"Hai! Arigatou!"

I leaned against the bar, and now that I was sitting, I could feel the vertigo, head wanting to move forward, to the left, to swirl about... My throat burned, a cloying sweetness from the coffee mixing poorly with the harsh spirits. Time slipped by, and before I knew it, a plate was under my nose. I was commanded to eat it, and I did so. At first, my stomach rebelled at the hot food, knowing my penchant for spicy things, but she made me a simple cheese quesadilla and I crunched it down fine. When I presented the empty plate to her, along with the finished tonic soda, Meiko announced to Ami that she was sending the 'kaiju' home. She approved, and...

I almost left my hat behind. I think that startled her the most, and she put it on my head, offering me a shoulder and an arm to lean on as she led me out of the Rabbit.

I looked at my truck as she lead me to it, and she held out her hand.

"Give me your keys?"

"Can you even drive?"

"[Give me your keys!] Give!"

I eyed her but obeyed. She grumbled something about drunks who ought to know better and tried to push me into the passenger seat.

"I'm goin', I'm goin'..." I climbed in well enough and pulled over the seat belt. As soon as my head hit the back, I could feel my eyes droop.

Everything was at a lurch, a steady stream of jolting from the caffeine keeping me going, but the bone-deep weariness pained me.

"[I thought you had last night off,]" she growled.

"Toka never showed," I said, resting my head on a palm. "Ami called me to pick it up. Couldn't leave the new girl by herself."

"I could have done it!" she protested. "You are a wreck."

I smiled, chuckling softly. "You have no idea."

I had forgotten I was supposed to be surprised she could drive. She didn't drive well, because a few of the turns kept me awake (even on the short trip and with my less-than-smooth shocks), and I tapped at the window. "Here. This one."
She turned too wide, but she squeezed in.

I laughed in my nose. "Good job. Ya jes made it." I looked at her, but she was not smiling at me. It made mine dim. "Sorry."

"You are lucky I do not get arrested," she said.

She was out and around the trucker faster than I climbed out, and if I had to take four steps to catch myself, I prayed no one saw. She slammed the door shut and I grimaced. "Make sure ya lock it. Manual, inside." She did so, and I gave her a thumbs up. I started to march, slower than I liked, but I didn't want to trip on anything. "Exactly how are you gettin' back?"

She didn't look directly at me, close enough to catch me, but not to touch. "There is a bus that goes near here. I will be fine."

"Well, ain't that swell," I said. "Never did much trust buses. Weren't a lot of them in my town what could be trusted." I gestured for the keys and she handed them over. I rifled (for too long...) to find the right one, and then played thread the needle to get it in. This is embarrassing. 'Exceptin' the Greyhounds. And you don't want to be on a Greyhound in the middle of a New Mexican Desert."

"New Mexican?"

I smiled at her. "Did I never tell you that?" I pushed open the gate and stumbled forward.

"You don't say anything about America," she said. "Except for your cowboys and music. You don't talk about where you came from."

I sighed. "Not much to say." I held the rail, even though I doubted it would hold me if I needed it to. "And what I can say won't be nice." I rifled through the keys again. "Damned woman has three keys," I said over my shoulder. "One for the gate, one for the door, and then another one for my place." I sniffed, remembering this conversation from before. "Security is top notch."

She snorted. "Yeah. Definitely."

I found the damned key and had a better time threading the needle this time. I turned it and it swung in. I paused a moment to catch my balance.

"McCree-san?"

"Oops," I muttered.

"What is oops?" Meiko asked, behind me.

"Landlady," I said, finger to my lips. "Supposed to be quiet." The door immediately to my right opened.

"McCree-san!" she said, looking me, up and down, concerned. "[Are you okay?]

I gave her an 'ok' finger gesture. "[Just tired. Been a very long week. Longer than a week. I need sleep.]"

"[Do you need soup or something? I can make you soup.]"

"I just ate, but thank you." I rifled through my keys for the next one, carefully going up the steps, and I heard Meiko translate behind me. "Up-- Sorry." I waved over my head. I found the right one and tried to thread the needle again.
This whole fucking set up is ridiculous when you're drunk.

I heard the creak of steps behind me and turned to see Meiko join me.

"[You live in a shit hole,]" she whispered.

I chuckled. I have lived in quite a number of shit holes over the years... And this was a nice one, comparatively. "Not supposed to be a permanent living situation." I swung open the door. "Ta-da!" I looked back at her, and she was watching me with concern.

"[McCree-san... This is not like you.]

I gave her a sad smile. "Child, you don't know me." I stumbled into the small room, and my eyes rest on the frying pan with a smear of melted, dried butter on them. Half a pot of coffee burning on the warmer. I swallowed the lump in my throat.

I should have stayed and had breakfast with him, I thought.

"[McCree-san, I have more furniture than this,]" she said, looking to my sad excuse for a living room.

"I don't doubt it." I made my way to the bedroom... and I sighed, enjoying the sight of the rumpled sheets, knowing what they had held.

I wonder if I can still smell him...?

"[McCree-san, how long have you been here? In Japan?]

"...Few months. Four... Maybe five. I don't know. I can't count right now."

"[Why would you come to Japan just to open a bar?]

"If I told ya, I'd have to kill ya."

I feel her eyes on me, and I know she's waiting for me to turn around and laugh and tell her I'm joking. But instead, I step into my room, and into the closet. I pull out my gun, the familiar weight in my fingers.

"McCree-san...?"

I turn, and she goes pale, seeing it in my hands. "[McCree-san... What are you doing?]"

I chuckle. "Yer fine, bunny. I ain't gonna hurtcha." But I hang it up where my hat usually goes, and I put my hat on top.

I might need my Peacemaker soon.

"So... You really are a cowboy," she said instead, nervous.

"Took you that long?" I asked. I lean against a wall and start tugging at my boots, finger slipping on the spurs...

I don't realize I'm falling until she catches me, and I stumble. I look to her. "Gee, sorry, darlin'."

There is fear in her eyes, as she looks over her shoulder at the gun, and then at me.
"Tell you what... Imma go that way." I moved forward, and drop on my bed instead. My boots come off easier, and I toss them in a corner.

"...You are safe," she said, almost to herself. I look at her, and she is a good berth away from my gun. "You sleep. Feel better. Come back tomorrow. We see if you can come back."

I snort. "We'll see?"

"We can take care of it," she insisted. "You work yourself too hard. We survive a day or three without you, but the Jack Rabbit would be nothing without its cowboy." And she moves to hug me, and I wrap an arm around her. "...You are scaring us, McCree-san. Get better, okay?"

"Yeah, sure, darlin'." I give her a weak squeeze, and she gives me a thin smile. It breaks my heart to see the terror in her eyes. I watch her go and listen to the door close behind her with a click. I pull my shirt over my head, telling myself I should lock up after her, but...

My eyes catch on little red spots on my skin. They make my stomach flip in unpleasant ways and my chest tenses.

I open a cabinet in my bedside table and pull out the bottle of tequila that is always there. I am surprised to find it was never opened. I take a moment to pull off the wrapper and twist the top off with a crack. I forgo a shot glass and just take a swig, feeling it burn as it goes down and I cough. I take another until that heavy, dull, turning sensation comes over me again. I put the top back and replace the bottle, doing a familiar dance as I pull off my jeans and kick them aside.

There is a trace of something, a spice I don't recognize, maybe a hint of cologne and musk that isn't mine. I bury my head in the pillow I didn't sleep on and pull cool blankets over me, huddling close. I'm gone before I can think.

xxx

I wake to an unpleasant sound that speaks to a part of my soul and fills me with dread. I lift my head with a noise of complaint, something in me ringing despair, and the thinking part of me trying to figure out just what the hell it's on about. It's a wet, rattling noise, and my brain realizes: COFFEE. I roll my eyes with a groan -- it's just the coffee pot going off without water in it. Which... admittedly is bad for the pot. I curl up back in bed... Until I realize it's morning.

"Shit!"

I bolt up, my head immediately screaming, and I clutch it with my squishy hand, the other floundering for my bottle of hair. A quick swig, and the lightning and torment is dulled to fire and thunder.

"Eurgh..." I haven't woken up with a bitch of a hangover like that in a long while...

...Not since I opened the bar, really.

I look at the clock, which watches me idly, having nothing to say to the conversation... Despite being a little after nine, when I should normally be hearing from it.

"Well, ain't you a bundle of help," I grumble to myself.

I stomp to the pot first, shutting it off. There's a half-pot of coffee still in there, and I get a flash of Hanzo, smiling at me with the mug now sitting in the sink. My heart clenches, but I just grab the pot and dump it, scrubbing it out and making new coffee. While I drips, I go to the head, long overdue for a shower. I touch lingering bruises and sores with fondness, and new ones with
frustration.

I'm used to some of this. But it's the unpleasant parts.

Pot is done by the time I step out, naked and damp, towel in my hair. I rifle it out, strands of wet dancing at my eyes. *I'm gonna need a trim here soon.* I open the cabinet for my last coffee mug (I figured three was more than sufficient for my own laziness) and get myself a helping of black gold. It feels good... hot liquid easing over the burned flesh.

I wonder, not for the first time, what my voice would sound like if I hadn't started drinking a little before I started biking, but it's not something I can help. I finish my first serving of breakfast and start the second before I pad back to my room, to dig out some jeans. *I need to do laundry, too.* I grab a pair from my basket that is only a little stained and a lightly wrinkled tee with the King on it. Because fuck yeah, Elvis.

That's the nice thing about owning a bar. *Dress code.*

I toss some eggs with cheese and pop some toast in. Third cup of coffee, I'm feeling pretty human again. I eat, check the time, go back to my room for socks and shoes. I'm twirling my keys in my fingers when the alarm goes off, and I skit to a stop with a squeak.

I turn around. *Why is my alarm...?*

And then I remember: I'd reset it for Hanzo.

Suddenly my good morning is ruined again. I stomp to the bedroom and stab at the minutes button to set it back to 9, where it should be. I drop it with an unkind crash, and I feel that tightness in my chest again.

I twirl my keys in my fingers and squeeze them, the pain as it pricks at the palm of my hand a pleasant distraction. I look around my room, and I do a calculation.

xxx

When I pull up to the Rabbit, I see someone already at the door, fiddling with the lock. I honk in greeting, and he looks up. He watches me turn around the corner, and I park in my usual space. I shut off my beast of a truck and hop on out, shutting it behind me. My boots crunch in the gravel of the parking lot, and when I get to the door, he's already inside.

Lights are on. Music is going. Rufio is pulling on his Usagi shirt, and gives me a tight smile."Mornin'," I say, tipping my hat.

"I am told you are not supposed to work today," he said, a gravel to his voice. "And if you show up, I am to kick you out."

I chuckle. "Yeah, I kinda figured that." I unlock the office, and there on the desk is a fat envelope with the night's profit. "Hey, can you make me a tall iced coffee, please? In a to-go cup." I hear him dish the ice, and I open the safe, pulling out the drawer. I stock it up with change and bring it out to the bar, opening the register in his name. He slides a cup towards me. "Arigatou."

"Mm." He starts poking in the fridge to see if things are stocked like they should be - the eggs are there, but I would add more tomato juice. I say nothing, eyes following him as he heads to the back. I take a sip of my coffee and head back to the office. The envelope has the receipts and notes that I need, and although there is a mildly worrying list of drinks, a lot are labeled 'Szumi', our new Usagi. I need to do inventory, and I definitely need to do a truck order today or tomorrow, but it can
wait. I toast Rufio as I head out, and he waves back, wishing me rest.

I love coffee.

xxx

I head back to my place and decide on what to do first. I start a load of laundry, and while it's running I pull out my books. I had expected, with a night off, to be able to sleep, do my books, and enjoy an evening and go to bed early, but instead I got called in. It didn't end too badly, so I wouldn't complain, but it did mean I only had the two nights worth of books to do. I had a not-complicated computer stashed in one corner of my room, and it was largely just so I didn't have to do accounting by hand. I marked sales and tips and loss and... Well. It's a lot of boring punching and things. Even as a fairly decent typer, it still takes a while. Laundry is finished by the time I'm done, and I indulge the day off by actually hanging up my laundry and putting it away. It's getting on noon-thirty by the time I'm done, so I grab all the cashy money (a terrifying batch of funny-looking pesos, you ask me) and bag it. I hit the bank (which steals another hour of my life) and while I'm there, I have another thought.

A wicked thought, in context. You don't have to rob a bank three times to always scope out a joint when you step in one, but it becomes a habit.

I swing by my place and click around online for a range that wasn't too terribly far away. I find one, a good 40-minute drive, but I don't mind. They have a shop, too, where I can pick up some targets. I blow through the safety course and get myself set up to fire, and I let myself practise a while, blowing a decent chunk of my ammunition and a nice bit of steam, too. There were a couple of yucks snickering to themselves when I showed up, trussed up like a cowboy, swinging a six-shooter. But when I started painting pictures with my bullets, they stopped laughing. I did some left-hand practice, too, but it was never as good. I knew it wasn't fair, seeing as righty had 23 years of advantage, but that was something I'd never stop being sore about.

Old habits die hard.

It was gettin' on five when I decided I'd shut the little fucks up good and well enough, and I was getting hungry. Breakfast at nine, lunch before happy hour... That sounded about right. I brought my gun to the Rangemaster and gave him my gear.

"You know..." he said, "We do a sharpshooter competition every month." He pointed his eyes at a poster that I had given a glance at earlier. "You could win some big money with that gun of yours."

I gave him a kind smile. "You're kind." I waved with my left hand. "But I'm pretty sure I'd be disqualified."

"Nonsense. If anything, that gives you a disadvantage. Your other hand is just as good, if not better. We have a number of veterans who play with prosthetics. It is no problem."

His eyes were generous enough. And the way he said 'veterans' rang with the respect of a man who'd served. I looked at the poster again, marking the entry fee, the prize (...Well. That was nothing to sneeze at) and the date. I nodded. "I'll keep it in mind."


"Arigatou," I answered, bowing as well. I grabbed my bag and left the range.

Part of me ached. The part that used to ride bulls and broncos and participate in that kind of thing back home. Back when everyone knew who Deadeye McCree was, and they cheered him on.
When the pain of being tossed wasn't nothing when put up against the free drinks and hugs and accolades after. The girls happy to give the pretty boy with a big grin a little tender loving care. And a boy or two. As I put my gear behind my seat, I sighed.

Problem was, there were still people out there who knew who Deadeye McCree was, but he had a bounty on his head, and shadows chasing him besides.

As I pulled out of the range, I contemplated playing just once on my way out of town. I smiled, liking that image, wad of cash in hand, finger guns to the crowd.

"See y'all. Been real nice knowin' ya." I smirked, tipping my hat. "But Elvis has left the building."

Chapter End Notes

Sidenote: Japan has VERY strict gun laws. Most no one in the country can really own one, even the Yakuza have a hard time getting a hold of pieces. It's why they use samurai swords and shuriken instead -- a gun showing up means you done fucked up somethin' serious bad. So seeing Jesse holding a gun is extra extra troubling, and not just because he's very drunk.
Elvis

Chapter Notes

The Elvis love is a legitimate thing. My roomie is a big fan of the King. The food is stolen shamelessly from the local Hawaiian barbecue joint, and yes, katsu sauce is addictive as fuck, fight me. And apparently Yakuza all have neck tattoos in a different color to denote their power, so... what does that say about the guy with a tattoo from his shoulder to his wrist? DAMN. That's what it says. And also, DON'T FUCK WITH THIS GUY. Because dragons.

Watch me flail and grasp at anime for names because I don't have the gumption to go to Behind The Names and look up meanings before I do the thing. No, I'm not sorry. Also, I changed the ending. Sorry, not sorry. It's fine. Enjoy it. Enjoy Jesse being awkward business owner who lets his business ruin and run his life because that's how shit works in the real world. And also shamelessly poaching a good bartender because that's life, man.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I spent the better half of my drive back to Koenji trying to figure out what I was going to do for food and the rest of my night, contemplating stopping for teriyaki somewhere and spending the night with Clint or something... When the radio influenced my opinion.

I heard a familiar beat and guitar riff, and the DJ said, [And now a little something for someone out there who I can't get out of my head... Make up your mind, mana!]

I laughed, turning it up. "Brother, I hear ya."

A little less conversation and a little more action, please.

It was a remix, but that was definitely the King. I smiled down at my shirt, feeling a touch of providence on me. Moments like this made me believe there was a God up there, even if he had a twisted sense of humour.

Baby close your eyes and listen to the music...

There weren't a lot of places that did Mexican (half the reason I went the Southwest route with the Rabbit...) but I did know a place in Ebisu that did a Polynesian barbecue. They did the Hawaiian barbecue and spam and eggs and Filipino chicken adobo and played Elvis and ukelele music, and it might be a good detour from what I was doing on the daily now.

A little more bite and a little less bark, a little less fight and a little more spark, close your mouth and open up your heart and baby, satisfy me...

I shook my head, taking the exit I needed. "You're preachin' to me, sir. Keep on keepin' on. Hallelujah." This was church.

I remembered being a youth, listening to my mama's Elvis vinyls, crooning Southern gospels on Sunday nights when papa was away doing what he did on weekends. A love of the King would stay with me forever. And as I did... I told myself I should hunt for a record player. Thing like that
would pay itself back quickly. I bet I could find some old Elvis records online, too. That'd be a nice thing to come home to...

The song transitioned, and I shut the radio off, smiling. You can't top that, son.

Satisfy me, baby...

I drove through the streets, trying to remember which street it was on... I did wander in circles for a bit, but I eventually turned a corner and spotted the luau girl on the side that beckoned to me with her leis and parted lips...

Satisfy me...

I was in good spirits when I ordered chicken katsu and kalua pork, something sweet compared to the soy bite of teriyaki, a different kind of barbecue. Now, if we had someone around here with a dry rub and a decent level of heat, we'd be having a different conversation, but this scratched that itch just fine. I sat at the edge of the bar, habit dictating a good vantage point of the kitchen, the dining room, the door...

So when a quintet of salarymen came in, I saw them no problem, drowning my katsu in a little more of that ridiculously tasty sauce they serve it with. My rice wasn't white anymore, and that's how I liked it. These people served portions like I ate, and that made me happy. I confess I had a place about three blocks away from here I was looking at for the Rabbit, and I was disappointed when it fell through because... Man. This stuff was tasty.

I gave them a cursory glance, none visibly armed, but I did see one of them, hair greying at the temple, perusing the menu. One man next to him sitting with fingers crossed in front of him. The one across the old man doing the same, both of them looking out at seemingly nothing. I took a bite, watching his gaze linger on me in my periphery. There was another man, 30s or so, who was speaking to the old man. It wasn't exciting, just asking him what he wanted to eat. He checked the menu as well. He suggested something to each of the men who were pointedly not sweeping the room, but rather stationed to watch one side or the other, and they agreed, not caring. The old man said what he wanted, and the last of them, an anxious-looking fellow in his mid-to-late-20s, pushed his spectacles up as he was given the appropriate amount from number 2. I took a sip as I watched him order for the lot of them, and yeah, I had figured it was pecking order, but...

I cleared my throat as I made to wipe something off my knee, and I took a glance over at the guards again. This time, I spotted the hint of tattoos under the collar of the guy half-looking at me. I looked at the kid, who turned his head nervously to his boss, and I saw his, too.

...Well, I'll be damned.

The youngest seemed to get a message from his buddies, though, because he looked me right in the eye. And then his eye tracked to my arm and back. I gave attention to my meal, picking up more pork with my little plastic fork, and I saw his hand touch at the back of his jacket. Now that he put pressure on the cloth, I could see the outline of his piece.

I'm not doing a damn thing, don't get excited, I wanted to say, but I kept it to myself, chewing. I didn't want trouble. I didn't want to oust nobody, and I sure as hell didn't want trouble. I looked up at the kitchen, and the waiter was watching me with eyes that warned me not to start anything. Like I was the one boasting pieces and working all organized crime-like.

I couldn't help but scowl. I was having just a fine day, wasn't I? Up and down, good and bad, everywhere. I told myself, not for the first time, that I should get a vanity sleeve for this thing, but
walking around like Michael Jackson with one glove on all the time just didn't jive with my lifestyle. I tapped my fingers on the counter, metal clicking. PEACE, I tapped out in Morse. I heard one of the guards snort behind me.

"[We are making him nervous,]" I heard his number two mutter, amused and smug.

"[Good. He should be nervous,]" the boss answered, as if I were the nuisance.

...I really wanted to sit and enjoy my food, I didn't want to fight with no Yakuza. I wasn't even carrying right now. I mean, I could probably take someone out and get a gun, but the last thing I needed was to get my face plastered all over the Tokyo Daily and ruin Genji's con. I didn't want them to know me. I didn't want to be noticed. I didn't want anyone looking for trigger-happy, one-armed cowboys to find me and turn my ass in for however many million pesos I was worth these days. I just wanted to eat this kalua and admire the scantily clad girl painted on the wall and ponder if the guy behind the counter wasn't really Samoan for shits and giggles.

I watched the young man move, as if impatient, towards the door, and wondered if he was going to give me trouble if I tried to leave. But I weighed that against eating my dinner with a batch of Yakuza staring at me, waiting for me to start something.

...And I thought about Moko-san, and how often he boasted how scary I was. I wondered if maybe, just maybe, he had done that to warn off other nervous Yakuza that I was not a man to trifle with without my knowledge. To have a witness that could attest to my skill, to suggest that maybe it was best to not cause trouble.

"Hey. Excuse me?" The guy behind the counter had hidden in the kitchen and peeked out around a corner like he wasn't twice that prick's size. "Can I get a to go box, please?"

"[To go box?]"

I nodded. Fucking English, I'm mad now. Even the rice is sticking to my teeth. But I pointedly didn't look at anyone else but kitchen staff as I waited for the box. He brought it to me and I scraped my plate in with my shitty little plastic fork, and I took one last bite before I dropped it in with my food and snapped it shut. I stepped away from my stool and kept my eyes on the floor, fist at my side and food at my hip.

See, shit like this is why I didn't like going back to New Mexico. People get all twitchy and gotta start something where there ain't any trouble. They can't just leave well enough alone. Shit like that pissed me the hell off. You're already the fucking Yakuza, people are scared of you. But why you gotta go around puffing and preening, too?

I marched down the block - no particular direction - and cut into an alley, checking the reflection on the cafe opposite me to see if I was tailed.

I peeked around the corner.

...And I let out a growl of a sigh. God damn gang bangers are making me fucking paranoid. I don't need this shit. I got enough going on in my life as is.

I looked up at the street sign, to see where the hell I was, and to start the sometimes intense ordeal that was crossing the street in Tokyo. I decided that maybe I would try my luck going around the block, and hope they'd put me out of their mind.

...Imagine my surprise and delight when I found a bar back there.

"Well, hello, gorgeous," I muttered to myself. Good. I could use a drink.
I slipped inside, and I was met with brick-walled interior, black lacquered siding, black and white photography hung on the walls... Most of it women in traditional kimonos, but with their hair down and no makeup, which was practically a state of undress in some places around here. The bar was a centerpiece of the room, an island of taps encircled by a granite-topped bar that opened up on one end, and plush stools on black wood. I felt a bit under-dressed, to be honest, seeing a woman in a very nice black dress and high heels laughing quietly over her martini with a gentleman beside her in slacks, a button-down and a jacket. Most of the folks in the booths were wearing... well, not jeans and a t-shirt. I stepped up, not sure. The bartender gave me a sideways glance.

" Uh... [Is there a dress code?]" I realized that I didn't know how to say 'jeans and a t-shirt' in Japanese, and made a note to remedy that with an Usagi later.

He gave me a kind smile. "Not technically," he answered, in rather smooth English.

I smirked and sat down. "I was gettin' funny looks at the barbecue. I half expected them to ask me to sing 'Blue Suede Shoes'," I joked, taking off my hat.

To his credit, he laughed. "We don't see a lot of cowboys around here."

"Yeah, that's true." And then I put my arms on the bar. Moment of truth.

He looked, and he saw. But he only gave me a napkin. "What can I get for you?"

Nice. I lean to look at the spirits behind him, and he stepped aside, doing something under the bar to be busy, but not in my way.

"Actually, let me see your beer list."

"Absolutely." He presented me with a menu, the font sophisticated, and organized like a fine restaurant. I made a note that this was the kind of place to definitely take a date, should I ever have one. But to bring my blazer. I flipped it over, looking at the imports and grinned.

"Good lord. Y'all have Aventinus on tap? I don't think I've ever seen that before."

"Only one in Tokyo," he said, smiling.

"Get me one of them," I said, putting the menu towards him. "I haven't had an Aventinus in years."

He nodded and went to a purple-handled tap a good three-quarters down the way. I licked my lips in anticipation and adjusted my hat to cover my smuggled-in food. He returned with a dark-brewed beer, beautiful head, and I murmured in appreciation.

"That's a good head, man," I said. "You poured that real pretty."

He nodded. "Thank you." He tinkled around with his glasses, keeping half an eye on the couple on the other side, who were more focused on each other than their drinks.

"You know, I got a bar in Koenji. You ever need some extra yen, you can come work for me."

He chuckled. "That is very kind of you."

"Truth. Crazy little place called the Jack Rabbit. I'm always looking for people that can speak English and appreciate the King."

He had a real nice laugh, too. Rich, and warm. And it didn't feel pretentious or put upon. Just gentle.
"I suppose that would look awful strange on a wanted ad, eh?"

I nodded. "Exactly. I have this whole... cowboy, Southwest aesthetic. Enchiladas, tacos, quesadillas... And almost every drink on our menu has tequila in it." He laughed. "House special is a Prairie fire, but then I had to decide if I wanted tequila or rum or moonshine... And the moonshine is damn hard to get shipped in, and more trouble to brew yourself. So I ended up doing half everclear and half tequila."

He winced, letting out a breath. "Ouch."

"It's a smidge more tequila. And I would do Frank's RedHot, but... Again. Imports. So I give them the pick between Texas Pete and Sriracha."

He laughed. "Sriracha, they know. The Texas Pete..." He gestured with a hand.

"Yeah, but it's got a cowboy on it." We both chuckled. I was halfway done with my beer, and damn, it was tasty... "You know. I think the last time I had one of these, I was actually in Germany."

His eyebrows shot up. "Wow. Really?"

"...I think so. I could be thinkin' Hefeweizen." I tapped my fingers. "Eh. No big."

He played at wiping at the bar. "You travel a lot, then?"

"Man..." I shook my head, and he chuckled again.

"Too much?"

"Way too much."

"Mm. You miss home?"

I snorted into my beer. "Home, where I came from, or home where I prefer to be?"

He considered it, smiling, head tilting side to side as he considered it. "The one you like better."

"Well, the one I like better is Mexico." I gave a dreamy sigh. "I know this little place, about a day's drive from Panama, tiny speck of a town. Like, not even on the map, I'm sure. Locals only, best-kept secret in the country. They got this one little bar, barely more than a shack, does 'dos peso pescado' - $2 taco Tuesdays." He laughed again, a hearty thing that shook his chest. "There's this woman there, Maria. Acts like she owns the joint. You get her a bottle of tequila, she'll show you a good time and everyone knows it."

"I bet they sell a lot of tequila."

"Well. It's Mexico."

His nose wrinkled as he laughed, and it was just a happy, merry sound. I drank from my beer and watched him, moving near the couple in case they should need him, finding a useful thing to do there, and when they didn't, he made his way all the way around. I took another swig and polished it before he came back.

"It's a good beer," he said. "Do you want another?"

I licked my lips. "Hmm. I'm thinkin' 'bout it."
He nodded. "...So. You ever buy a bottle of tequila for Maria?"

"Mm. Boy, let me tell you." He chuckled. "Not like I did it in a row, but... After the fifth time? She started buying me tequila."

He wiggled his eyebrows. "Oh, she liked you."

"She likes me," I corrected. "Mind you... I haven't seen her in a while. She might make me treat to apologize being gone so long."

"Yes... Women like to make sure you know they know they are wanted. You know, I didn't get my flowers this week..."

I laughed. "Or, gee. If you want something for White Day, you oughta get me somethin' real nice in February..."

"Oh yes..." It was such a nice sound, the way it rattled in his throat, and came out... like cocoa, or a bowl of goulash.

"How about you? Do you travel?"

He snorted. "Have you seen Tokyo? You can travel the world right here."

"Ehh. To an extent."

"Mm... I'd love to, though." He thought about it... and then he looked up at me. "You know where I'd really like to go?"

"Hmm?" My fingers toyed at the edge of my glass.

"...Glasgow, Scotland. Everyone else... London. Paris. New York. Los Angeles. But I've always liked Scots. They're a scrappy people, maybe a bit on the vulgar side, but they're lovers as much as they're fighters, if not more so. And the accent is just..." He shook his head. "It baffles me. In a good way."

I nod. "Having known a few Scots, you're not wrong. And hey -- Johnnie Walker did us a service, right?"

He laughed. "That is true..." He eyed my glass. "So how about it? Another?"

I pondered it... and I nodded. "Sure."

He nodded, taking my glass, and got me a fresh one, filling it perfectly yet again, and presented it. "Damn nice head," I said again. "You didn't cut it or nothin'. How long you been tending bar?"

"Oh... Seven years now?"

I nodded. "Nice. You gonna keep doin' it?"

"Long as they keep paying me, yes."

And he had a beautiful smile...

"Damn. I wanna steal you."
He chuckled. "You are kind."

"No, I'm serious. Your English is amazing, you're a wonderful conversationalist, you pour beer like I'm fucking royalty, and god damn, you got a pretty smile. I know I can't compete with these fine folks here, but I want to steal you anyway."

He bowed his head, shy, and looked at me sideways. "You are too kind."

"I seriously just fired someone," I added. "Right now it's me, a Harujuku boy, a new girl I just got, a mom who can't work past midnight and a college girl who I end up using and abusing, and one day she gon' leave me for a nice office job. I could really use someone to help me not work four days straight with less than five hours a sleep a pop."

"So little sleep?" he asked, concerned.

"I run the shop. It's my bar. I end up opening at 10 and closing at 2, leave at 3, maybe 4. My new Usagi can't even flip her bottles yet, poor bunny."

He laughed. "Bunny, ah?"

"Oh-- That's the best thing." I grinned. "It's the Jack Rabbit. So I got everyone company t-shirts, with a jackrabbit on 'em? So customers call my girls Usagi. All of 'em. Usagi-chan 1, Usagi-chan 2."

He actually bent over the bar, laughing. "That is adorable."

"Yeah, and my new girl, Sezumi, she actually hops around, cos she's all excited? I told my other girl, I said, 'Damn, I got me a bunny what actually hops'." We share a good laugh for a long moment, and he shakes his head, looking at the couple again. And then steps back to me.

I leaned closer. "I don't think they need you."

"No, they don't," he agreed in a mischievous purr. "They've been at that level for 20 minutes. I swear, his drink is just water now."

I chuckle. "He thinks he's gonna get lucky."

"Ehh." He tilted his head to one side. "In that dress? Maybe. But she is not drinking it. So either she really likes him, or she's making him work for it."

"...And you read people," I murmured, and take another sip.

He smiles at me. "You barely know me."

"Sure don't. What's that tell you?"

Then I see him move in what, to some, might be a nervous gesture. But I see his fingers tug at his collar, and a familiar tattoo peeks out. "I got... history." His eyes look at me and then down. "It makes it hard... for me to keep a job."

I shook my head. "Brother, I understand. I really do. More than you could know."

That was the blue of a Shimada clan member. I had held the arm of one under my fingers the other night, and gripped it so tight it turned purple.

I looked down at my drink, my jaw tight. "Actually." I swallowed hard. "I got a real weird question
for ya."

He tilted his head, listening.

I tapped my fingertips on my glass. "...I have a customer. Favorite customer, actually. Who, ah..." I gestured my other hand towards the side of my neck. "You know." His head turned slightly, a poker face in place. "...It sounds stupid, and reckless. But... I know you folks are... Discreet." I looked up at him, eyes narrowing. "You know? Hard to get a hold of?"

He nodded. "...Right."

I nodded. "...But I also know there are... patrons. At the bar. Of that... variety?" I stroked my beard. "I know you folks want to keep a low profile, but I got a drunk barfly who can spot 'em easier than I can. I... worry. About if... If there's some kind of territorial dispute around where I'm at." I'm trying to think of a lie that'll work, and I'm trying to use my anxiousness to 'find the right words' to come up with something. I sigh. "I sound like an idiot-- Could you know which... color is in charge of my neighborhood?"

He shook his head, shrugging. "I would not know Koenji. But... I mean. The colors... There are... blue. Black... Red. And, um... yellow."

I nodded. "I'm- I'm still new, so. I mean, I'm barely learnin'. I just want to be, you know, informed. In case someone wants to start some... bidding war." I sighed. "No one's done it yet."

"How long do you say you've been open?"

I shrugged. "Couple months?"

He nodded. "It might be too soon. They want to be sure you will survive until they bother claiming you. You do not squeeze an orange before it is ready to be harvested."

There's a terrifying notion, I thought to myself, and I let it show on my face. In truth, Genji had given us a 6-8 month window, with the anticipation that we would finish the job and get out of there before anything like that was a problem. But if I was really considering keeping this bar, dealing with the local gangs would eventually be a problem.

"...Right." I took a drink, trying to think. "I just... Feel like there might be something near me, that he keeps coming in. You know?"

He shook his head. "I'll be honest, I do not know about us having territory in Koenji. I'm sure we have some, but it's just not my end of town."

I give him a sad smile. "Right. Yeah, forget I said anything." I took another drink... And he leans a little closer.

"...You worry about that, yet you would still offer me a job?"

I lowered my glass and looked up at him with sincerity. "Of course. You could be out there right now on the street, peddin' drugs, harassing single mothers, bullying small business owners, picking fights. And yet you're here. Nice place. Nice outfit," I nod to his buttoned-up dress shirt, simple black tie, vest, slacks... "I mean, even if that's a uniform, you could be a slob about it. But you even polished your shoes."

He considered that. "That is a point."
"Also. The head on this was fucking gorgeous. You take pride in your work. If I didn't know anything else but that, I'd hire you. To be frank, your history would be a boon to me. Would help me see trouble coming in, so we can keep it out. Or at least entertain it properly. I'm trying to build the kind of place where a girl who gets stood up on a date can stay at the bar until her courage is back, and make it home safe. Hell, I already got in friendly with a cab company that gives me discounts for the fares I'm giving them. And sometimes I pay."

He furrowed his brow. "You pay cab fare for customers?"

"And help. My college girl buses in. No way in hell I'm sending her home at 1 in the morning on a bus. Forget that."

And when he looked up at me, his eyes were shining. "What was the name of your place?"


He nodded, and meandered off to check on the couple, verbally this time. They had apparently forgotten their drinks, and she sucked on hers with gusto while he ordered another. I watched him ring it up for their tab and flip a bottle of rum into a scotch glass of ice, and then the coke. Then he glanced my way and ripped out a piece of paper.

He scribbled a note on it, and then returned to me, casual and nonchalant for whoever else might be watching.

"Jackrabbit, you say."

"Yep."

"And you are...?"

"Jesse McCree, owner and resident cowboy."

He chuckled. "Southwest, you say?"

"Yep. Hope you like tequila and limes, cos that's our special. Got Dolly Parton and Daisy Duke in the mens room, The Man with No Name and the King in the girls." He laughed. "I play a lot of country music, too. Gives it the whole vibe."

"Oh no," he said, "Country music. I think that's where I draw the line." But he was grinning as he pocketed the note.

I clutched my heart. "Och. And I thought it was true love." And I smiled at him. "I warn you, I'm a horrible flirt."

"Horrible about it, or horrible at it?"

"Ha ha ha ha," I said.

"I suppose I shall find out."

I shook my head. "You and Meiko would get on just fine."

I polished off my beer and sighed. "...What time is it?"

"It is..." He pulled his sleeve up a smidge to show a simple, but handsome wristwatch. "Almost 8. 7:43."
"...Damn. Dinner rush." I shook my head. "I get a day off, don't know what to do with myself."

He shrugged. "Clean house?"

"I did that for breakfast." We both laughed. I held out my hand. "Alright, Usagi-jimbo. That's what I'm gon call ya until you give me another name."

He took it and shook, smiling. "Tenshi. Miyazaki Tenshi."

"A pleasure," I said. Tenshi. "Now how about... I ask you to make your favorite cocktail."

"Favourite cocktail?"

"Mm-hmm. Favourite one to drink, favorite one to make, whichever."

He laughed. "Do I tell which it is?"

"Nope! Some of them, I can just tell by which one you pick. If it's a layered drink or a long island, for example..."

His mischievous laugh was something darker and breathier. I liked it. "Favourite drink." He put a thumb to his chin and considered the glasses before him. And then he grabbed an old-fashioned, and pointedly grabbed bottles from the other end where I couldn't see what he was pouring. I like his sense of humour. I saw one... two... three spirits go in. He added ice, tossed it in a mulder for a quick stir, and then served back in. It had no garnish but the straw he put in, and he presented it with a fresh napkin.

It was yellow. Like... a soft yellow. And mildly cloudy.

"Cream of some kind..." I took a sniff. "Coconut."

He smirked. And said nothing.

I gave it a sip... yeah, definitely coconut. And Baileys. And... brandy? I smacked my lips. "Hmm. That's fun." I took another sip. "What is that?"

"It's called a Fuzzy Duck," he said. "Baileys, brandy and coconut rum."

I nodded. "Hmm. And it's yellow."

He nodded. "Yes. It was... a custom request once at a dance club I was tending bar at. Lots of fun shots - Pineapple Upside Down Cake, Buttery Nipples, Blow Jobs..." He looked around, keeping his voice low. "You know. Anything that sounded ridiculous when you ordered it."

"I love Blow Jobs..." I said, also low. "They're so much fun." I looked up at him, and he was biting back a grin. "...You are wicked."

He shook his head. "I said nothing."

I nodded. "You'll fit in just fine with my crew." I took another drink. "...Coconut rum. That's a great colour."

"I love to give it to people who ask for a random drink," he said. "It's not the kind of thing anyone would think up on their own accord."

I laughed. "Probably not." I down the drink, and feel a good buzz...
And I remind myself I don't work here, and I will not be here until 3a to sober up.

"Alright. I gotta get out of here before you get me in trouble." I reach for my wallet. "How much do I owe you?"

xxx

I was good, I didn't drive. I went to the cafe instead for a coffee, and then went to find my truck. When I got there, I checked to make sure no one had booby-trapped it (in case it wasn't obvious, I am a paranoid fuck sometimes) and that my gun was still stashed under my seat. I sipped my coffee and finished my dinner (even cold, still fucking amazing), and then I pulled her out to head homeward. I stopped by the Rabbit, tipping my hat at Meiko and Sezumi behind the bar.

"Ohaio!" my hopping Usagi greeted, waving a hand.

I chuckled. "What, are you a parrot now?"

Meiko had a hand on her hip. "Go away."

"Love you too, Usagi," I said, sitting at the bar. "Can you make an old man some kaiju nachos to go? Extra jalapenos."

Sezumi giggled. "Ja-la-pen-os."

"I will get it." Meiko moved to the kitchen, and Sezumi hopped to me.

"Y'all having fun without me?" I asked.

She nodded. "It's a good time."

"Excellent." I looked around the pub, and I spotted Mezumi reading her usual book, and sipping her usual tea. I slipped over there and waved to her as I leaned in opposite her.

She smiled, her book lowering. "[Good evening, McCree-san]."

[Just dropping in, checking on things.] I looked around, a smile on my lips. "[What do you think of the new Usagi?]"

Her eyes moved to Sezumi and her eyes crinkled. "[She has a lot of energy.]

[Right? I have a rabbit that actually hops.]

She laughed. "[That makes for more accurate advertising.]

I nodded. "[...Anyway. Just wanted to say hi.]

She bowed her head. "Arigatou, McCree-san."

[If I'll let you get back to your book. Just don't forget me now, okay?]"

She laughed. "[I do not think I could forget you, McCree-san.]

I wiggled my fingers at her again, then headed back to the bar. I felt her eyes follow me before they went back to her book. Sezumi was watching her out of the corner of her eye and came up to me as I sat back down.
"...I keep meaning to ask. Is she okay? She doesn't drink anything but tea."

"[So? We serve tea."

"[Yeah, but... It's a bar."

I turned to face the stool next to me and crooked a finger at her. She looked a little nervous, but she came around to sit next to me. I leaned closer to her, covering my mouth with a hand. "[Sezumi... Have you ever needed to hide from someone? Someone who knew everywhere you went? Followed you? Hurt you?"

Her eyes widened, and she shook her head.

"[Well... There are a lot of people out there that make life difficult for others. I've seen my share of people that needed a place to hide, and now I have a place where they can do that.]" I tapped at the bar. "[This is a safe place. If you ever see someone who looks like they're scared or want to hide, like they came in here to get away from someone else, I want you to help them. Alright?]

She nodded, her eye wanting to look, but also knowing it was rude and she wouldn't...

"[She wants tea, give her tea. She wants to sit there for six hours and read a book, let her read that book. If the bar gets crowded and we're out of tables, let her sit at the bar. But she picks the closed space because it's safer."

I stopped as a patron passed by coming out of the bathrooms, a grin on his face. I smirked to myself.

And then I looked back at her. "[There's also that other fellow. You remember from last night? Came in right before you went home."

She nodded, blinking. "He kept talking to you all night."

I nodded. "[He's hiding, too. There are a lot of them here, once you learn to look. Even Moko-san is hiding, in his own way."

She chewed on that, and Meiko came out with my nachos. "Usagi," she said. "Don't let him sweet talk you into working extra hours, you'll never leave."

I snorted, and she giggled. She looked to me for permission, if this conversation was over, and I subtly nodded away. She bounced up and started rounds. I turned to Meiko.

"What was that?" she asked me, sliding over the box.

"She was asking about why a woman who only drinks tea is reading in a bar."

"Mmm..."

"How long has she been here?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. 7? I usually just show her to her corner and watch her cup. I stopped paying attention to time."

"Did she order anything to eat?" She shook her head. "Alright. I'm going to head out of here. But in another... 20-30 minutes, send her a plate of quesadillas on the house."

"You got it, boss."
Unable to help myself, I broke into my chips to take a taste, and hummed.

"McCree-san! [I did not see you there!]

I turned about and grinned. "Hey, guys."

...To-go, yeah right. I got pulled into conversation, rarely not dancing around and working, and then the 10:00 rush came in. The chips got put aside with not even half of them munched on as I helped with the rush, and then 10 was 1.

"Good night, McCree-san!"

I waved. "Good night! Y'all come back now, y'hear?" They laughed, and so did I. I wiped my hands and sighed, checking the time.

"You sneaky cowboy," Meiko grumped. "You were supposed to be off today, and you still managed to work."

"Only a couple hours," I teased. "Not like you're the one paying me."

She snorted. "I'm not leaving until 3. Get over it."

I laughed. But I looked to my hopping bunny. "Usagi-chan! Happy hopping bunny..."

"Hai!" She bounced to the bar.

"You ready to go home?" I teased.

Her eyes widened, and she looked at the clock. And she relaxed. "Yeah! It is time."

I grimaced. "Greedy bunnies..."

"[This job pays well when you're here to collect tips...]
"[But not when it splits three ways.]"

"Hey, I bring you amazing tips, don't even play that way." In fact, I snatched at the tip jar and twirled on my boot. "When was the last time you dumped this?"

She thought about it. "[...8?]"

"[9.]" Sezumi said. "[You did it, like, 10 minutes before he got here. Because that guy with the big tip was here, and then I made a Scorpion shot round of 4 and had just come back to ask you if I did it right when he came in.]

"Wow. [You got a good memory, bunny."

She shrugged.

"Well, that means all of this is mine. I'm taking it home." I made to hide the pickle jar under my shirt, and both Usagis protested, rushing me at once.

I was laughing, pulling it back out, when someone slipped into the bar. I didn't hear them, but I saw them.

And my heart dropped.
"Hey, you," I called.

"Hey." Hanzo Shimada tilted his head to one side. "What time you off, cowboy?"

"NOW!" Meiko protested, snatching the jar from me. "No tips for you!" Sezumi giggled, chasing after her.

I gave a half of a chuckle... But I looked back to him. "I'm actually off right now. But... you know. Watching after these two."

He smiled, fond, leaning against a post. "Yes, I imagine."

I swallowed hard. Why did his voice sound so lovely? "You want a drink?"

"Sure." He came up to the bar, and I met him there, watching the girls reaching into the jar to get all the coins out of the bottom.

I tore back to him, but his eyes were only for me. "You, ah... You know what you want?"

He smiled even bigger, that goofy smile I just wanted to slap/kiss off of him, and it made my heart clench. His eyes made a point of looking me up and down. "Well, you look like a tall drink of water."

I scoffed. "Water? I'm all whiskey, baby. Barrel aged and high enough proof for a Molotov cocktail."

And that low, throaty chuckle that didn't escape the stretch of his smile, resting on his palm. "A whiskey sounds nice."

"Shot or drink?"

His eyebrows wiggled at me. "How long will you be?"

I swallowed the lump in my throat, feeling my heart race. I looked over to the girls. "Hey! You two about finished?"

"We are counting!" Sezumi insisted, spinning on her heel, pointing a finger at me. Then she giggled, spinning back around.

I shook my head and reached for a shot, pouring it. Then I had a wicked little idea... I held it up, and he reached for it.

"Kanpai." And then I tossed it back.

For a moment, his jaw dropped at my audacity and then his eyes got evil, and his lips twisted. "Oh, you should not have done that."

"Oh, yeah? Whatcha gonna do about it?" I refilled the same glass and handed it to him.

His eyes were like dark thunderclouds. "Things I will not speak here." He tossed it back and dropped it on the bar. I watched him seethe over it, tilting his head to one side, and then lick his lips... slow enough to be more than just tasting the whiskey on his lips.

I know I smiled. A lazy, drunk, stupid-looking thing. Which of course is when the girls came back.

"Okay, McCree-san!" Sezumi said, dancing in place. "We figured it out!"
"Alright, hit me with it."

"If we split it in half, it's..." And then she saw Hanzo watching... well, me. He was staring at me, like a crocodile who had something in his sights, waiting for me to get within striking distance. She shuffled closer and fanned out the bills. "It's this many."

"Nice," I said. I could do the math. I took the cash.

"Do not take all of it!" she hissed, and Sezumi complained as well.

I laughed. "I'm not gonna take all of it, you hush." I counted out myself some money, well under a third of the share, but a little something to keep in my back pocket after the spending I'd done. I then split the rest of it down the middle, making sure both of them got a fair amount of big and small bills each. "Here. Carrots for my Usagis."

"Those nice carrots," said Sezumi with a grin. She gave me a hug and I hugged her back, chuckling.

"Alright." I saw another patron come in. "Howdy! We'll be right with you."

"I got it!" Sezumi bounced off.

I popped open the till while Meiko took Hanzo's shot and put that in the sink.

"[Are you going to comp that?]" she muttered to me.

"Nope. I'm gonna pay for it."

Her eyebrows went up. "Really?"

"Really," I laughed. I pulled out the drawer and gathered the wild amount of tips for a weekday, and made a stack I could organize. I replaced the till, and rang up two shots of whiskey and even my nachos, for good measure and paid for them out of the tips in my back pocket. Meiko watched me - I could feel her eyes - until Sezumi came back with the table's order, and they got to work. I leaned against the counter, flipping and facing them, then sorting by value.

"That's pretty sexy," Hanzo purred. I looked up at him. "Leaning on a bar... Hands full of money."

I smirk. "Do you need another drink?"

"Mm. How long will you be?"

"Not much longer," I promised. Bills ordered, I counted them out under my breath. I split them in half, and stuffed half in my other pocket. I took a couple bills from the set and dropped them back in the jar. "Usagi-ko," I called.

"Hai?" She looked to me, and I held up the cash. And while she was watching, I put it back under the drawer. "Hai."

"She's very chattersome," I told Hanzo, looking at her sideways. "Loquacious, even. Can't shut her up most days."

"Hai. [I talk more than him,]" she said, very dry with the sarcasm.

I chuckled, and looked to him. "You want anything from the kitchen?"
He shook his head, eyes on me. I felt like he was trying to devour me with his eyes.

I swallowed and looked about, trying to get my head back together. "Meiko. If I walk out right now, what am I forgetting?"

She thumbed the fridge. "Your half-eaten, soggy monster nachos."

"Right..." I moved to her and muttered in her ear. "Have I mentioned you're my favorite?"

She snorted. "Really? Why don't I believe you?"

"It's true..." I said, reaching for those nachos.

"Maybe next time you wear a real shirt to work."

I scoffed, stepping out from behind the bar. Hanzo stood to go with me. "What's that supposed to mean?"

She raised her eyebrows at me, and even pointed at Hanzo with her eyes. I raised a brow in question. She rolled her eyes. "Good night, cowboy. You are not opening tomorrow."

"Don't tell me what to do," I teased.

"Rufio-san says he's been trying to be opener for weeks. You do not let him."

"Moko-san will throw a fit."

"And? He is not in charge here. He survived today just fine."

I laughed, looking to Hanzo. "No, see, cos Meiko's in charge now. See this?"

His eyes were looking, alright. But not at her. "Mm-hmm."

"Good night, McCree-san..."

I shook my head as I pulled open the door for him, and he stepped out. It was a bit chilly out now. I shivered. "Speaking of real shirts. Chilly out here."

"So I see," he teased. And then the bastard tweaked me.

"Hey, now," I said, purring.

He looked up at me, and I looked down at him. I leaned forward and he met me, lips touching whiskey-stained lips. His tongue slipped inside, and I felt my breath catch. When we broke, he purred in his throat, and damn it, this man did bad things to me.

"...This is the part where you tell me this is something you do not do often," he teased.

"No, I don't take patrons home from my bar," I said. "I don't know who those people are. That's not my bar. I'm not in charge, didn't you hear? Meiko is!"

And he chuckled, fingers teasing at my belt loops, and he tugged. I obliged, moving closer. Another kiss, this one a little more hungry... And he was practically on fire.

"...She is right, though," he hissed. "You should wear a real shirt tomorrow."

"Pfft. Real shirt. What does that even mean? Y'all got somethin' against the King?" I asked,
gesturing to the black and white Elvis cover I wore.

And he smirked. His eyes were at the collar, as his finger touched the flesh of my shoulder.

...And as his fingers rolled over the pricked flesh of a welt, my face dropped in horror.

"Oh, shit." His hand lingered down my chest, palm teasing over another peak, as I touched my skin, finding it myself. "Ah, hell. And I was wearing this all damned day."

He snickered. "What was it you said? 'Do not tell them where you got it from?'"

"Oh, please. With the way you're staring at me? She knows."

And his smile vanished, something cold and jealous taking its place. "Good." And his hand slid up, fingers wrapping around my throat, and I forgot what I was saying as I melted into his touch, leaning down for another kiss...

...Which he pulled off short, and I swear he hissed. "Enough. We must leave before I take you here and now."

I chuckled. "Well, alright..." He stalked in the direction of my truck, and I... looked around for the Cadillac he had promised. "...Hey, Hanzo?"

He turned to me. "...Where's your car?"

He looked away. "I... do not have one. At the moment." He looked to me. "Is that a problem?"

Damn. I had been hoping for a license plate. "No, just... curious."

He nodded to the truck. "Shall we?"

"Yeah, sure, of course."

And as I walked to the truck, a growing distraction in my lap and cold nachos in one hand, I wondered how the hell you break it to your new lover that you and his baby brother are plotting to kill him. How exactly does one slip that into a conversation?

Chapter End Notes

...If you haven't found the Overwatch "collaboration" video to PSY's "Daddy" song, it is pure earworm and eye candy. Because I don't know what else to put for this chapter summary, but I've been ruined by this video. McCree was my favorite, but that Soldier at the end was just hilarious.

IF YOU LIKE MY CRAZY SHENANIGANS (it's fanfiction, it's the only place I don't take myself too seriously or I'll selfimplode) you can find me elsewhere online as @SmutWithPlot or @LoonyMoonyProductions.
Talk

Chapter Summary

In which Jesse musters up the courage to do something brave, but stupid. And naturally, it blows up in his face.

Chapter Notes

Boba tea! It is so tasty. Also, partly inspired by a wonderful "Hanzo Main" account I've friended on Facebook who is just... hilarious. His profile pic for a while was an "I don't give a shit" Hanzo with shades sipping on a boba, so I had to put it in the story. And, shameless Pokemon joke. I'm... actually really sorry for that one, but he wouldn't let me take it out after it was there. Said it was his fight song, and Genji just rolled his eyes at him.
The gun running bit is a DIRECT Sons of Anarchy reference, and I am not sorry. I have an album of twangy covers from the show on my #McHanzo playlist, and it makes me all kinds of gooey. Especially Katey's songs, /damn/ she can sing.
I love the comments, you guys. You have no idea how much they keep me going in trying times like these. If you like me (you really like me!!!) you can find a bunch of other stuff I'm doing all over the internets as @LoonyMoonyProductions or @SmutWithPlot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I unlocked the truck and climbed on in, Hanzo doing the same opposite me. I tucked my food in the back seat, my eyes resting on the black case that held my Peacekeeper (what kind of peace did it keep, though, really?) and I turned back around, clearing my throat. I heard him click in next to me, and I started the car, setting it into neutral.

"I be honest, I didn't expect you back so soon," I said gently. I watched the traffic on the street, hand on the clutch, foot on the brake.

"Nor did I," he admitted.

"Musta been good, huh?" I teased.

That quiet sniff of a laugh. "It was, yes." His eyes glinted at me in the dark, black sapphires.

"Come back for more, then?" I'd had my share of this-fuck-was-amazing relationships. They were their own kind of satisfying, and heartbreaking, too.

He shrugged. "I do not expect..." He hesitated as I let go of the brake and leaned over to watch where I was going, my hand on the shoulder of his chair. His eyes watched it like I was a bear trap, waiting for him. He started again. "I did not expect... that. To happen."

I snorted. "When you come in, pretty like you are, droppin' all kinda hints? I almost don't believe
you." I spin the wheel and stick it in first, and we're going. I look at him sideways with a smile. He is looking at me like I am speaking... Well. Something other than English or Japanese. "What?"

He shook his head. "You are strange man," he said.

*That's what Genji says,* I thought, working my jaw. I kept my eye on the road. "You mean to tell me you waltzed into my bar at 1a, and you did not do so with the express intent of taking the barman home?" I glance at him with a cocked brow, and he has a shy smile. Hell, he might even be blushing. It's hard to tell in the dark.

"I meant to tease. You make it fun. And easy. What happened... I was pleasantly surprised."

I chuckle. "At least it was a pleasant surprise."

"And if it happens again... I will be more surprised."

I laughed. "You're sweet."

And when I glance at him, he has an almost pained desperation to his expression, arms hugging his jacket tight. And I realize this boy has probably never been called 'sweet', or anything like it, in his entire life.

"Alright then. What did you expect?"

He shrugged. "I flirt. You say, 'Thanks, but...' And send me on my way with a cab. Like you would anyone else. But... I would go home with a smile."

...I had thought of it. "That would have been enough for you?"

"Like I said... You make it easy."

I glanced over, and he is looking out the window, lost in his own thoughts. It wasn't hard to do the math - I had come from a background like that. Not the same, but similar enough. There were a lot of expectations. Gang loyalty had to be proven, time and again. Strength had to be displayed and tested, and more importantly, it established your place in the pecking order. I could only imagine how that would be amplified when you were Yakuza royalty. All the finest tutors to kick the shit out of you if you weren't the very best that no one ever was.

...I remembered being given unpleasant tasks, like taking out an ex-fellow operative in Blackwatch who had gone rogue, or put down a pig who wasn't letting the gang get away with things they felt they ought to get away with. I had kicked the shit out of someone to punish someone else, and a few of the souls on my invisible record were people that had been affiliated with the gang and fallen from grace.

But none of them had ever been my brother.

"...Well. I'm awful flattered." I checked the lane and made for a left turn, checking both ways and hugging the corner.

He looked up, confused. "Where are we going?"

"Somewhere to sit and talk," I answered. I didn't know what I was going to talk about, and if I wasn't going to fuck this up royally, but I was going to try. "That alright with you?"

He looked nervous with my answer, hugging his jacket to him. He just nodded.
About two blocks away, I pulled up to a boba cafe that I knew from experience would stay open until 4a to cater to the bar crowd (like me). They had teas and slushees and creams and ices and, most importantly, coffee. I pulled into a spot a little away from the door, and he eyed the place with weariness.

"Do you know what you like, or do you want to come in?" I always offered a choice to my girls. If they wanted to hide, they could hide, I would never force them. I've found it best to avoid confrontation when possible. Touched my protective streak to do that, too. But if they wanted to go out and take the world, by gum, I wouldn't take that from them, either. And I gauged a lot from people by how they answered those sorts of questions.

He curled in on himself. "I like... matcha green tea." Shy smile. "Extra bubbles."

I smiled, shaking my head, popping open the door. "You are absolutely adorable." I glanced over to watch him shine with that stupid grin. I hopped down and turned back to you. "I'm gonna slap that shit-eating grin off your face."

He blinked at me in surprise. I slammed the door and tucked my hat low, watching him out of the corner of my eye. He had a smug smirk on his lips, and I liked leaving him like that.

...You make it easy.

The bell rang as I stepped in. I joined the line behind a girl debating on a fruit flavor and hooked my thumbs in my belt loops. I considered the man sitting in my truck... And I realized he was something akin to Jasmine in Aladdin, or that bit about the Prince and the Pauper. He was trying to run away from something that he couldn't, a sworn duty he had been given without choice or option at birth. Now, I knew Genji. Him and me and Reyes got on so well because none of us are particularly partial to following the rules. In fact, we liked to break the rules, just to keep them guessing. They expect us to behave one way, so we would flip it on its head and use that assumption against them. Genji was the kind of guy who switched won chess pieces with stronger ones on the board. He didn't move them because that was typical. But he would swap that rook out with a pawn while you were playing with your queen. Subtle, but subversive. You knew something had been done, but it was hard to remember the detail that had changed.

I tried to pair that with the man I was getting to know. Crafty, mischievous. Wary. Every move is calculated. He doesn't expect compliments and takes them like a freshman virgin. I remembered Genji finding me grating when we first met, and we got into a fight not too far into it when he demanded I stopped being so ridiculous and mocking him. It took time for him to realize that it was just part of who I was, that I said shit like that to everyone. Reyes would poke me, call me 'chulo', and bounce right back with it, if sometimes with a biting sarcasm. But Hanzo wasn't forced to live and work with me. He came of his own accord. He sought out the foreign, the strange, the abnormal. He wanted an escape, something that was everything his life was not. He found a quirky bar with a handsome cowboy that flirted indiscriminately with all kinds of people and made him feel special and desired, but also safe and without expectations. Even if he thought my hospitality was just a ruse, a ploy, a trick... And he was fully expecting it was a trick, I could tell. He was waiting for me to turn on him. Much as he wanted to trust me, if I said the wrong thing, he would get nervous. Like he was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

He didn't mind if I was ridiculous or insincere with my affections. He didn't mind eating candy or pink drinks, for the temporary thrill and indulgence of it. He just didn't want anyone else to know about it, and that was probably for the best, for his own reputation. I knew Genji's competitive streak, and I couldn't see him handling his big brother, who is supposed to be even tougher and smarter and faster than he is, to be doing something so ridiculous as sipping a Pink Passion and
flirting his ass off with a perfect stranger.

Especially another man. Legacies needed to be carried on. When you were the firstborn and the only remaining son, that had a list of limitations on your romantic life, too.

"[Hello. Welcome. What can I get for you?]


I paid for the drinks and pocketed my receipt. I moved to the window to look out at the truck. He was lying with his head against the headrest, watching me. His face was still... maybe even tired. But when I smiled at him, he smiled, too.

...Hanzo was just hiding from the world in the warm embrace of a perfect stranger. He didn't expect me to be anything but a fun gimmick, and one he enjoyed. Like extra pearls in his boba tea. A private indulgence. Anything I did above and beyond was a kindness he'd never known. And I knew from experience that I could be addicting to certain types of people. Had gotten me in some bad relationships in the past. Not 'your brother and I are plotting your murder' bad, but...

I had mastered the two oldest occupations in the world. They were occupations for good reason.

My number was called and I collected the drinks. I carried it out to the truck, set them on the roof, opened the door. He was waiting for me, and I handed him his drink first.

"Arigatou," he said gently.

"Don't thank me yet," I said. He tensed, and I reached over to put the coffee in my spot and climbed back in.

"...What does that mean?"

"We still have to talk." I buckled, and... He looked scared. "Come on. Buckle up, baby."

The endearment tweaked at his lips and he put his drink in the other cup holder. I turned on the truck, but I waited for him to be buckled before I started to move. We didn't speak, even when I pulled into the parking lot of a closed store, and then down the alley to park in the back of it.

I've taken people out to be shot, and that's the kind of look I usually get. A quiet panic that they fiercely keep inside, eyeing you with puppy dog eyes, begging you to find your humanity and not do it, and also wondering how they could be so betrayed.

"Don't look at me like that," I said. "I just bought you boba. I'm serious, we're gonna talk." I sipped my coffee and looked to him.

He eyed me like I was a fat tiger, ready to jump him. But he reached for his boba, stabbing the big, silly straw in and sipping.

It was a long while, but I could be patient.

"...What are we talking about?" he asked.

"As I said before, I don't make a habit of takin' people home from my bar." I look at him. "Be honest, first night I met you, I didn't put two and two together. But I figure you like the anonymity of a stranger. Correct me if I'm wrong."

He chewed on that... and a pearl. "...You are not wrong."
"I am... from a similar background myself. As you." He frowned at me. "I mean... I'm not tatted. Someone snatched me out of that mess when I was still too young for ink, so I don't wear it on my skin, but it's still burned into my soul."

His eyes tried to piece together my words. "...I do not understand."

I tried to rephrase. "I don't know if they're still doin' it, but um... Your clan used to have connections with an American biker gang called the Deadlocks. We, uh... Ran guns and drugs into the States for ya."

Comprehension, and surprise. "You worked for us?"

"Not directly." I sipped my coffee. "But the gang did. I was just a punk kid, I didn't get to meet anyone important. Not like you." I took off my hat and set it on the dashboard, running cool metal fingers through my hair. "I just knew we got shit from overseas, and every now and again we would do a charity run to California that was always a cover for drug running or guns." I gave him a tight smile. "I remember thinkin' I was hot shit for having illegal gun parts wrapped in my kit on the back of my not-so-shiny or impressive hog." I took a sip, thinking about how stupid and impressionable I was. "If we'd been caught I would have spent a couple decades behind bars, I'm sure. Even at 16."

I looked at him, and he was quietly chewing.

I took a breath. "...I'm just sayin', I kinda know where you're coming from."

"And where am I coming from?" he asked. His voice was cruel and had a waver to it from hidden emotion. His eyes were unkind.

Genji had lashed out, too. "Gang life is never easy. Lot of pressure to perform. And unbearable consequences if you don't. And shit, I was just a kid. I wasn't their prince." I sipped and watched him crumple a little.

"I never asked to be prince," he whispered.

"No one ever does," I say, just as soft.

His eyes look to me, and they're wet, waiting to drop. He is searching me, trying to find out if I am an assassin sent to finish him, or if I am truly being a friend.

He wants to trust me, but he expects me to betray him.

"What do you want with me?" he asked, looking away from me.

"The truth," I said gently. "I need to know your side of the story."

His eyes flicker about, confused. "I... am Hanzo Shimada. Master of the Clan." He looks to me. "What side of the story do you need?"

I brace myself. "What happened with Genji?"

He turned on me, face growing red with rage. "How do you know that name?"

"Just answer the question--"

"HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT NAME?" he demanded again.
I felt small, his power and anger and presence taking up the whole truck, but I stood my ground.

I wasn't going to kill anybody or do anything until I had all the intel I could get. I had learned the hard way that was the only way to make sure you weren't getting conned or cheated or played. I had worked with Reyes long enough to know to never trust a client. Especially when vengeance was a motive.

"Please believe me that it is way easier for me to not tell you," I said. Just as gentle. "I don't want to hurt you."

And yet, he seemed to almost flinch, like I'd slapped him. I wouldn't say he cowed, but he took it down a notch. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, I'm gonna hurt you when I tell you that answer. And how I tell it to you will depend on how you answer my question. I'm really doing this. I kept my eyes on the wall of the building in front of me. If things went sour, I told myself Meiko could take good care of the bar and Mezumi and Elvis. It would probably look like a deal gone bad, a Yakuza killing swept under the rug. I didn't want to have to shoot him myself, Genji would never be able to live with himself, and yet I knew the Peacekeeper was under my seat if I truly had need of it.

Something in him clutched at the door of my truck, and I wondered if he was going to get out and leave me. If he did, I would probably never see him in the Rabbit again, but when Genji and I came for him, the hurt in his eyes would haunt me forever. But he didn't and turned back to me.

"You say you did not know me... Yet you know that name." He looked down. "I do not understand."

"There are a lot of Japanese people in this country," I said with a nervous laugh. "I get your names mixed up. More so because I'm not from around here. Hanzo Shimada was just another name to me. I had to be told who you were. And I put the rest together after."

"So... you knew of me... But not... me." His eyes were hard. "When did you know?"

I caught myself before I answered. That was a trap. "Know which?"

This was like playing chess. It was nerve-wracking. I was decent, better than most people, but certainly not the best. I was always the crazy fool who went in guns blazing to save the day, I wasn't the master tactician. I tended to just follow orders. Or... tweak them a bit. But I could see the misstep that could be made if I answered the way I had intended. That kinda wordplay came from years of therapy. And avoiding therapy. And Reyes.

He scoffed. "How do you mean, 'know which'? Know who I was!"

"Well..." I sipped my coffee, and it was almost gone... Damn. "I didn't know who you were at all, first time." I looked at him, so he could see the sincerity in my eyes. "One of my Usagi told me who you were. That you were Yakuza, and a boss's kid. I didn't know you were the boss's kid." I worked my jaw, looking down at my cup. "I didn't know you were Genji's brother until... After." I looked to him again, and my heart broke. "After you left in the morning."

He shook his head. "How can you know that name?"

"You won't like the answer," I said again. "Hell, you might hurt me for it." I fought the hesitation to sip. "But before I tell you that, I need to know your side of the story."

He laughed. It wasn't a pleasant sound, but a broken, desperate, whine of a sound and he shook his
head, eyes shining with tears. "[Your side of the story, he says,]" he muttered to himself. "I am supposed to tell you, a stranger, 'my side of the story'--" He used finger quotes "--about one of the worst days in my entire life, like we are discussing the score on a baseball game, ah?" His smile was unkind and cruel. I had the decency to be ashamed. "Where is all that, 'Shimada deserves better' now, ah?"

And I chuckled, too, a growl of a sound. And I sighed, though it came out more a hiss. "Hanzo-san, you have no idea how much I am trying to give you a chance right now. For Chrissake, you were naked in my bed two nights ago. For some people, that means something."

I was trying not to be hurt, but that didn't mean there wasn't pain. I knew the panic, the paranoia, the feeling of betrayal. I knew where he was coming from, and I expected it, but that didn't mean it didn't sting.

"You just did that so you could 'fuck a Shimada',' he answered with a growl.

"No, I 'did that' because, damn it, you were cute and horny and drunk and you actually stayed when I was a sleep-deprived louse at 3 in the morning," I growled back. "Lots of people flirt with their bartenders. But when I say 'last call', they get up and leave. You stayed. And you were drunk, I wasn't gonna let you drive home. But you're also a Shimada, and..." I trailed off. "Damn it, I owe you lot. You can't know it, but I do. So I was going to take you home and let you sleep it off and leave you a note or something when I left four hours later to go to work."

He stared at me. I looked at him, and then I looked away. "...But damn it, I came in and you were just... Lookin' so shy. So hopeful. So expectant. And damn it, you looked so tasty I couldn't help myself." I laughed. "No, I take it back. I asked you. Three times! To make damned sure I wasn't doin' something stupid." I nodded. "You told me--"

"I am not that drunk',' he finished.

I nodded. "You sure did. And damn it, I went to work like a fucking zombie, four days straight working 15 plus hour shifts and not enough sleep, and I got called in on my night off to sleep, and then you showed up just before closing. So damn it, yeah. I took something nice for myself, and I was kickin' myself the whole damn time. And I was grumpy and growly and you kept on." I shook my head. "Fuck it, you deserved everything I did to you." I looked at him, and he was staring out the window ahead of us. "And I happily took what you did to me. I can't remember the last time I had love bites to worry about, and you did that."

His lips twisted into a hint of his dark smile. "...I was just going to get a drink and say hi. Then I saw that thing on your neck." He turned to look at it, and I gave a shy smile. "...It made me crazy."

I nodded, tapping my fingers on the wheel. "And damn it, I like you." I sighed. "So I need to know. Before this goes any further... Before I get so tied up in you I can't think straight." I took a deep breath. "I gotta know what happened with you and Genji."

His face seems to... crack. "I do not understand how you know that name," he whispered, pained.

"I'll tell ya. Just please don't kill me."

Our eyes locked, and I swallowed hard, my heart breaking at his pain.

His lips parted... "What do you know?"

"Well. He's your brother. Younger, I'd guess. Since I was told you were the firstborn--"
"He is."

*Shit.* I watched his eyes rattle, and his face went pale. A hand went to his lips.

"*Fuck.* I pressed my fist to my lips.

"You said... 'he is'. That is not me misinterpreting. That is what you said." He pointed a finger at me. "Instead of 'was'. You did that. And then you cursed."

I let out a breath through my nose, eyes squeezed shut. "Please don't kill me."

"I will kill you if you do not *tell* me. You said 'is'! What, is he... Alive? Somewhere? How is this possible? How do you know this? Who the hell are you?"

"Heh... That went easier than I thought it would," I muttered, heavy on the sarcasm.

"Easier, nothing! You will answer me." He turned in his seat, sitting on his legs.

"I can't believe we're having this conversation..." I said, my voice a high whine. "I was hopin' it would go the other way around..." I tugged at my hair. *He's gonna kill me...* I'm not sure which of them I mean.

"Other way around?! You speak in riddles!" He slapped at me, an open hand on my shoulder. "Speak to me plain!"

"Hanzo, please... What I'm gonna say ain't easy. And... you won't like it. You won't believe me..."

"You know him, don't you?" he said, and damn it all, those tears were finally falling. "You know him, and you came here because of him. For me. Didn't you?" He launched himself at me. "DIDN'T YOU?!"

"Jesus, Hanz--" I scrambled for the door and threw myself out, his hands going for my throat. I spun back around, panting, eyes wide like a wild animal, and he looked much the same, sprawled over the seat, claws reaching out for me.

"[I'LL KILL YOU!]" he roared. "[I'LL KILL YOU FIRST! HOW DARE YOU LIE TO ME!!]"

"Now, Hanz--"

"NO!" He slammed the door on me and sat up in my seat, and fiddled with the keys.

"Hanzo, please--"

"You stay away from me!" he roared, stabbing a finger my direction. Sputtering to himself, I heard the pained groan of the gears as he shifted it into reverse.

"Oh, shit--" I ran, and he barreled past me, rocks kicking up under the tires. Another groan of the gears as he turned, following the alley, and daggom, the damned bastard drove off in my truck.

And... I realized with horror, my heart dropping like a stone into my gut. ...He had my gun.
...Holy crap, what a chapter ending. Even -I'm- a bit gobsmacked about it.

And for the occupations reference: It's an old joke among clowns, that 'clowning is the second oldest occupation in human history'. When someone asks what the first one is, you hint that 'we both make people happy'.
Shot

Chapter Summary

Dangerous, uncomfortable conversation, take 2! McCree, your gun is in the frame.

Chapter Notes

I realized HE HAS THE HAT TOO. That was fun.

I felt all kind of exposed.

There I was, middle of the night, fists in my pockets and shivering, trying to walk the streets of Tokyo with a semblance of dignity. I had no hat, no truck, no gun, and no jacket. My heart was all twisted up in knots, and I wanted to cry, I wanted to scream, I wanted to hide, but I sure as hell didn't want any creeping monsters of the night to find me in the middle of a foreign town far from home.

My best chance was to get back to the Rabbit before Meiko left. I tried to focus on that, my long legs moving me quick, the swish of my denim, crunch of my boots, and dancing of spurs ringing out in the dark like a sonar ping for anyone that wanted to come and get me.

He took my gun... I thought, feeling ill. And he took my hat.

I mean, the hat could be replaced, but I always felt a little naked without it. But the gun...

Growing up in my neck of the woods, there were two kinds of people. Folks who ran the gang and folks who were run over by the gang. My dad bought me a bee bee gun when I was twelve, probably to try and get me off the couch watching old movies all day, and maybe do something with my life besides sit and scowl all the time. My mother was enterprising and desperate - why a woman with those kinds of smarts ended up with a louse like him, I still don't know. Maybe it was just a good idea at the time, and then I happened. Coupled with the shit economy of the starving remains of a silver mining town, and maybe she just got stuck.

Lot of people got stuck out in the desert. Like moths drawn to the flame, then slowly roasted alive.

"Damn, boy," she said once, come out to fuss at me again for being outside all evening after school, shooting. I had started collecting pellet-sized rocks to use instead of bee bees when I'd had trouble finding them after. First time she'd actually seen me shoot, rocks spitting all over the place, ricocheting off my target, a crudely drawn sketch of The Bad tied to my least favorite teddy bear.
"You're a damn good shot."

I smiled. "Thanks, mama."

She leaned in the doorway, crossing her arms, eyes gauging me... "You stay that good, maybe we get you a real one, and you can go javelina huntin' for supper."
I laughed, thinking she was joking at the time. I was a kid, I didn't see the desperation in her eyes. "Desert pork chops, right?"

"That's right." She looked out over the ruined chain-link fence that didn't do much to keep out the lizards and rattlers... "Hell, you go fetch me a cat, we'll skin it up and barbecue it, old west style. Wouldn't that be crazy?"

I nodded. "That would definitely be crazy," I said, hugging my gun to my chest.

"You do that, you be sure you do it in Desert Springs," she added. "Don't do it our neighborhood. Never hunt in the same spot for too long, the cats will know you."

I thought she was awful funny. But the next time I saw a cat, I watched where he went. He looked at me, and strolled right on, not paying me any mind. It took me a week to get one, and I liked to think I was a hunter on the African safari, sniping lions. When I killed my first cat, I was beside myself, didn't know what to do with it. I found a burlap sack somewhere and brought it home.

I half-expected her to scream at me, that she was joking, but... she cried instead.

"My sweet boy..." she whispered. "You gonna save me, ain'cha?"

I blinked away tears, wiping them away with a knuckle. Get a grip on yourself, Jess... I had been raised in a world where power meant noise. The rumble of a bike, the crack of a gunshot, coyotes calling out their kills in the night. Angry words and not-so-empty threats. Mama singing in the kitchen as she did the dishes, filling her heart with a man that didn't come home drunk and angry. The warmth of laughter that cheered the soul and brought together strangers, despite their skins.

Both the ones on their bones and the ones on their backs.

I rounded the corner, and there was my Rabbit. She felt like a death trap, now. A compromise of security, a place so wholly and unabashedly my own. Everyone knew McCree-san here. I realized that this whole bar thing was a bad idea. The longer I stayed, the better business got, the better the chance someone would walk into that place with a bullet that had my name on it. How many times had I seen that in the movies, or done it myself? Some haggard old hero drinking away his sins in the corner of a bar that let him be, only for some fool to come to him, begging him to help. "I'm retired," he'd say. And then someone else would come in and threaten his life, shoot up the place, and then all he had was an ache for vengeance and a dying wish to answer.

Anytime I opened alone, I put myself at risk. And anyone that worked for me. All it took was someone waiting outside this bar at two-something in the morning and shoot my ass cold dead while I was taking out the trash. A part of me wished they would wait till I dumped it, but I'd known enough cowards to not trust it.

I banged on the front door, hoping I didn't miss her. "Meiko-san!" I called. "It's me! You still in there?"

I wait for a moment that feels like 90,000 of them. I pull out my keys and stick them in the lock.

...It's dark inside. "Meiko-san?" I shut the door behind me. I lock it. I pocket my keys, and switch on a light, blinking at the brightness, and look at the clock. It wasn't even 3a, yet she was gone.

"I know there's no way in hell you finished up that early," I growled. She was awful bad about doing only the needful, dishes and trash, and not stocking up too much, leaving the drawer for me. Which, I mean, the drawer was fair, but the stocking thing aggravated me. Sure enough, when I went behind the bar there were a number of bottles in need of switching out. "Child..." I didn't even
want to look in the fridges right now. I pulled out the bus schedule we kept on hand for inquiring minds and spent a good 10 minutes trying to find a route that went home. Last bus... 0237.

I glanced at the clock: 0243.

"...Well, hell." That's why she gypped on me. Her bus came too early to finish. I sighed, and grabbed the phone, hitting the speed dial and calling my ass a cab. I would have to start budgeting a cab for her or something.

I found myself making a drink, and caught myself as I put a splash of whisky in the glass.

"Now, hold on."

I looked down at the bottle of Johnnie black and set him back where he belonged. I rinsed out the glass and left it in the sink. I made myself a soda instead, strawberry and lime.

My stomach grumbled, and I realized he had my damn nachos, too.


I felt a little safer inside, but... Damn it all. I had just gone and pissed off a Yakuza. Left him everything I had but my wallet and the shirt off my back. Left my hat, my truck, my gun...

...My heart.

To say nothing of Geni's confidence. Not that Hanzo had any way of finding him - nor did I, for that matter - but this would not be easy to explain.

*I tried talking to him, and accidentally let slip that you're alive. He's on to us. Real sorry about that.* Sure. That would go over just as well as this did.

My drink hit the bottom, and I reached for the trash can. There was no bag in it.

"Jesus, Meiko..."

I popped it on the counter and found the bags. I replaced both and even did some restocking (at least she pulled out the chicken...) until the phone rang.

"Jack Rabbit, McCree speaking."

I was surprised to hear a breath on the other end. "I am coming." My blood went cold. "Hanzo?"

"I am coming. We need to talk."

I felt naked again, and my head moved about, looking for ghosts, even though I was still indoors. "Hanzo, I need to know you're not gonna come over here and shoot me, or I swear, I will show you what a jackrabbit looks like."

"You were right," he said, voice quavering. "There was no way to know this thing, and not be hurt. But... I need to know."

"Now, darlin', I--"
The phone beeped, another call coming through.

"Shit, hold on."

I beeped it over. "Hey, McCree. Cab is here."

"Yer a darlin'," I purred. "Say, you want a drink for the trouble? I know I don't usually call you folks so late."

He laughed. "From you? That would not be wise."

"No, not-- You know, I do sell other things. Orange juice and seltzer and sodas." Speaking of which, I tossed mine. "Mix the sodas myself, good sellers. Or I got cold brew coffee."

"...Okay, coffee I would like," he admitted.

"Swell. I'll make ya somethin' sweet."

"Alright, I'll be waiting."

I hit the button again. "Hanzo?"

I got a dial tone.

I hung up, feeling dread and the cold hand of fear going up my spine. I felt... Mildly better now that I had an alternative, and maybe a witness... But also just as likely collateral damage. It still troubled me. I made up two iced coffees, and claimed one for my own.

Quiet as it was, I could hear my truck pull up in the parking lot. I felt that tension tighten across my chest. I scribbled a note - two iced coffees and cab fare from the till and slipped it into the drawer. I stepped outside and locked the door. My truck was idling, but Hanzo wasn't in the driver's seat, probably moved back over to the passenger's side. I took a breath and moved to the cab.

"Mornin'," I said.

He laughed. "Not yet." He looked over at the truck and then to me.

"I, uh... Hmm. Having a bit of a domestic." Handed him the cup. "Be a doll and linger for me, will ya? I may need ya, but I'm not sure yet."

He nodded. "Sure."

"I mean, I'll pay you anyway for your trouble."

He smiled. "I appreciate that. And the coffee."

"Ah, you know I take care of you."

And then I braced myself and crunched over to the truck. I opened the door, and... yeah. He was in the passenger's seat. "Permission to come aboard?"

"Is your truck," he answered, voice wet.

I clambered in, and snatched at my hat, putting it back on. I put my cup down and reached behind the seat to be sure...
There she was, still locked and safe.

I let out a breath, head falling on the seat. "...Darlin', you 'bout gave me a heart attack." I looked at him sideways.

But he wasn't looking at me. He was looking at the suitcase. His eyes darted at me, and he moved, faster than you would believe, and I caught him, shoving him against the door again.

"Now, you hold on just a cotton pickin' minute!" I barked, hand out to him. "You do not know what that is, and this is my truck, so show a little fucking respect!"

His fists were clenched, ready to rise, ready to fight. "What is it?"

"It's a whole hell of trouble," I answered him. "And it's worth a lot more than you would imagine, so kindly don't touch."

His chest heaved, his eyes darting back to it, and then to me, and I think he might have been trembling.

"Now, you listen here," I said, voice low. "There is a cab right there who is happy with a fresh cup of coffee. If you can't do this sensible, you can get on with him and go the hell home. But you stay here, you need to do as I say and respect a man's fucking truck, you hear me?"

His eyes still darted to the mystery behind me, but he looked away. A tight nod.

"I come back here, that thing better be right where it is," I warned him. "And you better stay in yer damned seat and show some respect."

His eyes were angry slits, his lips twisting in rage, but he said nothing.

I growled to myself as I hopped down and went back to the cab, reaching in my pocket. I pulled out a bill and handed it to him. "I appreciate you. You have a good night, alright?"

"Yeah, sure. Thanks. Have a good night, McCree."

"Until next time."

I watched him drive off, friendly smiles and waving... And then he was off. My smile dropped into a scowl as I went back to my truck. Hanzo was still in the passenger seat, leaned as far away from me as he could be, arms crossed and staring out the window.

"Buckle up," I told him, doing the same.

He shifted in his seat to do so, and I pulled it out of park. Checked the road... and pulled out into the street.

*Where am I going now?* I asked myself. I had the thought that maybe just driving would be a good idea. Might have less physical altercations when we could both be in trouble should we run into something.

"...I told you that you weren't gonna like it," I said, voice curt. "Be mad at me if you want, but stealin' a man's truck and his hat and such just ain't polite." It sounded stupid and petty, but it hurt. A lot. "Especially after I've done nothing but try to be good to you."

He scoffed, but said nothing.
"I tried talkin' to you. Be sensible. Sort this out together." My eyes stayed on the road, the bright lights and fluorescent street markings... and glanced his way. "Mind you. I'm stuck doin' whatever I can when you actually show up. Remember that this isn't a very back-and-forth sort of relationship," I said, gesturing between us. "I work at a bar. You show up at the bar and expect me to just do as ya please--"

"I don't expect anything from you--"

"Yeah the hell right!" I glared at him. "Please! You can't tell me a guy like you ain't used to people droppin' to their knees to give him everything he wants. While little folk like me are expected to oblige him."

He scoffed. "Little folk. Please. Like you are weak."

"I got tough like this cos I had to," I said. "Place I'm from, we're all ants scramblin' around in the desert fighting over scraps of water. It's be bully or be bullied. I was a professional gunman before I could legally drive. And I drove a hog before I drove a truck. I had a government contract before I could legally buy porn, much less alcohol..."

I glanced over at him, and his eyes were wide, wary, his eyes going to the little black case behind me. He wasn't stupid, he was clever enough to put that together.

"...And yes, that's a gun," I said. "It is my personal piece, and I have gone through a lot of bullshit to keep it with me over the years. Last thing I need is some crazy Jap stealing my personal property just cos he heard something he didn't want to hear."

I leveled him with a glare, and to be fair, he looked a bit ill.

"You said... 'don't shoot me'. On the phone. I thought..."

"You thought I was making Yakuza assumptions."

"...Hai." He looked again at the case, then back to the road, fist on his cheek.

"...Nope. I assumed you would tear apart my car to see what else I was 'hiding' from you. You'd find the gun, continue your conspiracy theory that I'm here to kill you, and finish me off as a pre-emptive strike." I passed a park and considered it. "Would be neat and tidy, too. Me and my truck at the bar, just a robbery gone wrong, or maybe an un-compliant new business owner who didn't understand local politics put out of his misery by local Yakuza. Just another sad story of tourism gone wrong."

"You think I would do that?" he asked, voice barely a whisper.

"Hell, it's what I'd do," I answered. I decided to go for it and took the turn, aiming to go around the block. Maybe find another entrance. "Maybe it ends up in the news, maybe not. I end up in a body bag somewhere, unclaimed and forgotten. Just another statistic."

He shook his head. "I would not do that to you." His eyes looked to me, tears staining his cheeks. "I would not let you be forgotten."

I glanced at him, fingers fidgeting, and a lump in my throat. "Trust me. You'd be better off."

He let out a shaking breath. "...Gunman. So... Are you here to kill me?"

"Darlin', if I wanted you dead, you'd be dead," I answered honestly. "Not to brag, but I've had a few
opportunities now. I could have shot you outside my apartment, no one would have known who or what or why. I could have strangled you in your sleep. Offed you while we were alone in the bar..." I looked over at him, and there was a hand to his lips. "If that was the goal, I'd have done it already."

"Then what is the goal?"

"Right now?" I turned into a quiet road, a sign saying that the park was closed from dusk to dawn. "The goal is to talk."

He let out a soft, scared sound. "You keep taking me to places that are great to kill somebody."

"I take you to places we won't be seen or disturbed," I say, looking for parking. "Those two things are very similar, but not the same." I look at him sideways. "Sides, I'm pretty sure you could kill me just as easily as I could kill you. So don't go all actin' like I'm slippin' you date rape drugs on prom night."

I park us under a light, and then I kill the engine. It's quiet. You can hear the cicadas singing. Without the conversation, this would be a beautiful evening.

Morning. Whatever.

I unbuckled and sighed, taking a swig of my coffee... Sweet, wonderful coffee. "So I'm gonna ask you again. What happened with you and Genji?"

I let him take his time to answer, ever so slightly uncurling around himself. "We were... I was being groomed to head the Shimada Clan. Firstborn. Many responsibilities..."

"And Genji's not the type to follow rules."

He looked to me, pain in his eyes. "No. He was not." His eyes searched, which I was coming to learn was him thinking. "He was rebellious, even as a youth. Parties, holidays... Taking girls home to his bed."

I smirked. "Probably not the right kinds of girls, either."

"Of course not. But through it all, they kept trying to... fix him." I watched his face contort. "Finally, I was told to put an end to it. An end to his rebellion. The shame he brought to the clan." He pressed a hand to his temple. "Make him see reason or else..."

"Terminate," I finished. His eyes met mine. "I've had that order. Few times. But it was never my brother."

His eyes wandered. "...I tried to make him see reason. But... He was defiant. Confrontational. It came to blows, I..."

His voice cracked. I held out a hand to him. He stared at it, not sure what to do with it. But he covered it with one of his own. I stole his fingers, weaving them together, and I squeezed. "You don't have to go on any further." I whispered, thumb moving over his skin.

...Dangerous hands. Hands that could squeeze the life out of you... In good ways and bad. Hands that had sought to punish, not to kill... And yet, his brother fell. I wonder what had gone through his head in that moment, staring in horror at the fallen body of your brother, still from your own beatings, and not having the courage to touch him again, to verify his death. To just flee, enraged at your own cruelty and heartlessness.
He seemed to melt, a sigh escaping his lips as if the story had been a weight he'd been carrying for years. Which... I'm sure it was.

"...I do not understand," he said gently, eyes on our hands, my finger gently caressing him. "I tell you these things, and yet..."

I give him a sad smile. "I get where you're coming from," I said. "I do." I turn in my seat. "Hanzo... I swear. I didn't know you were Genji's brother. But... yes. That's why we're here."

He closed his eyes, chin going to his chest. He looked like he was going to be sick. "'We'," he echoed, voice thick.

I nodded. "We." I gave his knuckles a kiss, and when I looked up, his eyes were watching me.

"...And now?"

"And now..." I sighed. "I need to find a way to get you two to 'see reason'. You deserve to know each other. And you need forgiveness." His other hand was a fist at his lips as he turned away from me, and I could see tears slipping down his cheeks. "And perhaps just as importantly, he needs to forgive you. Or it's gonna eat him up inside."

"I do not deserve forgiveness," he whispered.

"Now, you stop that," I said, tugging at him. "Just cos you got a fucked up family don't make you less deserving of some peace and forgiveness as the next person."

His eyes looked to me, trying to figure out what I was on about.

"Yeah, you heard me. And damn it, I'm tired of every time I call you somethin' nice you look at me like I grew a third head. You ain't never had anything good in your life for you. Or you wouldn't be sittin' here with some crazy Gaijin in the middle of the night holdin' your hand like this."

His eyes moved to our joined hands... One metal, the other flesh. "And get a good eyeful, because you're gonna be seeing a lot of metal limbs from here on out."

He snorted, a quiet thing I wouldn't have heard otherwise. "You have other metal limbs? I remember only the one."

I try to bite back a smile, and his makes it harder. "...You think you're cute"

That quiet sniff of a laugh. "Only you think that, cowboy."

...I didn't have the heart to correct him. I looked out into the night, head tilted back. "...You still want to kill me?"

I glanced at him sideways, but he was looking at... I smirked. His eyes flicked up at me and then away, and I could see a trace of a blush. "No, cowboy. But I am..." He rubbed his fingers in his eyes, red and tired. "...I will have to think. It has also been a very long day for me."

I nod. "Do you want me to take you home?"

His eyes looked to me, and they begged. "To yours?"

I smiled, sad as it was. "We can do that."

His shy smile was enough to break your heart. And he nodded. "Hai."
I squeezed his fingers a last time and buckled, stealing a swig of coffee before I started the car back up. The drive home was quiet, my omnic hand resting on his knee when I didn't need it. His fingers would wrap around mine, and he clung to me like a drowning man in need of a savior.
Love Me Tender

Chapter Summary

A short-ish chapter. Sorry. But also not. I didn't want anything else to ruin this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was quiet. Not the same tense quiet, but a shared silence. A tired quiet. A we're-going-right-to-bed-when-we-get-home kind of quiet.

When we get there, he takes my coffee from my hands as I do the locks. I flip on the lights as we step in, and I drop my boots by the door. He does the same for his, but he leaves them straight and neat. I even see him straighten my boots. I smile, and I clean out the coffee pot. He comes behind me, just pressing himself against my back, loose arms wrapped around me. I drape my arm over his, pouring the water and setting the timer.

Love me tender, love me sweet, never let me go...

The words of the King echo in my mind, as I stay there, letting him hold me. I relax into him and he moves behind me. I tap my hand gently on him, and he lets go so I can turn and face him. His eyes are red, and tears are stained on his cheeks. I brush them from his skin, and he looks so... hollow. And tired.

"...I do appreciate you comin' to see me tonight," I say, gentle.

He tries to muscle up a smile, face tilting to me. I take the suggestion, giving him a kiss. It is slow... tired. Fragile.

Beautiful.

He makes my heart twist, and it hurts, and I deepen the kiss, tongue teasing, and he melts against me. One of my hands is at the nape of his neck, fingers teasing in his hair, the other gripping his hip, holding him close. His arms slide around me, doing the same, fingers trailing up and down the broad of my back, and it makes me shiver. We sway, and part, breaking for breath. I look into his eyes, dark and hungry, but also sad, and my hand squeezes the warmth of his neck.

"Let's go to bed, darlin','" I murmur. And I give him a kiss on the forehead.

His smile is so precious. So small and sweet, and so fleeting.

Love me tender, love me long, take me to your heart...

I move to my computer when we step into the room. I feel his eyes watching me, but I pull up Spotify and find a certain song, and make sure I add it to the collection for the bar's mix. Then I find it on YouTube... And wait for it to load.

"What are you doing?" he asked me, some part curious and some part impatient.
"Serenadin' you," I answer. I look over my shoulder with a smirk. He blushes. I wait for the gentle thrum of guitar to start, turning to him.

*Love me tender, love me dear, tell me you are mine...*

I touch him softly, warm hand sliding under his shirt and over his flesh. He is hesitant, listening... When the first line comes on, I see his face twist, and his grip changes.

It becomes a little more desperate. Needful. Not claws, but we move with hunger. Shirts are lost, and arms wrap around. When I undress him, he keeps hands on me, shoulders and dancing fingers. When he undresses me, it is careful, and our erections are forsaken for everything else.

*Love me tender, love me true, all my dreams fulfill...*

Even when the song is gone, it echoes around us, a quiet encouragement. We are slow, searching every inch, finding apologies that cannot be said, tender hands and sweet lips, and more kissing anywhere and everywhere. When we finally move to join, our bodies are weary with the day, but carrying on for this... love.

Love. Such a terrifying, beautiful, thrilling promise. So easily ruined, easily dashed. There's no way this can last long, and I know it, and now he knows it too, and we are taking the time to cherish it, to give it everything we have for as short a time as we have it. When I am inside him, we stay wrapped in each other, arms around and hands moving over skin. Kisses that last as long as we can allow them. We don't speak, but with soft sounds and gasps and groans and moans, ass squeezes that won't leave marks on your skin, but god, do they leave their scars on your soul and on your heart...

When I am finished, I move below to finish him, his fingers entangled in mine, or in my hair. It doesn't take much, but I make sure he is taken care of. When I crawl up beside him, he buries himself in my chest, and I just hold him.

I say nothing when he begins to quietly weep, because I do, too. We stay wrapped together like that until the sun is rising, the soft light of morning glowing through my blinds. I switch off my alarm clock and pull a blanket over us, and through it all, he doesn't untangle himself from me. I bless him with a kiss, my fingers threading through his hair, tickling at his shoulder blades. Eventually, he falls asleep, and my eyes droop, threatening to do the same.

I know tomorrow will be hard for both of us. And all the tomorrows to follow. It makes my heart squeeze, that I'm already saying 'us', but I know myself well enough to know there's not a damned thing I can do about it now.

...For my darling, I love you, and I always will.

Chapter End Notes

"Love Me Tender" by Elvis Presley. God damn, what a pretty song. Definitely #McHanzo First Dance at the Wedding kind of song.
Wild

Chapter Summary

Hanzo sees some of Jesse's... less-than-pretty sides. Some he is okay with. Others, not so much.

Chapter Notes

HAI GUYS!!! Well, boy, I'm just thrilled to tell ya! Today has been a rompin' good one. Stayed up late putting up the first chapter of "Satisfied" (I am NOT sorry for that! Chapter 2 was tasty, and Chapter 3 will be angsty AS FUUUUCK, like you know I do!), went to bed, got up (like raising the dead, man...) and dashed out the house two minutes late with unlaced Chucks and missed my bus. Turned around and went the other way to catch the next one, squeaked into my doc's office, like, two minutes before my appointment. In and out, presto change-o, grabbed some vinegar (I got a pack of chicken dethawing in the fridge that has CHICKEN ADOBO written all over it) and got home to do some proposals on Upwork, my humble attempts to become a professional freelance writer instead of a destitute madman who can't sleep and rations his ramen.

AND GUESS WHAT, YOU GUYS?! I GOT THE JOB! ...Well, I got -a- job. Pretty twisted stuff, too, I'm looking forward to it. I ALSO want to give a huge shout out to @maley_san on Instagram (and wherever else) who sent me FAN ART. LIKE, LEGITIMATE FAN ART, YOU GUYS!!! Like, you don't understand! I got fan art once for my crazy popular Mr. Gold RP on Twitter years ago from ONE OF THE PEOPLE I WAS WRITING WITH, and that was it. I have a drawing of Ozzy the Rat from Rats With Wings!, but I totally commissioned someone for it, because I'm sad and lame like that. THIS IS LEGIT FAN ART. I SWEAR TO YOU, I DON'T KNOW THIS PERSON. And damn it, it's PINK, TOO, which just tickles me... well, pink, really. Fit of giggles. Meds are wearing off! I had a half a liter of Coke for breakfast, so mania is a thing.

I'm just chuffed, you guys. Absolutely chuffed. If I can make enough ghostwriting to pay my bills, well, golly! I could sit at home and write all god damned day, and when I'm tired of working on that, I'll write something else, like this stuff, for you beautiful people, you.

And don't ask what it's about, I signed an NDA. Luv ya! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I woke to the beautiful fragrance of coffee... and the weight of another body on mine. Habit had my eyes opening, even though they should stay and sleep...

I watched him, the frown lines still pinched around his eyes, even as he slept. But other than that, he looked perfectly peaceful. A fist was caught in my blankets, twisted in probably some night anxiety or other. I contemplated if I should wake him or not...
I looked over at the clock, and it wasn't quite 9:30 yet. I let my fingers stroke through his hair, and put my head back, willing sleep...

xxx

...I woke again to gentle hands shaking me, and my eyes had a harder time opening this time. I blinked, bleary, the body gone. Instead, it was standing over me.

"McCree-san," said, gently, holding out a cup of coffee to me. "You overslept. Perhaps the alarm was not on..."

We both looked at the alarm, which read 10:37. I groaned, sitting up.

"Hanzo... I'm not opening. Someone else is." I rubbed my eyes with my fingers. "...But thank you."

He looked at the clock. "...Oh. It was not on for... a reason." His hands still held the mug, and damn it, the sheepishness on his face was fucking adorable.

"It's alright. You didn't know." I reached for the coffee, and he just... eurgh. That shy little smile. And he even bowed.

I patted the bed next to me. "Get your ass back in bed."

I realized he was wearing one of my shirts... Actually, the Elvis one I'd worn yesterday. I smirked as I sipped my coffee. "That looks ridiculous on you."

He looked down, the shirt too big on his frame, so he had to straighten it to not have a whole shoulder showing. Instead, it dipped down over his chest. It didn't help. "...I grabbed a shirt," he said, with that stupid smile of his coming on. "I was halfway to the kitchen when I realized I had the wrong one."

"'S alright," I said. "I like ridiculous."

He tilted his head at me, and let out that quiet little sniff of a laugh. Definitely addictive. Just the fact that no one else would hear it made it precious, and no matter how many times I heard it, it was still special. Stupid shit like that is why I fall in love so damned quick all the time.

I let myself drown in coffee for a long moment and finished it with a sigh of satisfaction. I tucked it on my dresser and lowered myself to my back again, tucking an arm behind my head and the other one reaching for him. His fingers found mine and they slid together like we'd been doing this for years.

"...Well, since you woke me up, what do we do now?" I asked. I imagined he would start in with the questions, and some pointless crusade to find his brother. I loathed having to tell him that apparently it was a Shimada trait to leave me in the dark and make me wait.

...But all he did was lie down next to me and rest his head on my shoulder and clutch our hands to his chest, as if it were just as precious to him.

God, why did he have to do that?

I sighed. "Alright. Then we sleep more. Blankets, boss?"

He laughed. "Boss?" But he got the blankets.

"...I'm only on my first cup of coffee," I answered. "Don't judge me."
He chuckled, and I could feel it through my skin. I wiggled my wrist until he let go, and I wrapped my arm around him. He hummed, and moved a little higher, lying over my chest. I saw him smile as my chest rose and fell with a deep breath.

...But I had questions. A million of them. What was the Clan like, if they would ask you to do that? How do you live with that? Do your parents know about your proclivity to men? Should I expect an assassin?

What's your favorite color? How do you like your eggs cooked in the morning? When's your birthday? How do you take your coffee?

But I knew the answer to that. He didn't like coffee. So that was... one.

His eyes opened, and he looked at me. And his eyes narrowed as if he disapproved of whatever expression was on my face.

I raised a brow in question.

He moved again, crawling over me and his nose teased at mine. I opened my lips to meet him for a kiss, but he drew away. I withdrew, frowning, and he smirked.

An evil, evil smirk. The one I'd seen at the bar.

He teased me again, and I waited... --then moved forward suddenly, and yet he still backed away, snickering.

I smiled. "Tease."

He scoffed. "What?" And then he moved over me, straddling me. Which made me very aware of the fact that he was clothed and I was not. That evil smirk on his face as he sat back and my eyes rolled in the back of my head at his proximity.

I was not awake. It was all... instinct. Instinct said to move my hips underneath him, and he looked down in surprise, like someone who was on an amusement park they'd thought was broken, only for it to start beneath them unexpectedly. He reached down and pinched my hip.

"Ah-ha-how," I complained. And I whined, hips stopping.

"You are extra strange without coffee," he noted.

I bucked, and he fell forward, catching himself over my chest.

"You ever rode a bull, Shimada-san?" I asked in a low growl.

He blushed. And shook his head.

"It's allll in the hips," I said, my hands reaching for his. I bucked again and he laughed, hands grasping at my shoulders, and it was a delicious sound. "Hips and the hands." I squeezed his hips. "You gotta have a good grip or he'll buck you off." This time he took the warning, hands staying on my shoulders as I bucked, and the laugh was low in his throat.

"...I am never giving you coffee again," he decided with that goofy smile of his.

"Them's fightin' words."

And instead of bucking, I sat up, still surprising him. My arms went around him, and he returned
the favor, arms going around my neck.

"...You are very strange," he said again, grinning.

When I spun and threw him to his back, he let out a cry of surprise. I growled, pulling those hips to mine and lowering myself over him. I took my lips to his skin and he squeaked when I started sucking at a spot high on his breast, where the skin was thin and sensitive. He cursed at me in a high-pitched Japanese, slapping at my shoulders with an open hand. I pulled away, tugging with my teeth and he let out another sound of complaint.

I reared, looming over him, and he quieted. I leaned up for that kiss, and I got it, his lips answering me, and I caught one with my teeth. He made a noise in his throat as I tugged on that too, leaning back until it slipped from my teeth. His eyes looked... incredulous. Like no one had ever had the nerve to manhandle him like that before.

Because they probably hadn't.

I smirked, and backed away.

"Hey!"

I swung to my feet, waiting a moment until I was steady before I turned back. "Yeah?"

His eyes swept over my body, lingering over my prominent member. To fuck with him more, I touched myself with a hand and stroked idly. His eyes went black. And then I started for the kitchen. I heard him scramble out of the bed to follow me, and I chuckled.

"[Why do you have to walk around the place naked like that?]] he protested. "[Hairy as a bear. People will think you are a wild animal and try to take you down.]]"

I snorted. "That's not something I haven't heard before." I reached into the fridge for something, and when I looked over my shoulder, he was staring. "Well?"

He joined me in the kitchen, shuffling his feet. I stood with a carton of orange juice and pointedly drank right from the carton. His eyes regarded me as if perhaps I was some strange, wild animal he'd never seen in its natural habitat before. I proffered him the carton, and he tilted his head at me in confusion.

"Alright, then." I capped it and put it back, shutting the door. I headed back to the bedroom, and I heard him doing this shuffle behind me.

"McCree-san is very strange," he said, as if to himself.

"There is a strange little man following me," I murmured, bemused, glancing over my shoulder again. I crawled into bed again and buried my nose in the pillow. "Mmm. I didn't need sleep anyway."

The strange little man crawled in next to me and I looked over at him as he grabbed the other pillow and did the same.

"McCree-san, if you live alone, why do you have two pillows?"

I grinned, laughing silently, shoulders shaking. "They came in a set." And then it escaped, muffled as it was. I turned on my side, and then so did he. So I rolled around to face the other way, and I heard him scoff. I laughed again.
"You!" he gruffed, and he threw his shoulders over my side so that I could see his face. I was grinning, and so was he.

"I'm gonna slap that stupid smile off your face," I warned him.

"You wouldn't dare," he said.

"You wanna try me?"

He backed away, on his knees, fists raised, but still grinning. "I fight back."

I grabbed one of the pillows and swung wide -- wide enough for him to protest and catch it, and I wrapped myself around the other way, squeezing him into a bear hug. "You fell for it!" He was a fit of giggles as I made a crashing airplane noise and smashed us back down on the bed. I moved to straddle him, and he pushed against my chest with his hands.

"Oh no! Kaiju!"

I sputtered in laughter at the ridiculous little voice he used, like a little child. "Yeah, I bet you didn't see this coming when you were watching your Godzilla movies as a kid. That the real monster was a hairy cowboy from America."

"It's not that great a plot twist," he admitted.

I fought against his hands until I caught them in mine, and we wove our fingers together. Then I was just over him, his hips between my legs, and he was swaying ever so lightly beneath me...

"All I have to do is kick, you know," he said.

"And I am trying to trust that you won't," I answered. "Because then the fun is over for both of us."

That stupid smile again... I moved slowly, and he let me come down, and I did -- I kissed it right off his face. He sighed, and the sound did things to me... That and him squirming beneath me.

I don't remember the last time I had someone to romp with like this.

"You taste like orange juice," he said, complaining.

"I'm sure I taste like sex, too," I answered, wiggling my eyebrows.

He blushed. "You are horrible."

"Really? They why did you come back?"

He rolled his eyes, and he stopped moving. I stepped off -- in doing so, he feigned a shin kick at my family jewels and I protested.

"Unkind!"

He just sniggered. "Would be so easy... So open."

"Sign of trust," I said. "Fine. Don't trust Hanzo Shimada. Lesson learned." I dumped my face into a pillow again. I yawned... But it was a waking up yawn, not a sleepy one.

He laid on his back, hands folded on his chest. With that stupid smile on his face, he looked like he could be a young man... A boy even. If it weren't for the worry lines. The frown marks between his
brows. The crow's feet. The silver bunched at his temples...

"I hate that you have silver temples," I grumbled, moving to prop my head up on a hand.

He frowned. "Why do you hate it?"

"Because mine just comes in... everywhere. Random grey strands everywhere. I started dying, like, a decade ago. But you..." I gestured to him with my metal hand. "Look at you. Fucking gorgeous. I'm so jealous."

He snorted. "Jealous. Right." And his smile faded. He looked back at me, eyes narrowing. "How old are you?"

I looked up, thinking. "...37?"

He turned onto his side, incredulous. "Really?"

I grin. "Yeah. How old did you think I was?"

He frowned. "...I don't know." He studied me. "I mean... I figured you were tricky. You have lots of laughter lines, but considering how much you are always joking around, I knew that was not going to be reliable. But... I don't know. You didn't have the greys, didn't limp around... I figured 30, maybe. You get your... serious moments. I did not think you were too young."

"Well, shucks," I said, smiling. "Are you disappointed?"

He rolled his eyes at me and reached for the other pillow. I yelped as he whacked me with it, but gently. "Help! Abuse!"

He gasped. "How dare you!" He hit me again, and I giggled. "I will show you abuse! You want to call for help, I will give you something you need help to escape from..." He stomped over on his knees and our hands tangled, and then he managed to grip my wrists in one hand and hold it aloft.

...That caught me by surprise. Enough that he put them down behind me on the bed and I caught myself... staring at him, heart racing, breathing thin.

He leaned over me, one hand pinning my wrists, the other on my breast. His eyes searched mine, and they brightened. "...Oh my."

I swallowed. "Don't tease me," I warned. "You'll break my feelin's."

He bit his lip. "You... You do not always ride top?"

"Considering the circumstances," I said, looking down at our unfair balance of clothing. "...Would you say I was on top?"

That evil smirk again. And he shook his head.

"...I'm not even surprised," I muttered. "You are a wicked tease."

He chuckled. "Oh, now we are going to have fun. You stay right there."

...Part of me was curious. Part of me was surprised, but part of me really wasn't. There was the piece of me that always hesitated, that always asked permission, that always made sure I wasn't stepping on toes that was a protector. There was the monster, the killer, the fighter, who could rip your heart out if you touched one his people, went to war for his country, put down rabid dogs and
did the wetwork. But there was always that part of me that hated doing all the work. Tired of being the one who had to play guard dog and papa bear and protector, and wanted to be spoiled and loved on as much as the next person.

I had been through enough pain and abuse in my life to learn to live with it. And after a while, I let it fuel me. An arrogance, a defiance that smirked and went, "Is that all you got? My sister hits harder than you" even though I'd never had a sister.

That part of me was excited, and obediently stayed right where I was, wrists crossed above me, waiting while he dug around in the clothes.

He returned with a long blue ribbon that I recognized had been in his hair until I had pulled it out, teasing my fingers through his hair... Hair that was still down and messy-looking, and glorious. He returned to where he was before and reached for my wrists. I kept them together as if bound by invisible rope. His eyes looked at me with a touch of excitement, and a cooler variation of black lust. I licked my lips as I watched him wind the silk around my wrists, around and between and across, snug but not uncomfortable. He looked to me, tugging on it, and I nodded. He knotted it and tucked the knot between the ribbons.

_Damn_ pretty.

"You have done this before," he said, not a question. My wrists went back above my head.

"Couple times," I answered, his palm on my chest. "Little shibari, little interrogation... Same tactics, different intent."

His head tilted. "You know shibari?"

"A little bit," I admitted. "Enough to get out of it, not to really use it past some... Basic bondage."

Maybe some suspension with the right rigging, but I wouldn't want to do it for a Japanese person. You'll laugh at me.

He chuckled. "Do you like this?"

I shrugged, a sly smile on my lips. "I like attention."

xxx

...Note for those who are listening. If you're going to introduce a new lover to your kinky side, make sure there are other things lying around your apartment besides just ice and belts. I like a bit of leather as much as the next guy, but _damn_ those welts are ferocious. And you know, darn it all, a feather-tipped crop just isn't on my travel-light list for moving to a new country. I'll have to remedy that.

With a mental list of toys to acquire soon as possible and a vendetta to let roast, we headed out for lunch at a lazy 2p.

"Preferences?" I asked. Every time I moved something shuddered.

And that stupid grin of his wouldn't go away. "Something filling. I am hungry."

"I'm not surprised," I said, my voice croaking.

"My songbird needs a drink as well," he noted.
I snorted. "Do not keep that one." I took a turn onto the main road. "Shall we just drive until we see something we like?"

I eyed him sideways to see if the plural first person was as noticeable to him as it was to me. It was hard to gauge with that stupid grin on his face. 

_God_, I wanted to slap it off of him. But even my arms were quakey.

We drove around a good 20 minutes without finding anything satisfying, and I finally sighed.

"...We could always go to the Rabbit."

He smirked. "The Rabbit, eh?"

"Yeah, you know..." I gestured with the hand he was still holding. Baffling as that was. "The Rabbit. Jack Rabbit. It's, ah... This quirky little bar. Elvis hanging on the wall, country music..."

He looked at me with a raised brow. "Elvis? I saw no Elvis."

I grinned. "It's in the girl's room."

He chuckled, a sound that rattled in his throat and slipped out his teeth. "...See, now I am intrigued." He looked at me out of the side of his eyes. "You are wicked."

"I would love to see Meiko-san screech at you when you try to find out if I'm bullshitting you are not." My cheeks were going to hurt from smiling so damned much.

"I do not know... A woman with the nerve to bully you is no one to be trifled with."

"Ah, it's alright." I stroked his fingers, watching the street as I made to turn. "I like being bullied." I looked back to him.

We stole a kiss before I took my hand back to turn, and I heard him sigh.

"...I want to try those nachos. They look very tasty."

"Well, thank you, darlin'," I answered. "I'll make us a veritable mountain of nachos to conquer. Bwa ha ha."

We sidle up to the Rabbit, and I'm pleased to see it's busy.

"You got the reservation, right?"

I laughed. "Yeah. It's framed up on the wall with my name on it."

I grabbed the front of his shirt with a fist and he turned back to me for another kiss. It's indulgent, but not chaste one bit. I growl gently and release him, pulling out my keys. "Come on, Shimada. Let's get you fed."

I march over the gravel, a smile still on my lips... I open the door for him, and he slips in. I follow, pausing, looking about the place.

It is packed. Each table has people at it. Even the bar is half full. I whistled appreciatively, and Hanzo made a beeline for the bar, probably knowing well enough by now that I was going to do business first. "Good lord. You guys got any more space, or should I order to go?"

There was a round of cheers and salutations as customers that recognized me waved, and laughter
from those that just appreciated a cowboy walking into the Rabbit.

"McCree-san!" Ami greeted me, Rufio working the bar beside her.

"Am I allowed in this time?" I asked. "Cos, I mean, you guys look pretty dead."

"Har har," Rufio said.

"Usagi-san said you can work as long as you came after lunch."

"Well, thank you, Usagi-chan. Chan, san. Cool?"

"Hai!" they both said.

"Awesome." I made for the first table when another voice called to me.

"McCree-san!"

I turned to the bar, and fuck-it-all, it was the bartender from Ebisu. "Holy shit!" I caught his hand, grinning, and we shook. "Usagi-jimbo, my clever ruse worked."

"Well.." He shrugged, taking back his hand. I gave him a once over - he was wearing a Doors t-shirt, a patched black jacket, and blue denim. Even his shoes were black crocodile skin boots.

"[...Do not tell me you got a makeover just to match my aesthetic, I can't pay you that much.]"

He laughed. "[No, I do not expect you could.]

"Well, hey!" I clapped a hand on his shoulder. "You met Usagi, right? And Usagi?"

"Usagi-chan and Usagi-san," he corrected, pointing to each of them.

"Right, of course. Sit, sit!" He sat back down, and damn did he look tasty, spinning on his little stool there. "Now, I'm going to ask you a very personal question, and I want you to answer me honestly."

"Uh oh..." His chuckle was a little more nervous, but I just smiled as I washed my hands.

"Got any tattoos?"

He bit his lips, looking down, fingers tapping at the bar. He looked up at me. "Yeah, I got some."

"Come on. Take it off. I want to see."

I pointedly didn't look at Hanzo at the edge of the bar, because if he was going to be here... He needed to know how I was.

Tenshi sighed, but he stood up and took off the jacket. He showed me a few - not a lot - and all had faded ink, years old at least. His eyes were anxious and worried, but I busied myself with a shot glass and slid it to Rufio. "Scorpion Shot, if you please."

"Hai."

"Hanzo-san," I called.

"Hai?" He leaned around a customer to see me. I hooked my head, wanting him to come. He did so, and when he came around, I swear I could see Tenshi pale.
"Hanzo-san!" He about bowed in half and stayed that way.

"At ease, soldier," I muttered. "This is my bar, not his."

He rose, looking at me, and then to Hanzo, scared. Hanzo looked to me, uncomfortable.

"Over here, darlin'," I told him, moving to the edge of the bar.

Hanzo came to me, and I leaned on the bar. He leaned into me.

"You know what his tats mean. Tell me."

Hanzo clenched his jaw and looked the boy over. He was gentle, and Tenshi did not complain. When Hanzo reached towards the collar, he pulled the line down so I could see the blue circle of double dragons that marked him a soldier of Shimada. Hanzo looked back to me. He stepped closer to me, to speak in my ear.

"He is Shimada. Drug peddler. Two kills. 5 years in jail, probably caught with drugs, got off with a slap on his wrist. But that's very little tattoo for someone his age."

I nodded. "Put your jacket back on, love."

Tenshi did so, and then sat back on his stool, shoulders straight, and his chest heaving lightly, eyes wondering. I looked to Rufio. "Usagi-san. Give the boy his damn shot."

Rufio presented the Bite, and the boy took it, gratefully. And he grimaced. And made a coughing sound.


"I am not your sniffing dog," he growled. And damn it all, I done pissed him off.

"Now Han-- Really?" I watched him stomp out of the bar and huffed. "Great." I moved back behind the bar, fixing myself a drink, shaking my head. On the other side of the bar, Tenshi seemed to melt a bit.

"When you said..."

I gave him a wry smile. "Exactly."

He nodded, dazed. And he frowned, looking after him. "That is strange."

"This place attracts a lot of strange people," I told him honestly. I slid him a glass of water anyway. "And a lesson to you. If one patron says to the other, 'Hey, who's that guy?', you know what I tell 'em?"

He blinked at me. I turned to the Usagis.

"Hey, Usagi-san. Who was that guy who just left?"

"Just another customer," he answered me.

I looked back to Tenshi and shrugged. "Just another customer. Just like you. They could be cops, they could be Yakuza, they could be J-pop rock stars, and I won't tell ya who they are. Hell, if the KING came in, we'd treat him like royalty, but if you asked me, 'Hey, is that guy Elvis?', I would shrug and say, 'I don't know. He's just another customer. Just like you.' Same goes for the Usagis.
"You don't tell nobody anybody's name, when they're off, what their phone number is, what car they drive -- you don't even ask her how old she is," I added, pointing at Ami.

"I'm 57," she said with a wink.

"And damn, is she good lookin' for bein' older than me." I gestured my hands. "That's how it goes. It'll piss off some people, but that's because they're lookin' for someone that has decided to hide in my bar. And damn it, if someone hides in my bar, I'll kick them into my walk-in cooler to avoid immigration if I have to."

"Which is a good thing for me," Rufio added. "Korea wants my body something fierce."

Tenshi snickered. And then I leaned forward, voice quiet. "...And next time you see that guy, you apologize to him. You say you mistook him for someone else. Got me?"

He swallowed and nodded. "Hai."

"Good." I looked to the Usagis. "Alright, who wants to go home?"

"Not me!" Usagi-chan said.

"I was going to wait until 3," Usagi-san said. "It's been busy."

"Well, now I'm here." I punched out the register and pulled out a bill and handed it to him for an apology. "Go with the blessing of the King," I added in a low parody of Elvis.

"Who's that?" he asked, snatching the bill from my fingers and slipping past me.

"...And that is why he's here. Although usually, I call him Rufio." I caught him flipping me off as he went out the door.

Tenshi breathed, trying to relax. "You really have Shimada Hanzo as a regular here?"

I frowned. "Who?"

He gave me a bashful smile. "Got it."

I turned to Ami. "Usagi, dear, can I ask you a big favor?"

"Yes, cowboy?"

"Can you fix me up some nachos on the quickie? Like, I wanted to be eating them before I walked in. Extra chili."

She shook her head. "[You are going to die of a heart attack...]

"And just dump half a can of peppers on there, you know how I like it." I grabbed a menu each of the brunch, lunch, dinner and cocktails. "Have yerself a gander. See anything you wanna try, let me know."

"Alright, I will."

I did my rounds and got into the rotation of things, beer refills, more nachos, a cocktail there, party of Scorpion Bites. I threw Tenshi behind the bar a little bit, and by the end of it, he was laughing with Ami, answering to Usagi-jimbo, and left a little richer. I got a shirt size for him and traded a job application for our phone number so he could let me know what his schedule was like. He had
his own car, but he seemed confident he would make enough to justify the drive.

"...And I'm pretty sure this will be a lot more fun then there."

"Well, hell. Thanks." I shook his hand. "I won't ask you to quit, but I'd love to have you here."

"I thank you, McCree-san," he said, bowing low. And he waved to Usagi. "Bye, Usagi!"

"Bye, Usagi-jimbo!" she answered, and we all laughed.

I tossed the last bit of cold nachos when I finally took my proper break in the dead zone between happy hour and the 10:00 rush. It was quiet long enough for me to worry about the fact that Hanzo hadn't sheepishly come back. I wanted to apologize, I hadn't realized that would upset him. I wish I knew where to find him, or call, or--

And then I remembered. He called here.

Ami watched me bolt up from table four and scurry into the office to check. "Alright, McCree-san?"

"Just checkin' somethin'." I pulled up the phone log, and... Well. I thanked myself for being paranoid and getting that whiz kid to give me a system that would the digits to anyone who called, even hidden ones. And also because I know people who are hard to get A HOLD OF. I scribbled it down, and then I deleted the entry. I slid the nondescript number somewhere no idly wandering hands were likely to find it (not that anyone was strictly supposed to be in my office) hoping I wouldn't need it. And also hoping that, if I did need it, it wasn't a dummy phone he had tossed ages ago.

I told myself I was just tired and wanted to go home when I started feverishly watching the door and the clock after midnight had come and gone. I shouldn't have expected him to show up at half-past one, wanting to tempt me into more. I tried to keep my smile straight when I bid Usagi good night at 2. I told myself I was being stupid and 'one of those guys' when I left the bar at almost a quarter to 4, dragging my feet in case he came in. I don't know why I looked about at my place as if he would randomly jump out from behind a trash bin to surprise me. But I kept my boots quiet as I slipped upstairs and went through the motions of setting up my coffee pot. I changed it to 12 instead of 9. The alarm clock, too. Almost 8 hours. I should be overjoyed.

I don't know if I slept a wink.

Chapter End Notes

...Also, in case you were wondering (not that any of you asked), Usagi-jimbo is, naturally, a reference to Usagi Yojimbo, a veritable grandfather to modern comics, and especially Japanese Manga and Anime. It, in turn, inspired Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and was about a samurai rabbit. So... you know. Fitting kind of thing to be in Jesse's head when thinking about Hanzo-san. Because reasons and stuff.
In which a Shimada comes to the Rabbit after hours...

Shinjuku is a thing, I didn't make that up. "Mei-mei" is Chinese for little sister, though it can also have prostitution connotations (According to Google) so have fun with that. #ILearnedAllMyChineseFromFirefly

I didn't see Hanzo Shimada for two weeks.

I spent two days watching the door for him, especially past midnight.

The third day... I took my dinner in the office and I didn't eat anything, crying. When I came out, Meiko looked ready to kill me.

"It's a Sunday, for fuck's sake. You have tomorrow off. Go home. Drink your sorrows there." She even offered me a bottle of scotch, and I waved her off. I stayed until midnight, and when she caught me staring at the door again she kicked me out.

I did drink. I watched Tombstone for the umpteenth time and drank. And when Holliday died, I cried.

I'm losing it, I told myself. It shouldn't have been that big a deal. And yet... This wasn't the first time I'd pissed him off.

Maybe he'd decided I wasn't worth the trouble. Just as I was falling in deep.

I was on day 15 (16, if you start with midnight) and counting the register when there was a knock on the Rabbit's door.

"We're closed!" I barked. It was a Saturday, I was exhausted, and damn it, I did not want to deal with any drunks right now.

"Jesse!" a voice whined. "Let me in, cowboy!"

My heart fell into the pits. I might have launched myself over the bar, I don't remember, but I snapped open the lock and wrenched open the door before I could control myself.

...Wrong Shimada, I thought first, my face falling as I took in the grinning face of Genji Shimada. I immediately felt like an asshole for it and pasted on a smile.

"Genji! My old friend. Come in." I looked around the street, but there was no one else. I locked up behind him. "You know... We close at 2."
"I know," he said, his shoes slipping over the wood, looking around at the place with a smile. "That's why I'm here."

I snorted, gathering the dollars I had scattered in my rush. *All that for nothing.* "You can call, too."

"Ha haaa... Funny guy."

"It's true, though. There's a phone right there," I said, nodding to it.

"Mm-hmm." He smirked. "Likely bugged and rigged to register unmarked numbers, eh?"

I scoffed. "Who do you take me for?"

He chuckled. "Someone smart enough to find a pro to do your networking. And any Japanese hacker worth his salt will do that. Yakuza are too common here."

...And here I thought that I was all clever and such. "I suppose that's fair enough." I started counting, doing so under my breath as a sign for him to wait.

He waited for me to finish and write down the number. "...And speaking of Yakuza."

"Hmm?" I looked up to him as if I hadn't heard him.

He smirked. "Hmm. How is our friend?"

I swallowed hard and sighed, looking to the bar. "I haven't seen him in weeks." I tried to put away my heartbreak and leave out only the disappointment before I looked back up at him. "Two, at least. Sorry."

His eyes narrowed, ever so slightly, but he said nothing, and took a seat, spinning at the bar.

I counted out the till and put it back in the drawer, stuffing the rest into my envelope. "Can I get you a drink?"

"No, I'm good." He watched me put the drawer in my office. My eyes flickered to the hiding place of that number... Would he know he had left me a number? Would he have done so anyway, reckless and heartsick? I bit my tongue, one pain to distract from another.

It was probably just a dummy phone anyway. Who cares if I wrote it down?

I kept myself moving, checking the bar for restock.

"Say... That's your white truck out there, right? The Mitsubishi?"

"Yep. That's my hunk of junk. Why?"

He shook his head. "No reason."

I felt wary. That felt like a lie... "Genji, what is it?"

"Nothing. Just... you know. Making conversation."

I felt nervous now. "Genji, don't ask a man questions like that, you'll make him paranoid."

He laughed. "Make him?"

"You heard me." There was no mirth in my words. I slipped into the back of the bar and took a
moment to brace myself in the dark.

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph, help me.* Did someone see me driving around with him in my truck? Or worse, see him driving it around in the dark when we were fighting?

...Were there Yakuza trails after me, courtesy of a spurned Mr. Shimada?

I gathered the bottles I needed, the glass clinking. I brought it back to the bar and placed them there. Genji watched me guarded.

"...I'm waiting for you to tell me what the fuck you know," I said, my voice a growl. "I've had a very long day and my patience is not there."

*My patience walked out the door two weeks ago.*

He shrugged. "Just that... Well. I was listening to radio chatter a few days ago, and there's a standing order to watch a truck that matches that description."

I drop a nearly empty bottle of tequila on the bar with a thump. "What description?"

"White Mitsubishi. Late 90s make, bad shocks, dent on the right side."

I made myself breathe. *Bad shocks.* "That's an odd description."

"Indeed it is," he agreed. "And I didn't think anything of it until I came to drop by, and I saw it."

It took everything in me to not touch the bottle of tequila to my lips as I screwed off the top. "So you're going to ask me if I have bad shocks." It isn't a question.

"I wasn't going to worry you," he said gently. "I was going to wait until you left and listen."

...The siren called to me. I screwed the cap on it. "Radio chatter. That's oddly not-specific."

"It is," he agreed.

Police chatter is police chatter. Local chatter is for construction crews and private security...

"Fuck it," I growled, undoing the cap. I eyed the level and I threw it back.

God, how it burned. It felt good, I needed the pain. It was better than the hollow numbness that had started to surround me like an iceberg, dense and cold and dark and suffocating.

I gasped for air when I finished, popping the bottle back to the bar. I shut my eyes, growling again, feeling the way it ripped and scratched at my throat, leaving me feeling raw and exposed...

Pain was a reminder that I was alive.

"...I debated the feasibility of you as a bartender," Genji said, quiet. "I thought you were doing well, actually."

"I was," I agreed. I didn't give him any more, feeling a petty, spiteful side of me want to echo his own unhelpfulness. I tossed the bottle into the trash harder than I should have and listened to the glass protest, a song of its own.

"And now you're not?"
I shrugged. "I have good days. More good days than bad." I grabbed a napkin and wiped my mouth. "Ironically, having all the booze I could want makes me less likely to drink on a good day. But on a bad day..."

"On a bad day, every bottle is a siren," he said.

I blinked at him. "You remember that?"

His smile was sad. "Jesse McCree waxing poetic? Hard night to forget. Although... Hearing him beg me to take the gun from his own fingers really sticks out. I've saved your life in battle many times. That one... I'll never forget that one."

I reached for my drink... it was water. "...That was a bad night."

"It was a bad situation. You really loved that girl. Hell, you were ring shopping."

"Yeah..."

I gasped, hearing the hint of something... An angel, or perhaps a demon answering my prayers.

"Jesse?"

A moment of sanity broke through. "I'm in here!"

A light flickered on, and Genji froze. "...Jesse, what are you doing."

"Help me," I begged, tears on my cheeks. "Please... Stop me."

"Easy, now... Jesse, take your finger off that trigger. Come on. Slow and easy."

The closer he came, the easier it was to listen. My finger slipped away and lay on the flat of the gun.

"That's it... Point it away, brother. You got this." He flanked to my left, and my shivering hand moved.

"I was praying..." I whispered. His hand grips my wrist, and I watch him peel the cold, inhuman fingers off the handle.

"Christ, Jesse, how long have you been sitting in the dark like this?"

"It feels like days..." I listened to him crack it open and dump the bullets, like pebbles. I stretched out my leg, knocking one empty bottle of tequila into two more.

He scoffed. "I meant--"

"I know what you meant," I said. I reached to touch my face and recoiled at the thing that was attached to me. I sobbed. "...Oh god."

"Losing a limb can ruin a thing," he said, quiet. "I mean... You think I get a lot of girls with a face like this?"

I snorted. "Hey, some girls like that kind of thing."

"Yeah, the crazy ones..."
I twisted a cap on the last bottle and sighed. "...I'm better, honest. I just..." I gestured uselessly. I started putting the bottles away.

"Living in a foreign country can be hard for anyone." He's fishing.

A humorless laugh. "I'll say." My heart squeezed. "...You know, I did a stupid thing. And I knew it was stupid when I did it, but I did it anyway, and now I'm..." I tossed my hat to the bar and raked my fingers through my hair, messing it up, but scratching at my scalp and giving myself more of the pain I needed. "I'm a wreck. And I got no one to blame but myself."

Genji propped up his smile on a fist. "Uh oh. That sounds like love."

I'm not sure if the sound I made was a laugh or a sob, but I threw a towel at him, and he caught it. "Bastard. Don't laugh at my pain."

"I do not laugh to mock, I promise," he said, fingers toying with the towel. "It is because I know you. I know how you can be."

"Yeah." I sighed. "You know how I can be."

He slid the towel towards me. "So... What happened?"

I took the towel back, and I touched the tips together, folding it back where it belonged. "I did a stupid thing." I sniffed. "I had a customer. Chemistry was nice. Hell, chemistry was great. Came in late one night, all wrecked and needing a dose of McLovin', and..." I sniffed, the siren calling to me as I put them away. "Well, it had been a while for me." I looked up at him. "So I treated myself."

"Understandable."

"...I told myself not to take home patrons, I told me. I said, 'Jesse James McCree, you listen to me. Every time you do that, you fuck it up. They get addicted to your barman you, then they go crazy when you're quiet at home.' Or, you know, they get jealous. They sit at the edge of my bar and watch me like a hawk, and ruin things. Or... Or even worse..."

I let out a shuddering breath, hand to my face, and I brush away the tears. "God, I sound like an idiot."

"You are an idiot," he answered me. I glare at him with wet eyes. But he gestured with his hands. "Or?"

"...The sex is great. Hell, the sex is fucking legendary. And they eat me up with a spoon, and I just... swallow up that love and affection and..."

He grimaced at that four letter word.

I pointed at him. "Exactly. You see it. It's that little word that means too much. I fucking fall in love and they just..."

I wanted to throw a bottle and smash it against the wall, and I know that at my state of inebriation I could calculate the throw just right.

If I was more smashed (and I'm convinced this is where that term comes from) I could do it without thinking.

I clench a fist. "...I get addicted to them. I fall in love. I start talking in plural first person. And then..."
"they ghost me."

...I hated being ghosted. It was so... Humiliating. Demeaning. Belittling. Invalidating. It made you feel like you weren't good for much but maybe a fuck, and even then...

"When was your last fix?" he asked, humoring the metaphor.

I sighed. "A while ago."

He chuckled. "Jesse, I know you. You're counting."

I look at the door. "...If you start the day when I wake up, 15. If you count it by calendar day... 16."

He shook his head. "So call her. Or... him."

"I... don't even think the number I have is any good." I pulled out the trash bag, carrying it to the back.

"Jesse..." he complained, calling after me. "That sounds like an excuse! Did she ghost you, or did you piss her off? ...Him? Whatever?"

I chuckled. "Whatever?" I call back.

"Hey, it's Japan, man. I won't judge you for it. Neko girls, tentacle monsters, traps in goth loli dresses, it's a fetishist's paradise. Especially in Shinjuku."

I'm laughing when I come back. "I keep forgetting about that..."

"Shinjuku has one of the largest red-light districts in all of Asia, man. Maybe you should head down there and get this shit taken care of."

"Crass."

"Oh, shut up, Mr. There-Are-A-Lot-Of-Marias-But-You-Only-Need-One."

"...Okay, that's fair."

"Jesse McCree," he sighed. "Gunslinger and world infamous mercenary. Heart of gold who loves cuddles more than life itself."

"Cuddles are life."

"God, I am so embarrassed to know you right now."

I laugh. And I do grab a beer. "Seriously. Do you want a drink? I'm just about done. I have beers you can take with you."

"Well, shit, my brother, hook it up." He held out a hand. I handed him a brew and made a note for myself. I locked up the office, envelope under my arm. I marched him out of the place, flipped the sign, and locked up.

Genji stepped out to the walk, hands tucked into the pockets of his hoodie, the beer can sticking out prominently. He turned to me. "You sure you're cool to drive, bro?"

"Nah, I'm fine," I told him. "I'm just a few minutes up the road."
"Dude. I just watched you down four fingers of tequila."

"It was three."

"Your fingers are bigger than mine."

...Which is when I realized he wasn't messing with me. I stopped and turned, and... sure. Maybe I did have a sway to my steps. "You offerin'?"

He pulled out his hands in innocence. "Hey, man. I'm just offerin' a walk home. None of that hanky-panky shit. And I def don't cuddle," he added, with a head wiggle.

"Man, don't nobody want to cuddle with you anyway, with your ugly ass. Although I bet your ass is prettier than your face, because damn."

"Hey, man. I got a lot more ugly where that came from, don't test me." I laughed. "I'm serious! I might scare you with the ugly I got."

"What, are we talking about your cock now? Your horribly mutilated, disfigured, scarred beyond recognition, manhood?"

"You can call me Mei-Mei."

"Yeah? You gonna charge me?"

"...Asshole."

We walked to my place, and when we got to the gate, I made like we were Romeo and Juliet and "parting is such sweet sorrow". Genji marched off back the way he came, cursing my name and flipping me off. It felt good to just hang out with my mate, someone who understood my madness, my past, my struggle with my bleeding heart. Anyone who could pull a pistol from your temple and still look you in the eye was a good man. I felt bad for lying to him, even though I knew I hadn't actually lied to him. In fact, I'd almost told him, if he put the two together... But I prayed he didn't.

I cracked open my beer once I was in, trying not to think about the fact that both of the Shimadas knew where I lived now. That made me nervous. And someone was trailing my truck...

I thanked my saner side for leaving that damned number at the bar, and Genji for walking me home. I was just drunk enough to call him at 4 in the morning on the off chance that he would answer.
McCree gets a fishy call about a suspicious package, and he isn't sure what to do about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"McCree-san?"

"Hai?" ...God help me. I'm turning Japanese. I think I'm turning Japanese, I really think so--

"Someone is asking you for you on the phone."

"Hai," I say again, and yeah, it still tastes weird on my tongue. I take the phone from him. "Jack Rabbit, this is McCree."

"[I am sorry. Do you speak Japanese?]

"Hai," I said again. God, I sound like a parrot. "[What can I do for you?]

"[Ah. I have a... strange order here. A package that was dropped off at my establishment, with a note to call this number, ask for the man in charge, and instruct him to pick it up.]

I frowned. "[That is awfully suspicious.]

He laughed. "[It is... But I was intrigued.]

It could be Genji. It could be Hanzo. It could be... anyone. As a rule, I didn't like unexpected packages. And this cat and mouse, using-in-betweens thing was a sure sign of someone with too much paranoia, money and time on their hands to be up to any good. But Genji had been in to visit a week ago...

"[Alright, give me the address.]

I didn't like it, but... Well, it could be a job, too. Couldn't shoot that down. Or maybe someone who just liked the Jack Rabbit (unlikely). Amari had done something like this once for my birthday...

...Mind you, her idea of a gift was something like a cross between a prank and a training session. Pulling cats out of bags was not fun. Walking into a hotel room expecting a whore and finding an assassin was something only Ana would find funny.

(Okay, so it was a little funny. But not at the time.)

"[Oh! And there is a note that it is time sensitive. Must be today. Before the evening.]

What, did someone send me a puppy? I checked the time and sighed. "[Alright. Thank you.]

"[Thank you, sir! See the front desk, please.]"
As I hung up the phone, I debated long and hard about ignoring this prank or trap or whatever it was... But there were so few characters that should know where I was, and it bothered me. I looked to Rufio. "Usagi, how do you feel about working an extra couple hours?"

He looked at me sideways, cleaning a beer glass. "Define 'couple'."

"Well, you're off at 2, and then Meiko comes in at 5. Tenshi is supposed to be here at 10, but quite frankly, I trust both of them to run the night without me if they have to." I rubbed my eyes. "Sounds like I gotta go take care of something pretty damn immediately. Could you stay until Meiko gets here?"

"No problem, boss!" he said, the accent still a little disjointed, but the grin and thumbs up were perfect.

"You're wonderful." I split the jar and handed him an extra bill.

The address lead to a small, cheap motel on the other end of town, in a neighborhood that didn't look sketchy per se, but felt a bit tense. The kind where you don't hear guns going off, but the cops aren't the ones most likely to come if they did. It felt like a drop or a trap, and I didn't like it. It was entirely likely Genji had some paranoid partner that wanted to talk to me on the side, discreet-like, or just the local crew wanting to have a sit down with Mr. Small Business Guy. The operative in me didn't like coming here unarmed and uninformed, so I indulged myself by wearing my gun on a hip. There was always time to play the ignorant foreigner card if I needed to.

When I jangled in the front door, gun and hat and belt buckle and plaid, the fellow behind the counter gawked. Not an uncommon response around these parts.

"[My name is McCree. I spoke to someone on the phone.]"

He blinked. "[Oh! Yes. Of course.]" He stood and scurried to the back, giving me another incredulous look over his shoulder before he ducked out of sight. I put my thumbs in my belt loops and scanned the halls on either side of me. I felt exposed. Out in the open. My heart was in my throat as I wondered if the person they'd sent to kill me would come from the East or the West...

...Nobody jumped out at me. But that didn't make me calm. If anything, my tension grew, nerves stretching taut and winding tighter and tighter. A cruel and sadistic person could give you a false sense of security before they dropped from the rafters...

Which is why I was eyeing the ceiling like a fucking loon when he came back, eyes wide like a child meeting Santa Claus for the first time. "Here we are!" he announced in broken English, no doubt attempting to quote something.

"Thanks," I said. The package wasn't very big. It was a simple brown box, nondescript but for caramel taping and a typed note on top with instructions to call the number provided and speak to the proprietor to retrieve package before 500p.

The operative in me muttered about amateur contacts who didn't know how to communicate important details. But that in and of itself was a clue.

The sender of the package was a professional, yet they'd chosen a virgin contact, if not location.

I gave the man behind the counter chiding eyes and he found something else to do for a split moment, a farce he ruined when he gawked me as I pull out a good sized switchblade out of one pocket and popped it open. He tried to stare at something else as I sliced open the tape and braced myself for a bad joke or a bomb or...
There was a bottle inside. I frowned and pulled out a bottle of Tequila Rose, and my heart fell into my gut and then down to an icy cold abyss. Emotion choked at my features as I turned it about, my breath noisy in my nose until I found nothing. But at the bottom of the box was a three-digit number.

"Now, I'm gonna ask you a question," I said, and I was surprised it sounded as even as it did, although the growl probably spooked him all the more. "And I have a feelin' yer gonna give me a weird answer." I held the small, pale yellow post-it note up to him, so he could see the hand-drawn number in Sharpie. He shrunk even more, looking at me. "I know how unlisted rooms work. I'm gonna guess fella who's in that room said he's not to be disturbed or acknowledged. And rules say only people with permission are allowed to know he exists. Am I wrong?" His eyes darted from the number to something on his desk -- likely his key stash, denoting which rooms were full or empty - - and then back at me. He bit his tongue. I gave him a wry smile. "Question is, are you gonna stop me if I head up there? Or does this count as an invitation in your books?"

He blew out his cheeks and, to his credit, he shrugged, wildly. "[I do not speak English.]"

I blinked at him. And then I laughed. Okay, good call. That was sloppy of me. "Right. [I am sorry.]" I tried again, waving the number. "[This is a room number, isn't it?]"

He still gave me a little shrug.

"[Are you going to stop me if I go knock on this door?]"

"[I do not know what you are talking about,]" he said, with enough inflection to say the unspoken permission. But I did watch him pick up his phone and tap out a number. He waited, and so did I. "[Yes! The gentleman arrived to collect his package.]" A pause. "[Yes, sir.]" I heard the tone of a hung up phone before he could say goodbye, but his wry smile suggested he had expected it. "[It's to your right, then a left, all the way back. Use the stairs, please.]"

"[Thank you very much.]" I gave him a bow, and he returned it, a smile playing on his lips, his eyes tracking me.

I told myself it was a good thing I had the bottle in my right hand because if it had been in my left, I might have crushed it. I took a left and followed the numbers until they ended at 126, and climbed the stairs two more floors. I took a deep breath and blew it out my nose as I stopped at 324.

I swallowed hard. Part of me was tempted to put the bottle down and go right back the way I came, let him keep his fucking games to himself, and if he wanted me, he knew where the fuck to find me, and I wasn't gong to sit here and be dragged around like a fish on the line...

But the part of me that ached, the part of me that hadn't made a Pink Passion in three weeks because it hurt too much, the part of me that lay awake at night in the cold, staring at the extra pair of belts on my dresser that would have otherwise stayed in my closet untouched for sometime...

The part of me that cursed myself a fool for pining for someone who couldn't bother to talk to me for three weeks, he was relieved. Touched, even. He was an idiot, and he fell in and out of love like the tide rose and fell every night. He fell hard and fast for ridiculous people and he got me in all kinds of trouble, but he was as much a part of me as the gruff hound dog that wanted to bark all the bad things and people away so his Master and those precious to him could sleep at night.

I tapped my knuckles on the door. Not a loud knock, but loud enough he'd hear me if he was really in there listening for it. I swallowed again, waiting, my heart starting to hammer anxiously, butterflies fluttering in my rib cage. I stared at the doorknob, my lips in a tight line, and I waited.
I had the thought that maybe he was anxious and trying to pull himself up by his bootstraps, too.

Eventually, the door opened, a quiet click and a tease of a line into the room, carpets a rich red wine and champagne bed covers lightly touched. His face slipped into the space, and my first impression was that his eyes were worried and bloodshot. There were bags under them, and a gauntness that he had already been teasing around. His hand touched the door as it opened, and Hanzo Shimada blinked at me, his chest heaving in quiet panic.

He was in street clothes. Whitewashed denim and a shirt the color of Irish cream, soft chocolate letterings of kanji I didn't readily recognize, his dragon howling down his arm along the door. I didn't know what to say to him. But I held out the bottle. He blinked at me again, hesitant, not moving. And I huffed, impatient. "For Chrissakes, you could have called, Hanzo."

I hated how quiet and heartbroken I sound.

I watched his face crumple. The door opened more. "So could you."

My jaw tightened. "Right. Like that wasn't a dummy phone you didn't drop two days after? Am I supposed to trust your lapse of judgment holds on for weeks? Get real!"

His face turned into something angry. "Lapse of judgment?"

"You were mad, and I get that. And I even get you bein' sore I asked you to pick over a new hire, and that's fine, you're allowed your own weird eccentricities. But don't sit here and play spooks and ghosts like it's supposed to be some kinda romantic."

"Well, you weren't discreet enough to keep an APB on my truck off the radars!"

"You got someone followin' me!" I said, stabbing a finger towards him, drink laughing. "Genji heard it on the damn police radio--"

"APB? What?"

"What's the matter with me?! What's the matter with you? [Where have you been for the last month?]"

"What's the matter with me?!
Well, you weren't discreet enough to keep an APB on my truck off the radars!"

His head ducked back, face twisting like he ate something sour. "APB? What?"

"You got someone followin' me!" I said, stabbing a finger towards him, drink laughing. "Genji heard it on the damn police radio--"

"What's the matter with me?! What's the matter with you? [Where have you been for the last month?]"

He cursed under his breath, something about 'ridiculous man'. "[I was working! I have a business to attend to, same as you!]

"Oh, business, sure," I nodded, turning to drop the bottle on the dresser. His kimono was neatly folded beside it. "[And you didn't say anything? You just left!]

He let out a sound like 'hyuh!', a sharp smile on his lips, fists on his hips. "Oh, do I answer to you
now? Sniffer dog has to answer to Master? Ah?" He waved a hand at me and laughed, but there was no humor in it. I saw his eyes catch on my gun, and every so slightly his body leaned away.

"It's not like that," I protested, fighting for the words. "I just... You left in a huff! I waited for you to come back so I could apologize, and you just disappeared."

"You wouldn't understand," he muttered.

"Oh, wouldn' I?" I challenged. "Try me. Come on."

His eyes followed my hands, which beckoned in a dare before they went to my hips in a stance I'd been using since I'd started shooting. My fingers were a breath away from my gun and he tensed. He was in a hallway and I was in the open. He had a door to his back and a closed bathroom door and closet. I had a gun. Fish in a barrel.

"I do not wish to fight," he said, quiet.

"Well, too damn late! You shoulda thought of that three weeks ago when you wanted to run off like I done hurt yer feelin's." I was angry. I was hurt. And yeah, I probably shouldn't have said some of the things I said... "Act like you're Mr. Ice Princess, nothin' bothers you. But when it does, you wanna go on and run off, stealin' a man's truck and what not."

"[Fucking truck,]" he muttered.

"That's your precedent!" I told him, pointing my finger. My left hand. My right hand stayed where it was, close to my gun. "You done it to me twice, now. Then you set up this shindig? How do I know you ain't decided I'm too much trouble and you make me a tourist statistic?"

This time the sound he made was more of a 'kyuu'. "Statistic! You are obsessed with dying!"

"You live the life I've lived, it's a fact of fuckin' life. Don't let yer dog out at night, hawks'll get 'im. Watch your step after dark or the rattler's 'll getcha. Don't touch the javelina. Don't touch Julio's sister, neither, he'll rip yer arm off. When the boss on the bike comes by askin' fer his pounda flesh, you better give it to 'im." His head turned towards me. An expression I couldn't read on his face. "...Even if it's all you got til Sunday. People been shot for less." I tugged at my belt, telling myself I should stop yelling so much, I should lower my voice. Especially when I'm armed. "Hell, I've been shot for less! You get some idiot tryin' to practice his marksmanship on a Magnum, shootin' yella spotted lizards and smack himself in the face with the recoil when yer right next to him. Or some uppity sumbitch wants to pick a fight with your crew and he picks on the one gringo in the pack, because what the hell does the white boy know, huh?"

For his sake, Hanzo didn't move, letting me do all the motion. I rocked on my heels, frustration and anxiety and an itch I hadn't been able to scratch on my own making my blood boil.

"I been shot at. Knifed. Lied to. Cheated on. Set up. Hell, I had a set up like this once where I thought I was gettin' a birthday surprise and I got an assassin, cos she thought it would be funny to watch me hoot 'n holler. I don't trust shit like this!"

I wanted to kick something. I wanted him to speak. And at the same time, I just... I just wanted to vent. The words spilled out of me, useless and irrelevant, and I felt the fool, but something in me kept fighting.
"Had me drive all the way over to this shit hole so you could give me a bottle of tequila rose and what? Kiss and make up?"

This time I bit my tongue, fuming from my nostrils, and I stared at him.

His eyes were on my face, concern furrowing his brow. He glanced at the bottle and then down, flitting about. That way he did when he was thinking, as best I could figure. He moved, tentatively, eyes flashing up to me. I stepped aside and he moved out of his cornered space and behind me. I turned, eyes following him.

He pulled open a drawer and held something to his chest. His eyes flit, and his mouth chewed, but then he looked at me again. He stepped towards me, arm outstretched, offering something to me. I lean away, part of me still not trusting, but I reach out for it.

...It's a jade dragon. Hefty son of a bitch, too, its weight requiring me to compensate my grip. It was longer than my hand, palm to fingertip, with a rounded, serpentine body curling in on itself, whiskers and horns and sharp ridges along its spine. Dark green, like emeralds, polished smooth until it shined. Three toes clutched a pearl, resting on its hide, and I dare say the damned thing had a cheeky smile.

...Reminded me of someone.

My chest tightened. I swallowed, but my heart stayed in my throat. I looked up at him.

"I went to Hanamura," he said quietly. "My hometown. On business with the family." He looked down to his drawer and closed it. "There are 18 of those still in existence. They are very precious. And rare." His eyes looked at me. There was no storm there. In fact, it looked mighty peaceful. "I thought to bring you one."

I looked down at the dragon and wondered wildly how much this thing was worth. Not just in dollars and yen, but in historical value....

Sentimental value.

I clutched it to my chest. "I... It's gorgeous," I said, lamely. It felt like an apology.

His lips tugged at the beginnings of a smile. "I looked over the collection of them a long time. His smile made me think of you."

My lips tugged at a smile. I looked up at him through my lashes, a thumb stroking over the dragon's neck. "I'm honored."

He clutched himself, shy. "Please do not lose it."

I couldn't quite let out the soft breath of a laugh. I leaned towards the dresser and set it between his kimono and the bottle of tequila rose. I even straightened it so he was facing out. "I wouldn't dream of it."

His eyes lingered on the dragon... And then to me as he heard me mess with my buckles. He watched me undo the belts for my gun, ammo pack and holster wrapped together in old leather that had been rehemmed and oiled and cared for over the years. I carefully set it behind the bottle and dragon, making sure it didn't touch. I watched him relax a little beside me, the motion a white flag of truce.

And in a blur of motion, he was suddenly in my arms again. I held him tight, and he clutched me,
fierce and jealous. I heard him give an open-mouthed gasp, or maybe a dry sob into my shirt. I breathed out, some tension in me melting. I buried my nose in his neck, breathing in him, and he was doing the same, his hands clutching at my back.

"I missed you so much," he whispered into my shirt.

I swallowed hard. "I missed you too," I croaked, claws in his shirt. "Damn it, don't leave me like that again. I thought we were done..."

"We should be." My blood turned to ice. "But I can't do it."

My grip tightened for a different reason. "...What does that mean?"

"It is forbidden," he hissed again. A heavy breath. "But I cannot bear it."

I pulled him away from me, that quiet panic rising again. "Hanzo. Answer me plain. What are you on about?"

There were tears in his eyes. Not fallen yet, but almost. "The Elders... They watch me." His eyes shined, darting between mine. "If they found out about you..." He looked away, trailing off, but the tightening of his claws spoke volumes.

"Shit." I looked towards the window. "That's who's trailin' my truck."

His eyes went wide. "What?"

"APB." And I closed my eyes, kickin' myself. "Duh. Acronym. Someone has an order out to watch my truck. Not detailed enough to get me arrested, but they're watchin' me."

He startled, looking around, and then at me. "They could have followed you here!"

"Well, yeah... But you're unlisted, right?"

"Well, yes, but..." He worried his bottom lip with his teeth. He stepped to the side, thinking, but his hand didn't leave mine, fingers entangling. "I made sure I was not followed..."

"Maybe I'm here to see a lady friend?" I suggested. His eyes shot me a cold, dark look. "Hey, I'm just sayin'."

"I am not a lady," he growled.

"Well, sure, but they don't know that." You're damn pretty, though, I didn't say.

He shook his head. "This is trouble..."

"Hey." I tugged on our hands, and he looked back at me. "So I showed up at motel in the shitty end of town. It looks like I'm here to meet up with a lover. What's wrong with that?"

He frowned, his eyes searching me up and down. Trying to sort out what I mean.

"So..." I pulled him closer, and he stepped to me, frowning now. "Do what's expected. I spend a couple hours here and then go on my merry way."

His eyes searched mine, dart-dart-dart-dart, and then they narrow, a sly brow rising. "...Do as they expect," he echoed.
I smirked. "Exactly." I pressed a kiss to his knuckles. "They don't know who I'm meeting up with, right?"

He scoffed. "I should certainly hope not."

I pulled him again, and this time he stepped right into my arms, his going around my waist, mine around his shoulders. "Maybe we do get some romantics goin'. Apologize proper."

"Kiss and makeup," he echoed, and there was enough of a drawl that I could tell he was doing an impression. I cocked a brow, and he gave me that Snidely Whiplash smile. His hands slipped over my shirt. "Cowboy, you are crazy."

"Indeed I am." I moved to take off my hat.

To my surprise, he took it from me and put it on himself. A warm smile. "Now I am the crazy cowboy."

"Well, shoot. You want role reversal, we can do that."

And he let out a warm laugh that rang like Christmas bells. My heart swelled, my fingers teasing at the tips of his (oh my god, so soft) shirt.

His eyes dart-dart-darted around again at mine. And then that smile softened. "You said Genji?"

My smile vanished and I sighed. "Yeah. I did." I tucked him closer, and he tucked his chin on my chest to look up at me. God, he was so precious. "I... told him I haven't seen you in weeks. Which... To be fair, I haven't. "I also told him I'm fucking in love with you and you were breaking my heart, but without specifics."I worry. I think he means you harm."

He looked down, away from me. A hand slipped around to my front, and I saw him toy with one of my buttons. "He would be right to do so."

"I don't want that for you guys." I eased my hand over his back, and he looked up at me, dart-dart. I tugged on his hair ribbon and he gave a soft 'hmm' of contentment. "A certain barfly who I will not name suggested that you two need to reconcile. That his rage will consume him if he is not careful."

His eyes narrow, trying to understand my vague words. "My brother's rage?" I can tell it still feels weird to say those words.

"And that you need to have his forgiveness for yourself." I stroked my hand at the back of his neck, warm and soft. "It can't be an easy burden to bear."

Dart. Dart. Dart. "You seem very forgiving."

I swallowed. "Call me biased. I like both of you very much." And I pressed a tender kiss to his brow, and there was that goofy smile I had yearned for...

"I hope it is not in the same way," he muttered, that sly edge coming to his lips, and his voice.

I snorted. "God, no."

And then that quiet, sniffing laugh I had become addicted to, and he moved higher to kiss me.

I realized he was on his tippy toes, and I let out a noise of complaint. "You are so adorable..."

"Says you," he whispered, a purr in his voice.
I said a lot of things after that. Probably some I shouldn't have said, but they spilled out of me, tender and insistent, and I felt the fool, but something in me kept fighting. Fighting for him. Fighting to get back what we'd had before, what we'd been building, and when we joined, he rose above me, beautiful and red-faced, and he whispered those words back to me. Promises we knew we couldn't keep, a future we couldn't have, stolen moments and forbidden indulgences. Perhaps its fleeting nature is what made it so precious, and why we both wanted it so badly. Even as we cooled, hands and lips wandered, learning secret places and hidden affections. I traced my lips over his dragons, and his fingers caressed my scarred places. Fat, hairy tummy was tickled, and I learned that there was a spot behind his knees that made a most delicious squeal if you bit just so. We ordered something to eat, and the staff was kind enough to bring it up for us. I answered the door in my jeans and a too-tight shirt that wasn't mine, to Hanzo's protests and the doorman's pointed not-noticing.

"Take that off!" he hissed at me.

"I don't know if I can," I protested, wide-eyed. "It's so tight. I might have to cut it off..."

"I will cut YOU off!" he snarled.

I laughed. "That don't even make any sense..." It was already riding up on my stomach, and he scrambled to help me remove it, and in true form, he searched the shirt for damage first. I chuckled, disassembling the order and peeking through boxes for which was whose.

"Hai-ya..." he sighed. "You are such a brute."

"Hey, you invited me," I teased.

"Your manners in public are much better than in private."

"Well, I have to behave in public," I said, peeling open my teriyaki. "Specially when I got a business to run." I took a bite. "Keepin' up appearances and all."


I regarded him, frowning over his food, picking at it with his chopsticks, finding the right morsel before taking a bite.

"So... I take it you and me goin' out to the movies and such ain't such a good idea," I ventured.

"Perhaps not the best," he agreed.

I swallowed. Why did that hurt so much? "I'll be more careful."

He raised his eyes to me, and there was the beginning of a storm there. That whipping of wind when the warm air got cooler, and a storm was coming, but the skies weren't quite dark yet. "I don't know if we should."

"Oh, we shouldn't," I agreed. "But there's a 'should' and there's a 'can'." I took another bite. "You disappearin' for three weeks proved I can't." My fingers stilled, and I put my food down in my lap, staring at it. "You break my heart, you do that again," I whispered, hoarse.

I tell myself I'm not imagining the pain in his voice. "It broke mine."

I looked at him, and there was that rain. Not thunder and lightning, but a torrential downpour, the kind a desert could soak on up and flood the wash, threatening to sweep everything you know and
love away while you hide in your shelter hoping that nothing in the yard is downtown by morning, and everything stinks of wet, musty desert, and even the plants cry out at the absurdity of it all.

_Monsoon_, I thought.

"What do you want to do?"

He tilted his head to one side. "Lots of things I want to do," he answered. His eyes begged me. "Not a lot I can."

I make myself take another bite. "Is that number you called me from that night really a solid, secure number?"

"It is my personal line," he said. "Do you have that number?"

"Of course I have that number," I growled. "I just didn't trust that it would have an answer on the other end of it that I would like."

I met his eyes again... And I wondered what he saw when he met mine. His hand reached out to me. I set down my chopsticks and our fingers tangled.

"You should get a phone," he said, looking down at our hands. "It might help us..."

I squeezed his fingers. "Stay in touch?"

His face flinched, but he nodded. "Yes. In touch." He looked up at me. "I do not want us to be over. But we must be careful."

"You got it, baby," I whispered. I leaned toward him, and his lips parted, eager for the kiss. I almost said those damning words again, but... Well, I could always blame it on the sex being that damn good if I was questioned about it. Plausible deniability, maybe. As if being in love was a crime.

We eat. We drink. We lie together a while, talking about nothing and everything (his favorite colour is actually pink, like the sakura. Like my silly drinks and the tequila rose. His favourite thing about me is my voice, and I've got him smoking again.) and I string a couple yarns about gunslingers and sheriffs and outlaws, and I find that I keep closer to the truth than I normally do, not glossing over the gore or the maddening malaise between stings. He tells me a story about a geisha and his brother that I will definitely file away as blackmail, and when the bottle is empty, he is purring contentedly against my shoulder, and I wish for the world that I never had to leave.

"...Hey, Han?"

"Hmmm?"

"...I'm glad you came back."

He leans up, looking to me, the crease between his eyebrows displaying his concern. "Of course."

My fingers trail along his beautiful skin, and I let out a deep sigh. "I really thought we were done."

He moves to crawl over me, a leg between mine. "Jesse McCree," he warns me, a finger in my face. "You stop that." He gave me a quick kiss, so quick I couldn't answer it. "I just gave you a piece of rock that has been in my family for centuries. That is a token. A reminder." He shook his head. "I do not give such a thing to just anyone. Understand me?"
The words he'd echoed in the heat of the moment come back to me, and the knot in my stomach untwists. "You sure?"

"Would I be playing 'spooks' if I was not sure?" he answered back, a croak in his voice.

I chuckle. "Yer also drunk."

"I am not drunk," he insists, even as he sways. He pinches my side and I protest. "How dare you."

"Alright, alright!" I agree, one hand in defense, the other sliding over his hip... "Alright." I let myself smile. "I believe you."

"You had better," he warns me, and he leans down for another kiss. It is lazy and decadent and feels like the seal of a promise.

Chapter End Notes

References:
"Turning Japanese" by the Vapors, which as an added bonus is a song about a strung out lover who is missing his obsession, his lover, his fix. Psyched Lone Ranger indeed.
ALSO! Unlisted rooms are totally a thing! I imagine it's crazy useful for discreet spy folk, but if you or someone you know is, for example, being stalked or harassed or sexually abused, you can check into a hotel, tell them you need to be unlisted and they will tell anyone who asks that they've never heard of you. Great way to lose someone who is trying to hurt you, and they will purposefully put you in the back where it's easier for you to run away from the asshole coming after you. Seriously. Use this service if you need to, it could save a life.
"Hai-ya!" is shamelessly stolen from Jackie Chan Adventures.
Adjustments

Chapter Summary

The naming of dragons is a difficult matter. It isn't just one of your holiday games... Jesse obliges and gets a phone (to the amazement and mischief of the Usagis) and takes his new guardian home.

Chapter Notes

Yeah, that's right! I quoted *CATS*. WHATCHA GONNA DO ABOUT IT? NOTHIN'. Because Munkustrap is a fucking bad ass, and you wish you could do a flat split. I'm not going to even go into Rum Tum Tugger or Mephistopheles. *hums "Pekes & Pollicles" to himself*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I stepped out of the shitty motel without another word to the help desk, twirling my keys in my fingers and whistling a jaunty tune I couldn't put a name to. The evening was coming in strong, dusk peeking in over the skyline as I stopped by a phone store on my way back to the Rabbit, finding a pre-paid option that I could drop if need be, but with a good data plan. I stepped outside of the shop, stabbed in the number I certainly hadn't memorized or anything (not that he had me repeat it five times to be sure. I had it after two) and sent him a message.

I don't know what I had expected, but a cute little usagi cartoon blowing kisses at me wasn't on the top of the list. "What in the fresh hell," I wondered aloud to myself. Hanzo Shimada was full of surprises.

I made it back to the shop before 8p, parking my truck in my usual space. I couldn't help but toss my head this way and that as if my tail would be conspicuous. I didn't see anything out of the ordinary, but I made a note of what cars were there, what buildings, and I might have to scout the neighborhood anew with fresh eyes. I might have to ask Moko-san for more intel on how to spot local Yakuza tails.

I stepped into the bar and was greeted by guests. Kenshin was back and gave me an earful for not being here.

"Come on! I come to show you off to my friends and you aren't here!"

"Well, gee, Kenshin-san, if I had known..." I snapped my finger, shaking my head. "I am so sorry."

"Is okay, I still love you. I love this guy!"

I shared finger guns with him, and a grin. "How many Bites you already had?"

"Three! You should make them on the house for your absence!"
"You wish!" I called back. Meiko gave me a tired smile.

"McCree-san," she greeted, arms opening to me.

"O-ho. I get a hug." I took it, squeezing her.

"I was worried you would not come back," she admitted. "You've been..." She shrugged. "Edgy. For a while now."

"Edgy?" I echoed. "Lord. Y'all worry about me somethin' fierce, don't you?"

" Mostly me... But Tenshi, too."

I gave her a soft smile. "I assure you, edginess has been dispelled, and I even ate."

She gasped and I chuckled. "Ancestors be praised."

"And... Oh, I know you'll love this." I reached into my back pocket and revealed the little black phone, sleek and slim.

She squeaked. "McCree-san got a phone! Ancestors be praised!" This time she actually clapped her hands together in a prayer and beamed at the roof. I laughed.

"I know, I know... Yuk it up." I slipped into the office, shutting the door before I pulled the Shimada dragon from my pocket. My grin faded into something a little more tender as my fingers traced the lines of it... That wicked smirk. I could even imagine he wore the same mustache as his master. I set him on the desk and took off my jacket. "Ought to name you somethin'," I told him, as if he could answer. "Rest assured it'll be cheesy. I do nothing with dignity." I sat in my chair and pulled out a post-it note, adding the spectacles I refused to let anyone know I used and switched on my phone.

I didn't expect to have a message already.

_I miss you already._

My heart leapt into my throat. I blinked away what I told myself weren't tears. _Good god, this man will be the death of me._ I swiped open the phone, my thumb tracing the edge of it. I bit my lip and punched back a reply.

_Gee, I'm touched. Forgive me been a while since I had one of these things. Im slow._ It took me longer than I would let anyone know to type all that, but I did. I moved to change the string of digits into a discreet 'H', sure I could come up with something better later. Before I could even finish, another one came in. An [image].

It was him, blowing me a kiss, and my face crumpled. He looked... sweet. Happy. Like a kid talking to his crush. Not like the pushing-40 heir to a Yakuza empire with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Me: Well dont u look prettier n a picture

I wasn't sure what I was going to do if he was going to torment me with such cuteness at all hours of the day and night...

Another.

H: Haha. I am in a picture. Silly cowboy.
And then that kissy-faced rabbit again.

I sighed. *This is your life now, Jesse.* I smiled.

J: Prettier than a picture. Turn of phrase

I waited, giving the screen a lopsided smile.


J: Sure well go with that

I went to protest that I had work to do and--

Another picture. This one, of a very familiar bundle of leathers piled on the counter. Hidden behind the kimono, and only visible from the higher angle. My heart dropped.

H: You forgot something.

I felt sick, pressing a fist to my lips. *How the hell did I forget that?*

J: Shit I'm sorry

J: Im gonna need that back

How the hell did I forget my gun?!?

H: I will bring it to you. Do not worry. I will take good care of it.

J: Please do. Shes very precios to me.

I hit the send button, feeling a panic rise in me...

H: She? I see. Does she have a name?

There was bile in the back of my throat. I couldn't put this cheery, friendly, happy Hanzo that I had left with the wary one whom I had intimidated with the very pistol he was asking about with familiarity.

J: Peacekeeper

J: She's an antique. Be careful with her.

H: I will treat her with the utmost respect.

*How he hell did I forget my gun?*

My fingers tapped, anxious.

J: Look Im at the Rabbit. Ill be here if you can drop it off. But I g2 get back 2 work

And then, a hesitation...

J: Luv u

It felt just as hard to say in text as in real life, and I didn't even type it right.
H: Aishiteru! Have fun. Maybe I surprise you. Maybe... Maybe not.

I told myself to calm... I'd just gotten out of practice carrying her around, is all. So when I did, and then I took it off, I forgot...

Out of practice is all. No need to panic, Jesse. Not like you left it just anywhere. Hanzo has it.

This was an inadvertent test of how much I trusted this man. Rationally, I knew I... Well, probably shouldn't, and yet I might. He hadn't done me wrong... Yet. Technically. Short of disappearing on me and stealing my truck once, but to be fair, he brought it back.

...But god, losing the gun was like losing my hand all over again.

My thumb moved over the screen. I wondered what 'aishiteru' meant, but if it meant what I thought it did, I probably would be better off not asking an Usagi. Maybe I wait until I got home to verify that one.

J: I wont hold my breath just in case. Be safe, baby.

I pulled up my number and started copying it down.

H: You too, cowboy. Make lots of yen!

I gave a shy smile.

J: Fistful of Dollars ;)

...Good lord. I gave him a smiley, I thought.

H: Haha! Kurosawa would roll in his grave.

Hot damn. He knows about that. As if I could like him any more. I smiled, finishing off the number, and sent a last text.

J: Really tho. Ur distractin

I set it on silent, kissed the black screen as if it were him, and stuck it in my pocket. I opened the door and almost stepped out before I spotted my dragon. I doubled back, wrapping it lovingly in my jacket, and tucked it over my paperwork, where no one would have any reason to move it. I touched a kiss to my fingers and transferred it to the bundle, and then slipped out.

"[I know you are old, but my goodness,]" Usagi teased me.

"Ha ha." I held out the note and stuck it under the bar. "Should y'all need me." She ghosted over, pulling out her own phone and immediately began to add my number to her phone.

"You want a goofy picture to go with it?" I teased her.

"No, I'm just going to put baka as your name in all caps. That'll suffice." I laughed, and she smiled, eyes glittering. "Moving up in the world, McCree-san. Next, you'll have a computer and go web surfing."

"I go web surfin'," I insisted. "All this music you hear is from my personally curated Spotify playlist."

"Spotify?" she echoed. "God, next you'll tell me you have a MySpace, too. Those are ancient."
"And still around," I teased.

"Ai-ya..." she sighed. "Oh! Table four wants another round of Scorpion Bites, but he says you have to do the party trick."

I snorted, and looked over at Kenshin's table. "Kenshin-san!"

"Hai!" he answered back.

"Are you bein' demandin' to my Usagi-chan?"

"Hai!" he answered back, grinning.

"Ooh, you cheeky bugger," I muttered. "Is that four or five?"

"Five!" he said, holding out a hand, fingers outstretched. "You must come drink with us!"

"See, now yer bein' demandin' with me," I warned him, tilting up my hat. "You really want a six-foot drunk cowboy singin' bad Elvis over you?"

"That is what I am here for!" he answered, his friends laughing. "Entertain me!"

"Oh, yer gonna get it now..." I said, racking up the shot glasses, the bottles, the limes... Usagi just laughed.

"He's been insufferable for an hour now," she teased.

"Kenshin-san, you been tormentin' my Usagi? Oh, you're in trouble."

"I am drunk!" he protested. "I am always trouble when I am drunk."

"Well, don't act surprised when there's an extra $50 on yer tab, alright?"

"It's in yen, I'll be fine," he said.

"I'm scared," one of his friends said, as she bit her lip.

"Buildin' me up, eh, Kenshin-san?"

"Always! I only bring you fresh blood. For Elvis!"

I laughed. "You crazy bugger... Alright, folks! Watch how it's done! We're gonna line these up all pretty, and spin the bottles -- whoop! Nice helpin' of each..."

I presented, and we drank. 8 became 9. Hanzo sent me another 'progress pic' of my darling safely tucked in a discreet bag with a selfie and a thumbs up. 'Safe and sound! ;3' Meiko pointedly leaned over my arm to see and I pulled my phone away with an "Excuse you?" and she giggled. 9 became 10, and Meiko was replaced with Tenshi, and the two of us made quick work of whatever came our way. We laughed, spinning drinks and presenting drinks... At one point, a party of 8 (9, after a girl slipped in half an hour late) taking two tables, and we lined up Bites simultaneously, to the cheers of all. 10 became 12 (why am I already checking my phone compulsively every time I get the chance?) and Tenshi and I took ridiculous photos of each other for our contacts. I labeled him "Tenshi-Yojimbo" and he laughed.

A little after 1, I got a text from Hanzo.
H: It seems I will not be able to steal a visit from you, cowboy. I am sorry. I have an early
appointment in the morning, or I would steal away anyway. I will keep your lady safe until I have
the time to come again.

And another selfie of him, pouting and hugging the bag like a sad puppy. I must've made the
'Awww...' out loud because Tenshi slipped over to see, quieter than Meiko had been. I moved my
phone away too late, judging by his wide eyes.

"That is disturbing," he muttered.

"Mind your own business," I answered, grinning.

"I am scared to ask," he added.

I hesitated for a moment. "He has my gun," I said, low and quiet. And then I looked at him
sideways and laughed. "I have a gun. An actual gun, that's not a euphemism." Well... "An old
revolver. I don't take her out much, I left her behind."

"I don't know if that's better or worse than what I was thinking."

"Usagi-yojimbo, you got a filthy mind," I purred. "I like that."

"I wish I didn't sometimes..."

I pointedly texted a reply [J: Get some sleep sweetheart. I appreciate you takin care of her 4 me]
and pocketed it. "Still can't believe I left my damn gun behind. I've never done that before."

"Well..." He had his hands in the soapy water. "That's usually a sign things are getting serious
when you start leaving things behind..."

"Yeah, but this isn't a jacket or a sock or a spare shirt or anything. This is my gun. That's like...
leavin' my hat." I tugged at it, self-consciously. "I don't just leave my gun." I sighed. "Sign of how
rarely I carry it anymore. I took her off and forgot I had her with me."

"You're one of those guys that names his pieces, aren't you?" he teased.

I tried to scowl. "What if I am?"

And he laughed. "Oh boy. What do you call it? Sarsaparilla?"

"How dare you..." I crossed my arms, refusing to answer him. He giggled, nudging me sideways.

"Come on. Tell me. Now I have to know."

"Now I don't wanna tell ya..."

"Fine. I'll make up my own..." He sighed. "Maria. Ooh, 'Tequila'. That would fit you."

"Staaaahp..."

"Scorpion! 'Scorpion' would work. As in 'Scorpion Bite'--?"

I snickered. "You are ridiculous."

"Or Jackalope... Jack Rabbit. Tumbleweed..."
"Who names their gun Tumbleweed?!" I protested.

"Coyote Ugly..."

"That's a bar, Jimbo."

"Elvis..."

I snorted. "Sure. But he's nicknamed 'The King'." I shook my head. At first, I was being contrary. Now this was too much fun.

"Maybe it's Dolly, then... Or Daisy."

I looked at him sideways. "That's reachin'."

He shrugged. "I'm running out of things..."

"I noticed you didn't say Clint Eastwood."

"That would be too obvious."

"Oh, okay--" I broke into a fit of giggles. "Oh, god..." I clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Jimbo, you make me laugh."

"Tell meee..." he teased.

"Maybe if you behave," I answered.

"I will ask Moko-san! He might know."

I snorted. "He doesn't even remember my first name, I don't think he's gonna guess the name of my gun." I moved to the tables, doing the rounds, but short of a fresh beer, things were quiet. I finished the circuit and came back as he was finishing the dishes.

"...Maybe it is the Gun With No Name."

I grinned. "Hell, that's poetic. I almost like that better."

"Ah, but that would make you a liar."

"I didn't say she had a name. I said I might be the kind to name it, I didn't say I did."

"Ah, but you had something you did not want to tell me. You would have said 'no' if you did not name it. You drag it on for sport."

"Well, excuse me, Mr. Psycho-clever."

He snickered. "That doesn't make any sense."

I checked my phone, and there was a [H: Goodnight cowboy ;3 Sweet dreams when you get there.] there that softened my mischief into fondness. I clicked it off and put it back in my pocket, sighing. I had a new filthy habit. It was a silly one, but more common than drinking or cigarettes. And damn it, it made my heart happy.

We were quiet a while. I offered to make nachos, and he declined. I made myself a rum and coke and sipped it while he restocked the bar. I let him finish bringing up the tomato juice for the
morning's bloody marias.

"...Peacekeeper," I said, quiet.

He looked up at me. "Oro?"

I smirked. "I said... She's called 'Peacekeeper'." I sipped my cola. "My old commander, back in the Overwatch days -- he gave her to me. It was a gift when I earned my first Purple Heart."

He stared at me. And then his eyes looked at my arm and then to me. "...Overwatch?"

I smirked. "Yep." I tugged at my hat. "Didn't tell you that, did I?"

He blinked. "You were in Overwatch?"

"Yes, indeedy."

"But that would make you..." His face went pale, eyes wide. "McCree McCree. Deadeye McCree."

I regarded him. "You know me, son?"

He swallowed. "You got a bounty on your head."

"Try not to say that so loud," I teased, but my voice was low and warning. I set my drink down. "You wanna try me for it?"

He shook his head. "No, sir. I-- If I'd known--" His head bowed. "I would not have been so disrespectful. I meant it only in good fun."

"It was taken in good fun," I assured him, clapping a hand on his shoulder. "But if someone comes for me when I'm unarmed, I'll know who to come back and haunt. A'ight?"

He bowed. "Yes, sir."

Now that was curious. Overwatch had been... God, almost a decade ago. And it didn't end so well. A lot of people were less than happy about the whole situation by the time they shut it down, and the fans and supporters became the exception rather than the rule. There had been a time where I could be recognized, walking alongside Tracer or Reinhardt, but I'd always liked to stay out of the media spotlight, preferring cramped quarters like bars and private parties. I was a homebody, and yes, a wanted man. And here I was, walking around with a target on my back as the eccentric Gaijin in a weird pub in Koenji, flirting with Yakuza princes and leaving behind my left hand and talking about war stories with my help. This was reckless, all kinds of reckless.

I eyed Tenshi, and he was quiet the rest of the night. I split the jar with him, and he took it with his usual, "Thanks, boss." I made quick work of the till, since we'd already done everything to prep for close, and I made myself another cola. I carefully unwrapped my dragon and set it on the desk, considering it as I put my jacket on. If I left it here, odds were Genji could find it...

I pocketed it, grabbed my drink and slipped out just after 230. I drove home, listening to the meandering groove of some midnight radio show, and quietly crept to my apartment. Keys. Boots. Hat. Refill the coffee pot. Clean the dishes in the sink. I felt the weight of the jade dragon on my side as I crept down the hall, and pulled him out.

Usagi. Boba. Sashimi. Sushi... Hmm. Sushi. He gave me a cheeky grin and I smiled.

Sushi it is.

I set the dragon on my dresser, nestled in amongst the belts that I still hadn't put away, but I do so now. I tidy up the place, putting clothes in the actual basket, knowing the day after tomorrow is my day off and I'll need to do a load. I strip, adding that to it, and the shower is hot and wonderful, easing the pleasant aches and pains of a good roll in the hay. I am contented, even feeling loved, and if my gun is with someone else, it's not a stranger, but someone I trust. I crawl into bed, wearing only my boxers, and spend a minute figuring out the camera before I send Hanzo my own selfie, labeled FYEO, of me, scruffy and naked, cheeky grin, and my own thumbs up, Sushi standing guard above me. [Me and Sushi are home and ready for bed. Wish you were here. :* ]

I wait for a long while to see if he'll answer, but when he doesn't, I content myself with the knowledge that, yes, he is asleep.

Sleep well, my love, I think, pressing a kiss to my screen. I set the phone on the dresser, marking the battery level to see how badly I'll be fucked if I go an evening without charging it. You know. Things that are good to know. I roll over with a sigh, and for the first time in a long while, it doesn't trouble me to fall asleep, a soft smile on my face.

I will say, for the longest time, I didn't like sushi. But living in Japan, it's plentiful, and I've learned there are bits of it I do like. A little california roll, some spicy tuna, some tamagoyaki... I get it, the rice texture is nice. The sake and soy and edamame and miso and all that, the decadence, the freshness... I see the appeal. And yeah, I've found that I can crave it myself on occasions. To be honest, even the fresh fish is something I'm less and less weirded out about. I know the Hawaiians have poke, which ain't too different, but it's... just something I'm adjusting to.

Just like Japan. And just like Hanzo. And yet... I don't mind at all.

Chapter End Notes

#SushiDragon #SorryNotSorry

For fun: AO3 likes to 'correct' foreign words. But it knew Teriyaki, Hentai and Yuri. Not Yaoi! But Yuri. What even, guys?

"My first purple heart" because he probably has a few of them that he hasn't been awarded because Blackwatch missions.

And yes, I'm sorry, Jesse does horrid text speak, while Hanzo is prim and proper and keeps it grammatically correct always. Know that it PAINS ME to write it like that, but it's what he would do. Because I'd like to see you text with one hand. Especially the wrong hand. THE THINGS I SACRIFICE FOR MY ART.

Also, there's a Critical Role joke in there for you #Critters.
Black

Chapter Summary

Fluff, angst, silliness... This one's got it all. Shameless product placement for Tuzki, Genji drops in, and a heart-to-heart with Hanzo while he's still too damned far away. Hope you have your tissues ready.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I've become a statistic.

On a good stretch, I can go 20 minutes, or even a solid hour and a half without checking my phone during a rush. I think the national average was something like three and a half minutes, and I already feel like a lovesick teenager checking my phone obsessively. I even put a ringer on specifically for him, which keeps me from going crazy looking all the time, but the downside is a distinctive coyote howl (shut up) that can get grating to the Usagis if we're mid-conversation.

Mind you, I doubt it's actually 'grating', I think they're just teasing me.

We went a little over a week without seeing each other. It didn't feel like it, with silly selfies and emoticon conversations and 'ransom negotiations' over Peacekeeper. It was more entertaining to pretend he was holding out on me than that he was just too caught up in work to see me, too paranoid to be seen, like we were a guilty pleasure, a filthy habit, a wicked indulgence...

I liked to think we were a fun secret instead of the shame and fear. The jokes helped reinforce the happy lie.

I had the day off. Even if I couldn't see him, I wanted to. I wanted to so badly. The third night he'd been 'abroad' (though he wouldn't say where) and had been up late, and we'd had some rather delightful phone sex. God, I hadn't done that since I was... Well. I'd rather not put a number on that. He'd sent me pictures of non-descript hotel rooms, and promised a souvenir when it was all said and done, but more than anything that he missed my face. I missed his face, too. So I had decided to get a gift of my own. Problem is... I had no idea what to get.

I decided to drive out a bit to a big toy shop I knew was out in Harajuku. I was picking up on a distinctively childish streak in my Hanzo-san that seemed to be his own indulgence, a private side that he was able to share with me that he had to hide from his Yakuza family. I rather liked the idea of something sweet and soft and pocket-sized he could carry with him, a reply to the Shimada dragon that I did not have the nerve to look up for value. I'm sure it would make me sick if I thought of it as anything other than a touching gift.

[H: Ohaio!]

[J: Konnichi wa!]

[J: How r u 2day hanzome?]  

[H: Aiya. You're really going to keep doing that.]
[J: Every day.]

I smiled, hesitating inside the door of the store, picking a wall and deciding to just cruise... Knowing he would distract me the entire time.

[H: No fair.]

[J: :) ]

I moved past board games and puzzles, knowing that'd be a bit... weird. And not discreet. And who'd want to do a puzzle eighteen thousand times? Didn't seem terribly romantic.

[H: How is the shop today? Moko-san causing trouble?] 

[J: Off 2day. Dropped laundry off at a service and decided 2 go shipping for a bit.] 

I scoffed, catching the typo late and correcting it.

[H: Exciting! What are we shopping for?] 

[J: Its a surprise] 

As I expected, a cartoon sticker -- it was another one of the Tuzki ones, which I found was one of his favorite sets, along with an absurd fish-in-a-suit thing. I imagine he liked the rabbit because of obvious reasons, but Tuzki was a snarky, sneaky little bugger.

...Which gave me an idea.

[H: what is iiiiiiiiiiiiit????]

I chuckled.

[J: Its a surprise!] 

[J: Maybe I show u when I find it]

[J: Or maybe...] 

I left it to trail off as I found the plushies section, and scanned the crowd of colors and faces and shapes for the one I wanted...

Another Tuzki, this one scraping at the walls in desperation.

I let him hang and hissed in victory when I found him. He had a whole segment of wall to himself. Tuzkis of all manner of sizes -- tiny little phone charms, teacups and coffee mugs, printed playing cards, plushes from pocket-sized to panda-sized, wall clocks, calendars, notebooks, pencils, t-shirts... 

It was a Tuzki fiesta.

[H: Jesseeeee............]

[J: How do u feel about pet pandas?] 

I snickered to myself, eyeing the ridiculous giant Tuzki. God, he was almost as big as I was... Certainly bigger around.
[H: You better be kidding.]

I smirked. I snapped a picture, and sent it to him.

[J: What, too much?]

He sent me a nosebleed cartoon and I laughed.

[H: WAAAAAAAAAAAAANT.........]

Hanzo Shimada used a lot of proper language and punctuation, except when he was being absolutely fucking adorable.

[J: I tease. I was thinking of getting one for the shop. Maybe for the Usagis.]

[H: I will be an Usagi!!!!!!]

I shook my head... But I did look at the phone charms, finding one I liked for myself. I did get a few for the Usagis, not sure if they would really use them, but thinking it would be a fun gesture. And I found a pocket-sized one that I thought would suit my purpose.

I snapped a picture. [J: How about 1 of these? He can fit in ur bag so u can take an Usagi w u when u leave me again :((()]

[H: I am sorry!!!!!!]

[H: Yes please!!!!!!]

[J: Alright. But u gotta give me Peacekeeper first.]

A flailing Tuzki.

[H: Noooo!!!!!!]

[H: No fair!!!!!!]

[J: So fair!!!!!!]

I chuckled to myself, cradling my bunnies in one arm. That giant Tuzki was way more than I wanted to ever spend on a plushie, but maybe another time.

[H: Jesse-san you are so mean to me!!!!]

[J: I can put it back...]

[H: Noooo!!!!!!]

Another sticker... God, I loved this man.

...The idle thought sobered me. I hated thinking like that. Love never did me well. And yet... I did.

What was I going to do when this was all over and done with? Genji was right. I wasn't the kind to retire. And even if I did. Would I be the secret squeeze of a yakuza prince for the short window of time until they found out about us? How long would that be? Six months? Maybe a year?

[J: <3 I miss you]
Another Tuzki, this one blowing kisses.

I sighed. Well. I had a bounty on my head. I'm likely to die any day anyway, right?

I bought my bunnies and drove back to the shop, teasing Rufio and Ami with the little bunnies. Ami squealed, and Rufio rolled his eyes, but he pocketed it, muttering something about a girlfriend. I tucked the rest by the register, sure they would disperse themselves, and sent Hanzo a picture of a peevish Tuzki, arms crossed, sitting in my office.

[J: Im locking him up and ull never get him until she is back in my arms!]

[H: Cruel!!!!]

I made myself a quesadilla, tucking my hat low when a customer tried to talk to me (it was a regular who laughed, offering to buy me a drink when he realised I was off -- I obliged him, of course), and slipped out with a soda and the treated beer tucked away with my lunch.

Laundry. My weekly purge of the place, and--

Was that Genji?

I parked my truck and got out. Sure enough, scarred hoodlum Genji Shimada put out a cigarette and met me.

"Hey, you," I greeted, mildly confused. "I thought we were meeting at the Rabbit."

"Well, considering someone is following your car, I imagine by now they know where you work. And live. I look less out of place here, being sober and grumpy."

I offered him a smile. "Well, come on up. I got a beer if you'd like it."

"Like I would say no." He sniffed. "What did you bring me for lunch?"

"Hey now. That's my lunch. I offered you a beer, be nice."

He snickered, following me up. I popped the beer for him, sipping my own soda, and cracked open the quesadilla, grumping at him as he stole a slice, but not stopping him.

"So what's up?"

"Well... My guess was right. The call on your car was from the Shimada clan."

I paused, my own beer caught on the edge of my omnic elbow. "No shit?"

"Afraid not. Good news is, they're sending in schmuck kids as customers. They're still sniffing you out."

That made me nervous... "Sure they aren't just schmuck kid customers?"

He shrugged. "To be fair, that is your demographic. But some of them move like Yakuza."

"Well... It is Tokyo. Lots of those around."

"True..."

*Howoo-oo-oo-ooooo...*
Genji froze, bottle to his lips, and lowered it. "The hell was that?"

"Coyote?" I offered a sheepish grin. Dear god, was I blushing? "It's a phone notification. Don't worry about it."

I realized that Genji had distracted me upon arriving home. Hanzo didn't exactly ping me for a play-by-play, but there was a 'drive safe!' and 'let me know you get home safe okay?' thing he did that made me feel like someone actually cared if I existed or not. Made me feel wanted and loved and stuff, and he would pester anyway, so...

...And I'd been home plenty long enough to have let him know I was home safely. I didn't have to check to know it would have five question marks at the end of it.

God, how did I get like this?

Genji narrowed his eyes at me. "You. Have a phone." It wasn't a question.

I tried to shrug, nonchalant. "Yeah. Helps me keep in touch with the Usagis."

"Right. Like you're not there almost every day with a store phone."

"I'm not always at the shop..." Yes, I was.

"Yes, you are." He tilted his head. "Wasn't it you who said we should do this without numbers? Something about a 90 billion double dollar bounty on your head..."

"It went up to 96 last year," I said, trying to steal a different topic of conversation. "Apparently I left a distinctive calling card at a wetwork job in Pakistan. Which is nuts, because I never work the Middle East if I can help it."

"..And yet, you have a phone."

"I also went to the shooting range a month ago," I said. "And yet... Still here."

He rolled his eyes. "Next you're going to make an ad for the Rabbit with your own face and name."

"I use my name already," I said.

"You are reckless," he hissed.

"Gee, I was going to ask you if you wanted to watch me compete at the monthly marksmanship contest. Nice cash prize in it."

He cursed under his breath. "You have a death wish."

I tried not to be sour, my lips a tight line as I spoke into my beer. "Genji, when have I not?"

He didn't say anything... Just took a swig. He knew better than most.

I squeezed my eyes shut as the coyote howled again. In this context, maybe compulsively checking my phone was less hazardous to my health. It was certainly more discreet.

"Maybe you should check that," Genji growled. "Your Rabbit could be in flames."

I held my tongue and reached into my back pocket for the phone, tiny Tuzki doll dropping from the bottom of it.
"Oh my god... Jesse, you've gone native."

"Says the native."

Two messages from Hanzo.

[H: Let me know you made it home safe, okay????? ]

[H: Jesseeeee.......]

Excessive punctuation... I'm worrying him.

[J: Sorry darling. Something came up. Im home ok.]

"Well? Is it on fire?"

"No... But I got everyone one of these silly little keychains." I tried a smirk. "Ami was thanking me."

His eyes narrowed at me. My heart raced for a moment at the thought he might call my bluff, and ask to see the text. Genji had a weird intuition about if I was lying to him sometimes.

Don't stare someone in the eye. Especially if you're lying to them. People instinctively make eye contact when they're being persuasive, to engage and encourage you to believe them. Liars tend to look you in the eye. Honest people don't feel the need. I sipped my beer, smacking my lips, looking around at the place.


"As it is. I was just gonna do laundry, so..." I shrugged, trying to be uninteresting.

The coyote howled again and I clenched my jaw. Jesus, Hanzo. Not now.

"Getting rid of me so quickly?" he pried. He took a swig. "I've half my beer left." And then, to spite me, he stole another slice of my quesadilla.

Damn it.

"You know, you should come by the shop more. The food is great." I tried to channel my frustration there, to seem like I was irritable about him stealing my lunch (not that I had paid for it, and really, should I be that irritable about it?) and not frustrated by the fact I was trying to lie to one Shimada and side chatter the other.

"I think I shall." He dropped into my beanbag chair, content to torment me a while.

I set my beer aside, and poked in the fridge for something else to supplement the quesadilla... I decided on just pulling out some chips and dumping them in a bowl, sticking them in the microwave for a few seconds to be nice and warm.

Meanwhile, I stabbed a text.

[J: Ur bro is here. Cant talk.]

And then I set the damned fucking thing on silent, dropping it to the counter with a clatter. The microwave beeped and I shuffled a few into the box, grabbing another salsa cup from the fridge and dropping it in with the other chips.
From the corner of my eye, I saw my phone light up. [H: OK. Talk to you soon. :* ]

I sighed... This such a mess.

I left my phone there, knowing Genji couldn't know my swipe password (because how could he guess I changed my lazy 2 to an H?) nor my fingerprint lock, but being too paranoid anyway.

"Although, if you're just jealous because your Cookie Jam score is falling behind, we could swap digits," I teased, bat my eyelashes at him as I passed over the bowl of chips.

He snorted. "Will you get me a Tuzki phone charm too?"

I hesitated, beer halfway to my lips. He knew Tuzki?

Of course he knew Tuzki. Who didn't? I tossed aside a casual conversation on the topic and scoffed. "You can get yer own damn phone charm. I don't see you tending bar for me until two in the morning."

He was definitely watching me. I was raising suspicion. Damn it, Jess, act casual.

"Maybe I should. Free food, cute phone charms, witty banter..."

"Hey, food isn't always free. Only if you stay late."

"Oh. Well."

"And you know I don't date co-workers, baby, what will the children think?"

This time the glare came with a smirk, and I grinned.

"Asshole."

"Oh, you think this is bad? Show up to work late, asking me to cover a shift so you can go to your girlfriend's for a conjugal."

He laughed... There was a lingering metallic tone to it from the respirator and stabilizer deep within. It still gave me the wibblies.

"Conjugal. Fuck you."

"And if you wanted to break in the office, I'm afraid I've already christened it."

His eyes widened. "Oh my god, really?"

And I burst out laughing. "I'm kidding, god..."

...And yet, he seemed to believe me, which was both heart-wrenching and hilarious.

Did he really think I would have found someone to bone and do so at the bar?

And right behind it: God, I should, though. I'd love to see Hanzo pressed against the door, hand clapped over his mouth to keep him quiet so the guests can't hear--

"...Eurgh. I can hear your cock growing hard from here. Just stop."

He threw a chip at me and I snickered. "Mijo, you had a pretty lady in the base and you didn't share?" I teased, using someone else's voice.
"Jefe is displeased with you," he added, doing the same. "Sparring match. Now. We see who wins, your libido or your ego."

I laughed, face turning red, chip in my hand. "You know he said that to me once?"

"I know, mother fucker, I was there!"

And we both laughed... A mess of giggles.

"Puto! Get that stupid hat out of my face."

"But boss, it looks so nice on you..."

"It doesn't look nice on anybody. I got my hat, you got yours. Don't cross the streams."

"Cross the-- God!"

Another mess of laughing, and I felt the anxiety in my heart reluctantly ease. If he was thinking of Reyes, he wasn't thinking of my phone in the other room.

He hummed, taking a swig. "Man, he had the best lines."

"The serenading?"

"God... You remember that one time we were bullshitting musicals, and Jack walked in?"

"I'd never seen him turn so RED."

"He must've talked to Winston about it because a couple days later he asked me what a Gaston was."

I snorted, almost choking on a chip. "Oh my god!"

"I just sighed and went, 'Boy, what a guy... That Gaston.' "

"You didn't."

"I did... And Tracer walked in right then and about bust out laughing."

I giggled. "Man, it's too much fun messing with him..."

"You know, I was always mildly terrified he'd be given an ounce of power and lord it over us like a school principal or something, all overly-proper bureaucracy..."

"Oh good lord..." I moaned. "I could see that."

"With a little clipboard. And a voice recorder."

"HA! 'Well, according to my research..."

"'Given the eyewitness accounts and your previous history... McCree, I'm pretty sure this is your fault.'"

"Hehehe! It's always my fault."

"Because you are always up to something."
"I can't help it, I get *bored,*" I said.

"Man, I remember hearing Jack and Gabe once, Jack's all, 'That boy could do drills all day long and be grinning. How do you discipline him?' And Gabe just went, 'I just smack him and call him an asshole. It works.'"

"*Liar.*"

"Fine, I lied. It was Ana."

"Okay, *that* I believe."

We both giggled... and my smile faded. "God, Ana. You know whatever happened to her?"

"Last I heard, she'd ghosted. Some people say she's dead. I'm not entirely sure."

I felt a rock drop in the pit of my stomach. "God... Amari dead. I don't think I could handle that..." I drank. "What about her girl? Fareeha?"

He snorted. "She's in the Egyptian Air Force, man."

"Get out!"

He nodded. "Yep. Walking in her mother's footsteps. You be careful. You'll run into her one day and she'll out-flirt you."

I barked out a laugh! "You take that back!"

"'Ibn, I learned from the best,'" he teased, the high pitch coming out robotic. "'Have you been told today?'"

"Hehehehe... Oh, Amari was the best for those. And god forbid I was cooking."

"Eurgh. The noises she made were indecent. I even saw her make Gabriel blush once or thrice."

"Seriously..."

Genji munched on a chip... and he sighed. "...I miss them."

"Yeah. Me, too." I drank. Last of it. "...Hard to believe it went down the way it did."

"Yeah..."

I looked at him. "You know, I..." I tapped my fingers on the bottle. "When I left. It was already pretty bad."

"Hey. You ask me, you were the smartest one of all of us." He regarded me. "Mind. You probably knew Reyes the best. You could see what he was becoming."

I nodded, working my jaw. "It scared me."

"It was scary shit," he agreed. "And I know you don't scare easy."

"I do not," I set the beer beside me and nibbled on my quesadilla. "What did they say about me? When I left?"

"Well..." He scratched his hair. "Be honest, a lot of people said some unkind things. Jack thought
you were a coward, couldn't take the job. Amari was concerned you'd gone off the deep end, done a few too many Deadeyes to be right off... That we were better off without you. You were a bomb waiting to go off."

I tasted bile at the back of my throat. "She said that?"

"Not in so many words... But that you were probably best left alone. I don't remember how she phrased it, and I remember being a bit biased at the time, but I had the impression she thought you were cracking -- like Jack -- and that you were better off getting out of Overwatch for a while. Like you needed to cool down for your own sanity. Which may have been sour grapes because she had enough shit to handle with the god damn PR mess that Blackwatch was going through at the time."

I chewed on that... and nodded. "That sounds a little more like her. She had a lot of shit juggling at the time."

"And a kid to worry about on top of it."

"Yeah..." I scratched my chin. "I was always a bit cross no one came after me."

He gave me a sad smile. "There was a lot of shit going on, my man. You kinda slipped through the cracks."

I nodded. I looked down to my food and toyed with it. "A lot of shit was slippin' through the cracks. And Reyes was usually on top of things like that. It's how I knew things were going bad." I chewed on a chip, but it didn't appetize me anymore. "When Ohioan went... You know how he gets. Signs up a mass, lights a candle, speaks at the funeral, full nine..." I stared off.

"Yeah. And he'd make as many of us go as weren't nailed to a watch. And even then, he'd hound Jack and Winston for a schedule juggle."

"Exactly. Blackwatch was his crew, and we ran a tight ship." I shook his head. "I mean, I didn't even like Ohioan, but..." I swallowed hard. "I remember. Day after we got back from the mission. I asked him about the funeral, and he'd forgotten all about it."

He stared at me. "You're kidding."

"Honest to god. He asked me, 'What funeral?' And I stared at him. I said, 'For Ohioan'. And man... I'd never seen him break like that."

"...He was really losin' it."

"It was like he'd forgotten my name, like he was losing his mind, he took it so hard. I had offered to take him out for drinks to help him de-stress, figured he was working himself too hard, and he never showed up."

"Fuck."

"Yeah. He was messed up. It scared me. I mean... If Reyes was cracking, what chance did we have?"

He shook his head, downing it. "I didn't know that."

I offered him a sad smile. "Not a fun thing to bring up."

He hummed... And then, when his eyes turned back to me, there was that scrutiny. "Speaking of
not fun to bring up. How goes that heartbreak of yours?"

I bit my lip, but it couldn't hide the reflexive smile when I thought of him. "Three weeks later, I got a fucking apology." I shrugged. "Hotel room... a bottle of tequila. A token from abroad." I tugged my beard. Hanamura wasn't technically abroad, but it might as well have been. "Complained it was work keeping him away," I shrugged again. "We made up."

"Ai-ya..." I had heard that from him so many times... Knowing both of them, it felt so strange now. "It was a guy?"

I laughed. "Did I not say?" I let my eyes glitter with mischief.

"That's your problem, Jesse," he said, waving his empty bottle at me. "Men don't communicate well. It's everywhere, they warn you. You were a nice booty call. Now you're the girl in port. Watch him only talk to you once every couple weeks when he's 'in town'," he said, with finger quotes. "Bet you he's married."

"You're so mean," I whined.

"Jesse, I've seen you do that before. What was that one girl? Ersie? Elsie?"

I bit my lip, remember. "Ursula."

"Ursula. That one. Had five boyfriends. You went to surprise her one day and she was in bed with someone else. It was, what? Paris?"

"Italy," I corrected.

"Ridiculous. I kept trying to tell you, Italians aren't like Hispanics. They openly keep mistresses, it's not the same. But you fell hard." He crunched his chip.

"When was the last time he talked to you?"

I thought of his velvet voice purring over the line, calling my name. I smirked, licking my lips. "Define 'talked'."

He cursed again. "Jesse..."

I giggled. "What can I say? I'm reckless. You know this." I chomped a chip, most of it useless splinters by now.

"When was the last time you saw each other? Face to face?"

I shrugged. "About a week ago?"

"Baka! The apology? Jesse!"

"Hehehe..." I know I was blushing now. "Hey, man, the sex is really great..."

"I hope he beats you," he growled, and I nearly choked on a sliver of a chip. "Please tell me you didn't say 'I love you' first."

My heart twisted. How did he know me so well? "Why do you assume I've said it already?"

"Ai-ya! Because if you didn't, you would say you hadn't! Jesse James McCree, you hopeless bastard. This is your problem, you fall in love too easy..."
I laughed. It was true. "Yeah, and then I get my heart crushed. I wallow in self-pity and drink and watch Tombstone and then I do it all over again..."

"You cried over Doc again, didn't you?"

"Hey, it's emotional."

He sighed. "Hopeless..."

"Oh! Another thing we didn't talk about." I stood, collecting my beer bottle, plate, and his. "Your brother." I took the chance to leave the room while I spoke to help sell the lie.

"Oh yes... Oniisan. How goes?"

"Well, actually..." And I smiled because it wasn't a lie. "He's another reason I bought the damn phone. I was grooming him, you know? Dinner, schmooze, sniff each other's butts and what not..."

He groaned. "Just don't poke it, please." I looked back at him, and he was pinching his bridge. "I know you. Don't do it."

"Would I do that to you?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, far too quickly, giving me a long-suffering look.

I blinked at him, at a loss.

He's right: I would. I did. I do.

"Anyway." I rinsed out the bowl, setting it aside, and sliding the bottles in one bag, the styrofoam for another. The neighborhood trash guy got really uppity about my leftover boxes. "He kept insisting for a phone line, separate from the shop, because, realistically, if I get a job, they'll want a line for me."

"Or they provide one," he said.

"Sure... But I'm kinda playin' stupid with the whole Yakuza thing."

He tilted his head as I dried my hands. "Stupid? Then why does he want a number for you?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe he really likes tequila."

He looked at me, and I realized that could have been a hint. I don't think it clicked in his head, because he frowned.

"That doesn't make a lot of sense."

I shrugged. "I don't know. Yakuza aren't my forte."

Was I shrugging a lot? I did that when I was nervous. I made a note to avoid it. I slid my phone over, flipping it on.

No reply.

"You want another beer?" [J: Hes still here. Sorry]

"Hnn. I don't think so."
I pocketed it, and he stood with a sigh. He looked to me, a lopsided smile. I echoed one.

"Jesse," he said. He clapped a hand on my shoulder, and my smile widened. "You know I love you like a brother."

"The one you're trying to kill, or the Yakuza gangsters?"

"Ha ha..." He waved a finger at me. "You make me want to kill you sometimes, so yes, the first one." And he put the second hand on my shoulder as well, giving me a small shake. "Jesse. Idiot cowboy. Listen to me. Okay?"

"Okay..."

"Let him go."

My face fell, and I blinked. "Sorry?"

"Please." He pointedly looked at the countertops... where there was no phone to be found, and then up at me. "The guy. Who you say is Ami, thanking you for a charm?" His eyes narrowed. "Help does not do that. Especially not for cheesy shit like that."

"Hey, I live for the cheesy shit."

He grinned. "I know you do. Because you're a cheesy shit bastard."

I put my fists on my hips, a mock frown. "Hey now. You might hurt my feelin's."

He shook his head. "Tough." His hands moved closer, squeezing. "I mean it. As a friend... Let him go. This... sexting, phone thing. I know you. You get addicted to it. But when this is all over... You're going to leave Japan. I know you will."

My heart twisted. *How the hell does he know me so well?*

"And when you do..." He tilted his head to catch my eye again, a sympathetic smile. "You'll end it anyway. You're self-destructive. And you'll invite me over for drinks and you'll cry and you'll move on. You always do."

I swallowed hard. *Do I?*

"Suggestion? Do it now. While this is... up in the air. Don't let him play games with you. Don't play games with him. Fall back, wean off, and break it off. For your own sake."

I could taste bile at the back of my throat. I grit my teeth, knowing he meant it as a friend... ...And also knowing I couldn't be as sensible as he was. Never had been. It's why we were such good friends. I was the reckless one. He was the sensibly rebellious one. His had purpose.

"I'll take it under advisement," I said instead, trying to keep my voice even.

"Ha. I haven't heard that one in a while." That was another one of Reyes' phrases. He clapped a hand on my cheek. "I love you, you crazy cowboy. But it pains me to see you broken up like that when you could avoid it altogether." He stepped back, tucking his hood up, his hands in his pockets. "You should walk me downstairs."

I tried to choke down that terrible taste at the back of my mouth as I obliged him. "Demanding little shit. Steal my beer, eat my lunch, mock my texting addiction, unsolicited dating advice..."
"I do it because I love you," he said, sing-song, quiet as we went down the stairs.

"Wants to rob me of my sexual gratification, and then says I can't fuck his brother, neither."

"Aren't you supposed to be quiet for your landlady?" he teased.

"She's havin' a siesta," I drawled.

He chuckled. "Siesta. Funny guy."

We walk to my truck, and he turns to me, walking backward. "I mean it, Jess. For your own sake. Wean off."

"You know that's a hell of a lot easier said than done."

"He abandoned you for weeks," he answered, giving me a pointed eye. "Then shows up with a hotel room and your favorite spirit? It's a bribe. And a booty call."

It was an inside joke, I wanted to say. A token from our first date.

"I respect that you're tryin'a talk sense into me, but that's like tryin'a catch a greasy pig."

"Very difficult," he agreed with a nod and a grin. "But not entirely impossible." He even blew me a kiss, and my heart twisted, feeling a sense of familiarity between the two of them.

"Sayonara," I called.

"Goodbye, Yankee-san."

"You little--"

And he snickered as he ducked around the corner, and I growled...

He knew I hated that.

...And yet, as soon as he was gone and I was turning back to my place, I already had my phone out.


I hit send and waited...

...And waited. I had gone all the way back upstairs, taken off my boots, checked again, popped a beer, took a swig, checked again, flipped the sound back on, carried it to my bedroom, set the beer down, taken off my shirt and dumped my sorry ass into the bed before I checked again.

...Maybe Genji was right. I was addicted.

Howoo-oo-oo-ooooo...

But oh, how my heart soared. I smiled, flipping it open.

[H: I was starting to worry. What happened?]

I tried the voice app variation, knowing I would fuck this up if I typed it. I was in the privacy of my room, no one could give me odd looks here. [J: Usual interrogation. He says Shimada yakuza are definitely tailing the truck and the bar. Ragged on me about having a phone now. Told me not to fuck his brother, and that I should probably dump this guy I'm seeing.]
I sighed. Genji had given me good advice I'd ignored in the past.

Another howl. [H: Guy? What guy?]

And then: [H: OH. You meant me. Sorry.]

I laughed. [J: Yeah.]

And as I hit send, [H: Why does he say that?]

I bit my lip. [J: Long story. Something I would have to tell you in person.]

Right. Let me tell my lover of... four, five times? About my terrible dating history and penchant for self-destructive, self-sabotaging relationships with people that are terrible for me.

[H: Would a phone call suffice?]

I hesitated. I'd meant it as an offhand 'we'll talk about it later' thing, but...

Well. Talking to him did always make things better. I loved the sound of his voice.

[J: I mean... if ur free?]

Reckless, I say again. I kind of hoped he was.

[H: I have a couple hours to kill. Give me a minute.]

I waited, taking another swig of my beer before the phone lit up with the call. I answered, setting it on speakerphone, hearing the static. "Hey, you."

"Jesse-san..." he teased, his voice like fucking velvet... "You know, in Japanese culture, it's very rude to refer to someone as You. Especially someone as important as me."

"And yet, you date a gaijin," I answered. "Someone might think you like disrespect."

"Haha... You tell anyone I kill you."

I chuckled. I sighed, cradling it in my palm. "How's your day been?"

"Oh, it's been boring. Meetings and schmoozing and people telling me how much they admire my last name. You think they were trying to marry in. Hell, some of them are..."

I almost choked on my drink. "You get marriage proposals?"

"Ah, not directly. But invitations to coming out parties, mentions of single daughters, that kind of thing."

"I see..."

"Japanese are subtle. And yet, not so much. So. How is my otouto?"

"Is that me or your brother?"

"Ha... Otouto is brother. Little brother. How is he?"

"Mmm. Paranoid. Worried for me."
"Ah, something we have in common. Someone has to worry about you. You don't seem to care so much for yourself."

It had only been so long... How could he know this about me? "Yeah, well... He seems to think this guy I'm dating is only using me for sex. I'm a glorified booty call. And he caught me texting, says I'm addicted." A dramatic sigh. "I should give up now. Wean off of my addiction, break it off. Before he breaks my heart and proves himself as the cad he is..."

I took a swig. He was awfully quiet.

"...He said that?"

"Yeah. To be fair... I have a bad track record of dating people as incorrigible as I am. Doesn't end well."

He was still quiet. Even when he spoke, it was low. "How interesting."

"Not that I'm calling you incorrigible, mind," I added.

He chuckled, a breathy thing I could almost feel against my skin... "No, I think I count. Did I tell you the time I went to a bar with the express purpose of taking a bartender home?"

"You didn't," I teased.

"Her cat didn't like me. She never called me back."

I blinked, beer bottle lingering at my lip. Say what?

"...I'm fucking with you, Jesse."

"Oh..." Damn, he was good. "Right."

"Still... I think I might qualify. Genji is not wrong -- from his perspective, and his experience, it doesn't sound good."

"His experience?"

"Yes. I can tend to do that kind of thing to people myself. Pick them up, play with them, set them aside when they bore me. I dare say it's given him a paranoia for such things."

I felt like I was gonna be sick. "That right?"

"Comes with being a Shimada," he said, and I heard him sigh. His voice turned into a tired grumble. "As I said... These people. Everyone I know wants a piece of me for something. Sometimes I indulge them for selfish reasons. Doesn't mean I am sincere."

...Maybe the hints -had- clicked. Maybe Genji was trying to warn me.

"Of course... there is this one cowboy I'm seeing right now," he added. As if he could hear my doubts from there. "He doesn't want much from me that he isn't willing to give himself. The first night I met him, he treated me just like any other customer. Made me a pink drink! Me! Hanzo Shimada. Can you imagine?"

"That don't happen often?" I asked, trying to keep my voice from dropping into something manic or angry or broken...
He laughed. "Never. Pink? As if. It's not gentlemanly, not decent, not proper. Sakura is for geisha, candy for children. I am never given anything sweet and nice that I do not have to find for myself."

"Could I have another?"

He was trying to dissuade my fears. Trying.

"...If you are wondering, Jesse McCree, I'm not using you as a booty call. Even if we stopped this tomorrow, and I was just Genji's brother again, I'd still come to your bar to talk to you. To hear your voice. To watch you dance and sing. I want you to know that."

My eyes close, and I can hear my breathing through my nose. "Assumin' I still had a bar," I confessed. My voice has a croak to it.

"You will always have a bar," he teased. "If not the Rabbit, another one. Somewhere in Mexico or Texas or America or what have you. You will always have a bar."

I could almost imagine him searching every bar, pub, tavern and hotel in the world to find me. Drop down on the stool next to me and nudge me.

"Need a drink, cowboy? I have some tequila rose with your name on it."

How long had I prayed for someone that wanted me around enough to come find me when I disappeared?

I swallowed hard. "He also says I'm very self-destructive. I sabotage myself." It came out reedy, but at least I managed to blink away my tears before they fell.

He snorted. "That, I know. Mr. 14 hour days and no eating. Close and open with less than 4 hours' sleep. If the Rabbit was a woman, you'd be married to her, a slave to her every whim, even though you couldn't afford the designer handbags she insists on buying like candy. You let your work consume you. That dedication and tenacity follows you in other aspects of your life. It is part of your character. It's why you fall in love so quick and so hard. You care too much."

I stabbed my thumb and took it off speakerphone, pressing him to my ear as I turned in my bed. "How can you know that?" I asked, bewildered...

"Jesse, please. A place like the Rabbit is too eccentric to not attract attention. It's new. And yet the chairs and stools are mismatched, different styles, but all reupholstered and painted fresh. It doesn't just match, it was remodeled to be the same, and almost no one would notice unless they were paying very good attention. The bar top is fresh, with painted jackalopes chasing tumbleweeds and cacti. It's your aesthetic, but it matches the style for your work shirts -- you commissioned an artist. With your budget, you probably went to an art studio or something and spent weeks picking out someone that had something that suited your vision that you could convince to design for a steal. And yet the fan is dusty. The music is old. That Elvis portrait has a name on the back of it dated 35 years ago. You get that shit from yard sales and then you paint it up to be cheap, so you can spend that money on importing fresh avocados and Mexican tequila and American whiskey. Everything is cooked fresh -- fast and cheap on the budget, but filling and full of character. It's comfort food you probably cook for yourself all the time, judging by your fridge and pantry, and you stick with what you know and love while living in a foreign country full of sushi and teriyaki and boba. That entire bar from top to bottom is you. You did it all yourself. And for a front, because you came here with my brother to do me harm? A man does not sacrifice himself so much for a mere front. Something so temporary is not done with such care. Yet you wish to do this right the one chance you have. You two spent months and months planning this, but your loyalties change once your
heart gets in the way. You care too much."

I just listened... It almost felt like an admonition. I didn't know what to say...

And then: "But... It's what I love about you."

I tried to swallow the lump in my throat, trying to follow his logic... He wasn't wrong. I hadn't expected anyone to pay that much attention. The music and loud cowboy and fun food sold itself. I wanted it to be cohesive, unique. Every detail I'd slaved over...

"...Yeah?" was all I could say.

"Dolly Parton, a musician. And Daisy Duke, the girl next door sister of a pair of reckless rednecks. And that's just the boys' room. Then it's Elvis, another musician, and Eastwood, one of your heroes. You even have the Tombstone poster hanging in your office. You have boxes of old films, and most of them are real rodeos. Westerns. Classics. You're old-fashioned. You live in fantasy, but you make it real. You are a gentleman to the ladies, but a cad to old women when they want a flirt. And I've watched you with your girls -- you always give them a choice to endure a problem customer or stay safe and let you do it -- you're protective. And the way that woman with the book doesn't even order refills? She only smiles for you. The Usagis don't understand it. You could have taken me anywhere for our talk, but you took us somewhere private and quiet so no one could hear me scream at you. Not for your own embarrassment, but out of respect for mine. You let me drive off in your truck, with your gun, and walked back to the Rabbit and ordered yourself a cab, calling it all a loss without a single curse. And you bribed me with boba first. No scoundrel does that. He would do it in the parking lot and then tell me to get lost. He wouldn't ask the cab to wait for me in case I wasn't cooperative."

I sniffed, a heavy breath. "You do like to sit and watch."

"I sat and watched first. I do not patronize an establishment if I do not like the atmosphere. I came back in the day to see if it was a fluke, but no. You are careful even with the drunk vet who sits at your bar every morning. You are not derisive to him, even if you tease. But he teases you, it is fair. But you treat me and him with respect, but not fear. You act with gratitude, not obligation. You do it because it's the right thing to do. Because you're a good man."

"I sure as hell ain't a good man," I whispered.

"Nonsense. You're probably the best man I've ever met. A real cowboy. Hero to the lost. You certainly saved me."

I laughed, a thin and frail thing. "Saved?"

"That night... When I came in late." He paused. And then quietly, "Do you know why I was there?"

I hesitated. "...No?"

"I was suicidal."

A stone dropped in the pit of my stomach, and I sat up, heart racing. "What?"

"Bad day, I said. You have no idea what 'bad day' means to someone like me. I don't just watch people die. I order the execution. And sometimes, I carry it out. I had to murder someone's son right in front of them, to make them comply with the Clan's wishes. The lives..." He choked off, and swallowed, his own breath heavy. "The lives I've taken weigh on me like I carry all of Fuji-san on my shoulders. My brother is but one stain on my soul, and definitely the darkest. But not the
"Don't talk like that," I whispered, holding myself.
"I wanted to end it. I always think about it... How easy it would be. I have the means."
"Please," I begged him.
"Help me..." I begged.

Wide eyes reached for the gun, prying it away from my temple.

"There were rumors... Rumors someone was asking around for me, in specific. Looking back, I realize it was Genji, but at the time, I feared someone was coming after me to repay a slaughter. I was tempted to beat them to the punch for fear they'd torture me beforehand... I was looking for a place that wasn't crawling with yakuza, where there would be no one around to watch me, to stop me."

"That man looks like he's hiding from something," I told her. "You need to, hide him in table 6."

I choked on a sob, one hand on my phone, the other clutching my face.

"...And then you flirted with me. I thought, what a nice way to go. Big smile like that. Beautiful voice. Make me feel wanted, and special, for once in my life. For something sincere, not because they wanted something from me. Maybe that last bit of kindness would be a nice farewell. The fact that you didn't know who I was added to the glorious innocence of it. The pure sanctity of anonymity. You were what I was looking for..."

I remembered him looking absolutely wrecked... Destroyed. Eyes red and a fucking mess.

"That night, you didn't kick me out. You didn't like it, but you didn't kick me out. You offered me a drink, and you weren't sweet or nice, because you were tired, and yet, you didn't kick me out. You could have. You could have sent me off with a false smile, or a growl, or a distant wistfulness and an apology, like the old lady. You could have let me go. And if you had... I would have done it."

I was shaking...

"...But you didn't. You didn't let me out of your sight. Even grumpy and tired as you were, you were a more than gracious host. You served me food and drink, you did your business, even when you had to growl and go back to fix something, and you made sure everything was taken care of. You could have taken me home, and I would have waited until another day, but you didn't. You took me to your place. You asked me three times if I was willing, and I am sure that you would've let me share your bed without touching me at all if I had said no." He let out a ragged breath, the only thing betraying his even voice. "I think I fell in love with you then."

My lips moved, but... "Han..."

"The thing with the boy... With the tattoos. It wasn't you. Not really. It was the fear in his eyes. I had wanted a yakuza-free place, and he was ruining it. It was selfish of me. You were right to be angry."

I shook my head, knowing he couldn't see it... "Still. I mean..." I sighed. "Jesus, Han."

"Hnn. You know something else?"
I almost feared to ask. "What?"

"No one calls me Han... Not even Genji. It was always Oniisan. As much as it makes my soul sing to hear you say my name... My heart swells at 'Han'. It is a private thing... Just you and me."

I tried a shivering smile. "Hanzo?"

"Mmm. Yes, anata?"

I bit my lip. "Please don't do that to yourself." I clutched my heart, feeling it pound in my chest.

"I would not dream of it," he whispered. "Not anymore. These days, my dreams are filled only of you."

I let out a soft laugh. "God. That's a line so cheesy I would say it."

"Hnn. Maybe you are rubbing off on me." I could hear the tired, but fond smile in his voice.

"...Hanzo?"

"Yes?"

I hesitated. "I don't want to lose you."

"I do not intend for you to do so," he replied. There was a steel there. "I don't know how we're going to make it, but I will find a way."

"When this is all over... You're going to leave Japan. I know you will."

"I don't either, baby." I sniffed, moving to my back, a hint of a whimper at the back of my throat. "I miss you so much."

"I will be home soon, anata," he assured me. "A couple of days, I think."

"I got a Tuzki with yer name on it..."

He laughed. "I am looking forward to him, too." He hummed. "Then I can carry him with me, and think of you."

"Speakin'a which..." I smiled at the jade dragon on my dresser. "Sushi says hi."

He muttered something I didn't recognize, a laugh in his voice. "I still cannot believe you called him Sushi."

"Hey, I didn't pick it. I just started throwin' out Japanese words until he found one he liked."

He hummed. "Is that so?"

"True story."

"...Interesting. Maybe I should introduce you to my dragons some time. I'm curious what they would think of you."

I blinked. And I wondered if he meant jade critters like mine... And I eyed Sushi with a touch of superstitious wariness. "Uh... Sure."

For a moment, there's a quiet... A not unpleasant lull in the conversation, as we both digested what
had been said.

Finally, "...Jesse?"

"Yeah?"

"I just told you I was suicidal. And that I kill people. You barely bat an eye."

"Ha. I wouldn't say I barely bat an eye." I sniffed. "God damn it, Han, you made me cry."

"...Still." His voice was quiet. "Most people would never speak to me again. Rage. Fear. Protest that they didn't understand."

I swallowed. "Yeah, well... I'm not that guy."

"Still! What kind of man are you, that I can say such things to you and you just... beg me to not do it? What are you? Explain that to me."

His words are tight. Clipped. An edge of something dangerous. I think of the night we fought the first time, as he threatened my life and shoved me from a truck.

I swallowed hard. "I..." I bit my lip. "I told you. I come from a... similar background."

"Similar, my ass. You are from the desert. A punk from a gang? That is not the same."

"No, but... similar enough," I argued. I coughed. "I get the peer pressure. The desperation to perform as requested. I mean, you, it was honor. For me, it was putting food on the table--"

"And the suicide? How do you brush that aside?" he insisted. "How do you speak so gently with such heartbreak?" I could hear his voice begin to crack. "I don't understand you!"

"I..." I pressed a fist to my lips. "Please, baby, I don't want to fight."

"I do not want to fight! I want to understand! How can you be so kind and forgiving?! What are you, that you could be so good to me, and yet say you understand? I do not! Explain yourself!"

I could hear his tears... I wondered if he was in a mess of blankets in a cold bed in a nondescript room that was unlisted in a hotel whose name he would not remember.

"How could you be so kind?" he asked, a hoarse whisper. "Who are you that you would be good to me?"

I wanted to be there. To hold him, to comfort him...

"I just..." I fought for words. "I get it. I been there. I got a kill count. And a gun. And them bad thoughts. I got a history, too. So I get it."

"What history?" he croaked.

"Baby... I was in Blackwatch."

After everything else we'd said... That brought a stunned silence. I counted. 7 long seconds.

"...Blackwatch. You mean Overwatch."

"I mean Overwatch's ugly side," I said. "The other half of the coin. The covert ops underbelly that
got the whole damned project shut down for ethics violations. All them rumors they had for years, about war profiteering and assassinations and shadow governments? I was the one that did the wetwork. The one that cleaned up the bodies. The one that kidnapped people. Killed people. Tortured people. You wanna talk about stains on your soul? I can't even put a number to mine. I've bombed entire towns, Han. Women and children. I've a $96 billion bounty on my head, okay? And I earned every cent of it. So yeah. I get it. I have a name that strikes fear into people's hearts, too.

...It's quiet. Too quiet. For too long. I can't even hear him breathing. I have to check my phone, but the clock is still ticking, and I bring it back to my ear, working my jaw.

"...Are you hearin' me?"

"Hai," he whispered. "I-yes. I hear you." There is a tremor in his voice.

"Maybe I'm not so well-known around these parts, but believe me," I warned. "There are a lot of places I don't dare show my face or it'll get blown right off my shoulders. I been on the run a long time. This bar? This is a fantasy land, yer right. I wish I could run a bar like this. It's a front, like you said. And when the job is done, I'm gonna have to set the place on fire and burn every trace I was ever here." Still nothing. "Every. Inch of it. All that love and care? I have to destroy it. Even if I wanted to take something like that Elvis portrait with me, I have no walls to hang him on that wouldn't have kindling behind the drywall."

For a long time, there's still nothing. I'm starting to regret this conversation. I'm angry with myself I said so much. Said too much. I'm angry I fell in love -- again -- with someone so god damned wonderful I can't think straight, knowing I won't be able to keep him.

And now I know losing me will absolutely destroy him. I can't bear the weight of that on my conscience...

"Jesse," his voice finally whispers. A wet and pathetic sniffling. "What are we going to do?"

I take a shuddering breath. "Baby... I have no fucking clue."

Chapter End Notes

Yes, the coyote howl from "The Good, The Bad & The Ugly". Tuzki is a thing -- one of my RP Hanzos used to use his stickers constantly because he knew they made me happy. *heart hands*

If you haven't seen the amazing Tumblr fan art of Jesse and Genji singing "Gaston" for Reyes, it is the real MVP. Also: Fantasy (one of my other fics) references galore because Ana Amari is a wicked creature whom I love and adore.

ALSO! "Trash guy is really uppity about X" is totally a thing in Japan, I learned this week. Weird shit, man.

"Yankee-san" is from AlmaMaDuele's "Hang the Fool". The "XX billion double dollar bounty" is a shameless Trigun reference. I believe Vash's was $$60 billion. Although I think it went up to $$90 after he blew up the moon the second time...? It's been a while since I rewatched it. /not making that up.

#ItsAllOverOnceWolfwoodKneelsAtTheAltar
Bug

Chapter Summary

Better safe than dead. Paranoia takes root in Jesse's heart, and in his panic, he finds something that shouldn't be there.

Chapter Notes

All aboard the angst train! More to come. Thank you for being so patient with me!!! I moved from destitute in Tucson to unemployed in Cleveland, and things are finally settling down again. There's also a new chapter for "Coyote", the sister story to this, and I as always encourage you to follow me on Patreon or Facebook at @LoonyMoonyProductions or send me shaking fists mentions on Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr under @SmutWithPlot. *Heart hands* It makes my heart glad to know you care, even if they're death threats for slow updates.

THEY JUST MAKE ME WRITE FASTER. THINK ABOUT IT.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We tried to change the subject. I told him about the Tuzki charms I'd gotten everyone, and that I was using one on my phone, too (which made him laugh, a fragile, desperate thing), and that I'd been accused of 'going native'. He had to ask me who it was, and I had to tell him.

Something of our fragile peace, a porcelain lie, had been shattered and broken. I know the Japanese are all about fixing broken things (so why should I be surprised to fall in love with one?) but it's still a thing I've only heard about, not seen in person. I wasn't going to hold out hope that this could be repaired, but something in me wished for the best.

Eventually, he had to go. There was a telltale sniff, and perhaps he'd already stayed on the phone with me longer than he should have (and my heart throbbed for it), but he had business to attend to. He needed to shower and change, wash away our conversation, I'm sure. I didn't want to let him go, but I had to. When we said our goodbyes, there was such pain and longing and grief in our forbidden words, but we said them anyway, with a resigned conviction. It wouldn't last. We both knew it, but we were too stubborn to be the first to let go.

As I hung up the phone, my first thought was, Genji is right. I should wean off... But as I looked up at Sushi, that shy smile and hopeful eyes... I knew I couldn't.

How many times before had he given me good advice I just couldn't follow?

I dragged myself out of bed, pulling on a fresh shirt, and put my boots back on. Hat. Gun, I added silently, patting at my hip, to get myself in the habit of checking again. It was still with Hanzo, but I told myself to check anyway. Keys. Wallet...

I checked the trash and pulled out the bag to take with me. Quiet down the stairs, where I could
hear my landlady watching some ridiculous game show on the tv, and I slipped out the front door.

I looked about. I didn't see anyone around, but my eyes took note of all of the cars in the area. I dumped the trash, checking the tires for each ride, to see which ones had been parked there a while, which had moved... Already, shifty habits were coming back to me. I did a walk around my truck, testing the tires, hopping into the back to move around the blue tarp that still had two days past rain on it, but I didn't find anything underneath. The lockbox in the back was still locked, but I opened it anyway.


"Being paranoid can save your life, vaquero. Better to be safe than dead."

"Ain't it supposed to be 'safe than sorry'?"

"If someone wants you dead, you won't be around to be sorry about it."

I locked the box back up, using my higher vantage to look over the neighborhood. Especially anything noticeably amateur like an underestimating Yakuza might do. If Genji could confirm they were Shimada, but Hanzo didn't know, there was a good chance the two were unrelated...

It was easy to assume that your boyfriend was a rat, but that led to a few trust issues when they were pressing some sensitive equipment in some sensitive places. He'd have to be a damn good actor to pull that shit off, and it just didn't seem his style. Maybe Genji wouldn't trust his brother farther than he could throw him, but he had his own reasons to be troubled. I was damn sure if some Deadlock boy showed up in town, I'd shoot him without thinking twice. On principle. No one wearing that ink should be looking for me without murder on his mind, and they wouldn't get the benefit of the doubt. It made sense. Quite frankly, if it came down to it, I wasn't sure either of them liked me well enough to not shoot through me to get to the other in the middle of a fight. Hopefully, some semblance of fraternity would make them sensible, but it wasn't anything I wanted to bet my life on.

...Still. Not seeing anything suspicious. I hopped down from my truck, shaking out the tarp and folding it up neat-like, before tossing it back in. I checked underneath for bugs or worse, and--

"Son of a bitch."

I pulled out a red-blinking tracker from behind my passenger side front tire. I took off my hat in frustration, scratching at my scalp for a little pain. Someone was keeping an eye on my comings and goings alright. I debated destroying it and letting them know I had found it, or leave it... I decided on leaving it, replacing it under my chassis, feeling a little ill knowing it was there. I got into my cabin, letting out a breath... And pulled out my phone. I debated telling Han... Or if I should save it for when I talked to him directly, wondering if there wasn't a bug in here...

And as I bit my lip, looked up to my place to see if there wasn't a bug in there. If there was...

I had to rest my head against my steering wheel for a long moment just to breathe. Panic... Definitely panic. That conversation I'd just had with Hanzo... Oh god. If they'd heard...

I was upstairs before I realized it, going for what was easy first -- my fridge was spare, but I pulled out the drawers, overturned bottles, checked contents, the freezer, tossing aside frozen peppers and
onions. Cupboards, turning over cups and looking, looking looking... Nothing. Pantry, and I was
getting bad about putting things back not a mess as I heard myself sob. Under the sink -- nothing.
The lights -- check the lights. I turned them all off, grabbing a towel to carefully carefully carefully
check the lightbulbs, but... No, not in the kitchen. I dumped my box of old movies, checking them
each individually before tossing them back in, sliding it back where it was. Check the tv...

Power plugs. An old shitty house like this, they didn't even attach properly. Easy to check, but
nothing...

Bathroom. Cleaners, soap, shampoo, nothing. Not in the lights or behind the mirror.

...My room.

I had to stop and lean against the wall and collect myself, I couldn't
breathe. Couldn't...

Come on come on come on come on...

...1 one thousand. Two... thousand. Three...Fuck it.

I tore the bed clean off the bed frame, ripping off the sheets in a furious rage. How dare they. I
shoved them all into the washing machine, the rest of my clothes at a professional's -- it was going
to be my day off. I was going to go shopping for Hanzo and have a nice fucking day and think of
something nice for him when he came home, and instead, I had to deal with this shit, and Genji
making me fucking paranoid and--

There wasn't a lot of clothes left in the closet as I swept it, pounding on the walls, tossing boots
after checking them, belts clattering against each other. Bedside drawers pulled out and dumped,
but nothing.

I even felt sick when he picked up Sushi and checked him, but of course there was fucking nothing
there. Hanzo wouldn't do that.

I put the dragon back, pulled out my computer and unplugged it, unscrewing the case and rifling
about the insides -- nothing but dust and dead spiders. I checked under the desk, my mouse, the
fucking monitor...

...The bookshelf. I pulled all the five books from my shitty little bookshelf, but there was nothing.
Lighting fixtures...

Nothing.

I was fuming. How dare they.

How long had that tracker been on my fucking truck? Huh? Maybe they just hadn't got there yet--

My phone.

I ripped at my phone, pulling off the casing, the battery...

...No. Just a shit phone. And really, when had I set it down long enough for anyone to bug it?
They'd had to have snuck in while I was sleeping, and I'd shoot anyone who--

...Well. I'd have kicked their asses, for sure. Shimada ninja or no Shimada ninja.

I dropped onto the bed with a sigh, running my fingers through my hair.
...The place is clean. I felt tears in my eyes as I realized I was going to have to do this on the regular... And/or set up invisible traps to see if anyone was here. I’d have to be real subtle, they’d know most of the regular tricks...

...But right now I didn't want to be fucking here.

I stormed down the stairs, and if my landlady had an issue with it, she didn't say so -- it was evening now. Dusk was painting the sky in lavender and roses, and the scowl could not leave me. I counted the cars -- 5. Six, with the truck...

...I checked the tires again, but none had moved in the last... I checked my watch and cursed. Almost three hours. I needed to go get laundry from the cleaners... A quick sweep of the truck, and then inside. Not a lot to rifle around, nothing in suspicious corners. I started the truck, eyes hyper-aware of my surroundings, and pulled out of the drive.

My next task was the Rabbit. I knew my Usagis were going to look at me like I was crazy, but damn it, I needed to know. Who was watching? And what did they know?

Chapter End Notes

Also: I know you think, 'Wow, Jess. Condoms and lube in your emergency supplies? Classy.' But in all honesty, lube is like WD-40, it makes things move. And condoms can hold a lot of water if need be, and they're designed to endure abuse. They're actually incredibly useful tools for your survival kit. And they look a lot less conspicuous than some things. Besides, those Trojans aren't even his size. He's a Magnum man.
Chapter Summary

You never find just one. Jesse scopes out the Rabbit and finds what he was looking for.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"McCree-san?"

"Not right this second," I growled, bee-lining for my office, and the biggest problem with owning a bar is the overly friendly customers that don't take 'no' for an answer. I slammed my door shut and locked it, and I still heard someone protesting, asking me to drink with them, even though your average, sane, sober individual would have picked up on my face to not fucking bother me.

Paperwork. Swear, this desk was never so neat since the day I bought it, and even then, only for about two seconds before I dumped my pathetic pile of paperwork and inspections on it. Everything was rifled through and then set right back, because while I could come home to a messy house (it wasn't like Hanzo was like to surprise me all of a sudden, nor Genji so soon) the bar was a different matter. I rifled through the filing cabinets, taking entire shelves out of the box and searching the insides for bugs. Nothing.

I got up on a chair, checking the ceiling... Nothing up here either--

A knock on my door. I growled. Can't you people take a hint?

"McCree-san?" Usagi called. I realize I hadn't looked at who was out there. Was that Ami? "[Are you okay in there?]"

"[I'm fine,]" I answered, though my tone of voice wasn't very convincing. I did find a dead mouse though. I scowled. "Hey. Can you grab me a to-go box?"

A hesitation. "What did you want to eat?" Yeah, Ami. Her English wasn't really the best.

"Not lunch, just a box. Be quick now." I hopped down from the chair and moved it a bit closer, opening up the ceiling tile... There you are.

A moment later, she came back with a shy knock. I opened the door for her, and she handed it to me, confused... Even more so when she watched me climb my chair.

"[What are you doing?]" she asked, no doubt scandalized by my boots on a chair.

"[Cleaning,]" I answered. I had a folded piece of paper and carefully scuttled him into the box, a grimace on my face as I closed up the box. I looked at her. "You seen mice around here?"

Her eyes went wide, and she shook her head. "There was one... A month or so ago. Rufio put out a poison and he died, we assume..."
I gave her a thin smile. "Well, I found him." I waved the box a little.

She put her hands to her mouth, going pale. "[I am so sorry!]

"Don't worry about it," I reassured her. "Better to find him dead than otherwise." I dropped it in the trash. I looked to her, pointedly. "Thank you."

"Oh. Yes, sir. [Sorry]."

You know how they say the Alaskan Eskimo has a hundred some-odd words for snow? I swear the Japanese are just as bad, but they specialize in apologies. I bet they could give Canadians a run for their money. I been in this town for months, and I still hear new ones all the time. I locked the door behind her, and continued my searching, pulling up my trash can, pecking under the desk, pulling out the outlet covers...

By the time I'm satisfied, it's clean. Again. It doesn't comfort me, though, because I've never been so lucky as to find only one bug. And this one only on my truck. I shuffle my lips, and as I pull up my phone to make a note, I realize that it was still off from when I pulled the battery out. Grumbling, I turn it back on and stick it back into my pocket, looking up at my wall clock to note the time.

It's getting on -- almost 10. That late crowd was gonna come in soon and I was gonna get stuck here.

Leaving the office, I move to the bar, pulling apart the till and running my fingers inside the dusty bits and pieces and jagged edges. I don't find anything. I tear out the money till, leaf through the bills, take a wad of cash out and make a note, sticking it under the drawer as I replace it, and stuff the cash in my pocket. I've started working under the bar when I see jeans and crocodile shoes in my peripheral.

I glance up at Jimbo, and he's pointedly not looking at me, but he is standing at the bar, an idle glass in his fingers. Watching, my mind tells me. Guarding. My lips tighten, and my hands slow, peering behind bottles for anything on the back walls.

"You ever check the bar for bugs?" I ask him.

"Every time I close," he answers, just low enough for me to hear him. "I found one by the register a couple days ago, under the bar."

I stop, and I look at him, rising. He barely comes to my shoulder. "Didja now?"

His eye darts to me and then back to the ground. "Green team seems to find you interesting. I caught someone trying to replace it in the middle of our 2p rush. I greeted him with an open collar, he didn't seem too pleased."

...I never find only one. My shoulders ease a little. "We boastin' colors now?" I cross my arms -- Hanzo wasn't going to like that.

"Odds are they will come back to investigate further, but with more caution," he answered, moving closer to put the glass back in its crate. "They sound like they were looking to recruit."

I snorted. "This old dog has a lot of tricks, but he don't play ball no more," I grumbled, leaning my ass against the back bar. "Too old for that shit." I tugged my hat down and sighed. "Do you check the bathrooms?"
"Everything except the office," he answered easily. Ami came back, grabbing a pitcher of beer from the tap at the far end of the bar and eyeing us both like we were hanging upside down from the ceiling like bats, hissing at passersby. "Because it's very locked."

"It is very locked," I agreed. I looked over at Ami. "Usagi, hon, can you make me a soda? Lime, please."

"Hai."

And then quieter again. "I want you closin' regular-like. How often can you get out of your other gig?"

"I gave them my two weeks last Monday."

I blinked at him. "...Really?"

He smirked. "Really." He had a catty smirk on his lips and eyes...

Eyes that made a man lonely. I sighed.

"...I didn't exactly ask because it ain't rightly my business, but speakin' of playing ball. Which way do you swing, out of curiosity?"

...Have I mentioned he has a beautiful laugh? "Depends on who is pitching, I suppose," he answered.

Coy as fuckin' ever. I smirked. See, this is why I like the Japanese. Their wordplay is... Well, it's fucking amazing.

"...I kinda figured as much," I purred. "You're trouble. But I bet you know that."

"I have been told..."

Usagi-chan presented her soda, and I thanked her with a hug and a kiss on the hair. "You are a sweetie. Here..." I pulled out a bill. "Keep the change."

She snorted. "You're paying for this?"

"Yup. After last week, I owe myself a lot. Fair is fair." I snatched at the drink and took a sip, the place starting to fill up. "Much as I'd love to stay and chat, it is my day off. I got shit to do." I offered Jimbo a fist bump, and he rolled his eyes a touch as he answered it.

"Be careful out there, sama," he said softly.

It hit me halfway through a step, but I caught myself before I stumbled. "I will. Thanks." I waved to the regulars. "Arigatou! [Have a good night!]"

I listened to their cheering me as I went, but it felt hollow. When you're a wanted man, a place where everybody knows your name is nothing but a liability.

Chapter End Notes

For all of you who had their doubts about Jimbo's loyalties, SHAME ON YOU.
Tenshi is legitimately trying to make his life better, I am disappointed in you lot.
*disapproving purse of lips* I have a lot planned for him, and all you people who are so twitchy and suspicious will feel very foolish! /subverting tropes like a boss
Sick

Chapter Summary

Hanzo and Jesse have another phone conversation while Jesse tries very hard not to be physically ill.

Chapter Notes

Kind of a short one. I'm trying to do a cycle of Jack Rabbit-Coyote-Shades, with some OC in between, just to keep it all moving. Seemed like a good place to end this scene. If you want to see my original stuff, I encourage you to find me on Patreon, Twitter and Insta as @SmutWithPlot or Facebook as @LoonyMoonyProductions and give me a follow -- I've been working on my #Dragonsbane comic lately, and I'm really pleased with how it's coming out so far.

When I got into my truck, there were a few rather worried texts from Hanzo, rationalizing for my benefit that it was far too early for me to have actually gone to sleep, and why wasn't I answering? The last was a very adamant 'Call me.', and I was honestly relieved at the permission. I dialed the number, and it answered three-quarters of the way through the first ring, met with silence.

...Right. Emergency protocol. "Hey, Han," I said, feeling a tightness in my chest as I turned onto the road. "It's me."

A heavy exhale. A prayer I only half caught, he hissed it so fast, "Jesse, what the hell? I was worried sick! What happened?"

"Well... I got good news and I got bad news. Which one you wanna hear first?"

He growled. Actually growled. "That depends entirely on what kind of news each is. Just say it!"

"Well, the good news is..." No, wait. "Bad news is, I found a bug. Good news is I found it, bad news it was there. Other bad/good news, there was one at the bar, but Usagi-jimbo found it already. Other good/bad news, he knows who it was. But it wasn't you guys. It was... Green team."

"Green team?" he echoed, baffled.

"Yeah, you know..." Was this a weird American thing? "Green team. You're on the blue team. Like Jimbo was on the blue team. Green team."

"...Ohhh." I could hear him frown from here, and fuck was he cute. "Why is green team...? That's yellow territory."

"Is it?" I asked. 'I'll be honest, I can't hardly tell what's team taggin' and what's just artistic graffiti, personally." If I had the intel, I could probably tell you what artist did which piece and what paint he uses, but this wasn't Blackwatch anymore.
"Well. Technically. I mean, it isn't unheard of for a territory to have outliers. Not everyone flies colors. Perhaps they were hoping to plant a flag, to use the metaphor..."

"Well, Jimbo flashed himself a little bit, hopin' it would make them less... Upfront about it," I said, taking advantage of a red light to take a drink. "It's not somethin' I wanted to happen, but..." I edited out 'Genji had told me'. "I was aware that this would probably happen eventually, somewhere down the line. Means I'll have to be more careful to keep the place clean."

"Problem is... Jimbo is retired," Hanzo murmured. "Keeping it clean will be harder. Blue sees a place with their flag, they will happily go and collect. You can not have the security of a color without paying for the service."

I grimaced. "Yeah. That's... The bad news."

I listened to him sigh on the other side of the line, and more than anything, I wished I was there to give him a squeeze and distract him from his troubles, but I knew I couldn't. They were serious troubles, and they were mine, too. "This is bad."

"I'm real sorry, honey." As if it was at all my fault. I realized that before all this mess, I'd been on my way to pick up laundry... Damn it. They might be closed by now.

"It is not your fault," he told me, gentle. "But... It complicates things. We will have to be more careful. Maybe..." A huff. "Maybe I cannot come to the Rabbit anymore."

Fuck bile in the back of my throat, my stomach actually tried to heave. "Ye ain't gotta do that, baby," I urged. "Please. We can just fly the flag. Claim it. Figure out how that works and you can mark it as yours, or whatever..."

He scoffed. "You think I have power I do not," he answered, wry. "I am no king. I am a captive prince. I am paraded about like a show pony and an executioner. I do not have the power I once did. The Clan is run by elders, not me. Not really. They do not respect me as they should."

...At this rate, I was gonna have to pull over and be sick. My heart twisted, and this much stress in one day was going to ruin me. How had I fallen so out of practice?

"...Make it neutral territory, then?"

"So you can fight off green, yellow and blue at the same time?" He scoffed. "That would not be healthy for anyone."

I worked my jaw. "Then what exactly do you suggest?"

"...I have no idea, anata."

I did pull over. It was the same boba shop as I had taken Han to previously. I parked, staring into the bright lights of the late-night shop. I unbuckled, sighed as I rubbed a hand over my eyes. "...God I wish you were here right now."

"As do I, Jesse," he said. "I wish I could do more to help you. Wish I could be of assistance."

"...Even just a hug would help."

"That would go without saying, anata."

Anata. It was like saying Love.
"I mean... Maybe Jimbo can help?" I offered, not knowing what else to do in this situation. There was no Reyes watching over the op, no Ohioan on intel, no Genji watching from another building. I was flying blind here.

"At best, he is a watchdog. He can keep an eye on things. But if my people come in demanding tribute, he will take the brunt of the abuse."

I swallowed back bile for real, pressing my hand to my lips. I could just see it -- my Jimbo, getting his pretty little face made less pretty, that shirt I just gave him being ripped apart.

If he hadn't been wearing ink, we could have pretended to be none the wiser. If I weren't an ex-spec ops guy, I could have played innocent. If Reyes were here...

...He'd probably set a trap and kill them. Because we'd be gone in two days anyhow, and collateral damage wasn't exactly our concern.

Winning is easy. Living is harder.

"...I suppose I should warn him, then?"

"I am pretty sure he already knows, anata."

Anata. Everything had an anata attached to it. I'd never heard him this worried before.

I heaved a heavy sigh, resting my head against the steering wheel. "...God, I miss you, honey bee."

"And I miss you, cowboy," he crooned back. "A couple days. Maybe I can swing sooner, but I do not want to make promises."

...I could hear him thinking. Stroking his beard in thought. Could just see his little frown, the way his brow pinched when he was pondering a difficult puzzle.

"...What did you have in mind?" I asked, guarded. I knew as well as anyone how hard it was to wiggle out of an op. I tried to think of Hanzo in that way -- an agent on an op. That's all. Not being someone's show pony or bitch on a leash. Not as some pretty thing they trussed up and tried to marry off. He didn't even like women, I can't imagine what it's like for him to smile and nod and dance with other people's daughters and pretend he enjoyed it--

"I do not know. But I've technically finished business here. At this point it's... schmoozing."

--especially when his heart and body was aching for me. But no one could know that. I hated that they put him through it. So much.

"But schmoozing is your specialty," I echoed, the scripted line having no heart to it. On an insecure day, they could make me jealous. Today, it just made me ill. Trifles and foolishness. Hiding in a closet and going through the motions. How long could he hold out before they married him to someone anyway, or we were found out and there was a scandal?

"Some days I am not so great at it," he answered, a taste of coy there. He wasn't up to the games either, but having the script in place was something we could lean on. "Perhaps someone will say something I take as disgraceful, really test my patience. Perhaps I can be home tomorrow."

...It made my heart twist how he said home with such longing. I ached, knowing he meant me.

"...Perhaps," I agreed, trying so desperately not to write the promise in stone, even as I clutched to
it like a drowning man.

"I will bring you dinner. Anything you like."

"Dragon roll," I said, the stupid joke bringing a soft smile to my lips. "Make it spicy."

"And I'll have the Western omelet," he said, echoing the matching line. "Extra cheese."

I felt tears hit my knee. I tried to be quiet with my sniff, but I know he heard me. "I'll be just as cheesy as you want, baby. Just come back to me."

"Of course, anata," he said, gentle. I wanted his fingers in my hair. His arms and legs wrapped around me, tight and unyielding. Gentle kisses that were too kind and sweet and tender to belong to someone so dangerous.

"And... And I'll make breakfast," I said. "It's only fair."

"Of course..." And yet, something in his voice was distracted. "Hold."

I held. I waited, listening. I heard his voice, protesting that he was not to be disturbed, a croak of sleep added to his words that sounded too thick to be faked. Tears he was holding back. A growl, and he said quickly, "I must go. Get home. Be safe. I will contact you when I can."

"Yeah, o--" A click. I checked and... The numbers flashed red with the finished time of the call. The bile rose up in my belly again, and I looked up at the boba place, remembering that they did have a public toilet for customers... I swallowed it back and sighed, texting.

[Of course, honey bee. I'm grabbing some boba now. Home soon. Miss u.] And then, [Sooooooo much].

I put my phone in pocket and sighed.

What a mess. I tapped my fingers on the wheel, debating. I checked my drink, but it was almost empty. I went in for a green tea to settle my stomach and used the restroom.

I didn't heave into the toilet, but I definitely thought about it.
Chapter Summary

McCree starts making preparations for the absolute worst.

Chapter Notes

So... We're getting to that end-of-act-2, start-of-act-3 level of 'oh shit what else is going to go wrong?' but we haven't QUITE plateaued yet. It's gonna get worse! If you haven't read my "Blackwatch" yet... It's gonna be kind of like that.

In the history of bad days off, this was up there with the time I nearly got polished off after that bank heist in Reno, or the time I had to outrun three assassins and the NYPD through the god damn subway. I don't much mind trains, but running on the tracks always scares the ever-loving shit out of me, and I was so sure I was going to inadvertently circumcise myself... Or worse.

I sat there in the boba shop for a while, my mind whirling around and around and around, eyes not seeing into my drink, not listening to the noise of the people around me. All I could think of was Hanzo. Riding over me with a couple of belts and some daring words, or at that hotel, crushed beneath me and begging... How could you be so kind? Imagining him in some nondescript room, curled in the blankets, weeping with a phone clutched to his ear, miles and miles and miles away. An agent deep undercover with no intel, flying as blind as I was. He was hanging by a thread, and in joining him there, I found myself high on the tightwire with him.

Funny thing is, over the years I'd developed a real aversion to heights.

Even when I had long since sipped my tea into oblivion, I chewed on the straw, lost in my thoughts. I considered the punk and his Master at the little Polynesian place, when the cowboy with the metal arm had given himself away by missing stupid, simple things. A vanity sleeve. Discreet sweeping. Minding your own god damn business... And not announcing your fucking military experience. Morse, McCree? Really? You deserve everything they give to you.

...Doesn't take much for me to circle around back to the million ways and reasons I should be dead right now. It's a long list, and I'm very intimately familiar with it. And to make matters worse, it wasn't a chew out from Morrison, or suicides from Reyes, or even a god damn court martial I had to look forward to.

People were going to get hurt. And quite probably die. A college kid who would never graduate. A mother whose child would become an orphan. A bouncing usagi girl whose joy and cheer would be ripped from her. Painfully. Ruthlessly. A man who had done wrong in his past, and had gone clean and legit, and I was going to make him break his streak because I had been a fucking fool and lost my touch.

And of course... My Hanzo. Scared, heartbroken Hanzo. I had left the door open for them to find him, hiding in his closet, and if he had no legitimate heirs to birth... What good would he be to the
Elders?

And Genji. Oh god, Genji. Would he delight in his brother's destruction, or be cruel when he lost his prey? Would he let me live it down?

If I lived to be punished for this indiscretion.

...Finally, the shop was quiet. It was only me and the shopkeep, and she was idling in the kitchen, finishing her tasks. When I closed my eyes and just turned it all off, let it all melt away until all I heard was the ticking of that clock, and her scrubbing at the sink, Korean pop music playing in the music.

Korean pop music. My mind deciphered the words, a break-up song about stupid mistakes and violent vengeance that made my lip curl in a snarl.

Fucking poetic.

I rose. My metal hand crunched the cup into a fist and I tossed it in waste bin as I left without a word, the bell signaling my departure. I climbed into my truck and turned back around to the Rabbit. My clock read 01:37.

_I hate these tiny fucking numbers on my clock_, a voice that wasn't mine growled in my ear. _Vaquero. Make sure he has my coffee on, or I will kill them all._

It was not quite 0145 when I pulled into the gravel road, a beat up little Honda that was mostly blue still parked there from earlier. I moved into the Rabbit, and I was greeted by a few customers. I ignored them and moved to the bar.

When I met Tenshi's eyes, his face had gone pale. "Back so soon?"

I put my hands on the counter where he could see them. "Just you?"

"A-at the moment," he said. "It was slow. Ami wanted to go home."

"Good." I waved at the customers, my smile more of a mask than it had been in a long time, and it didn't reach my eyes. But they wouldn't spot the difference. I moved behind the bar where I could serve myself a rocks glass, dishing it with ice. "I was just talking to Hanzo. Situation doesn't look good." I eyed him sideways, served a scotch. "I heard that the blues have been trailing my truck. Been a lot of sniffing about lately, for things I don't feel right telling you about. But that's kind of a given, with what is going on. I'm not telling you because you're safer not knowing. Understand?"

He nodded. His eyes narrowed. I could see something on his lips, but he didn't let it out.

"Next time the greens show up, you flash them again. And any yellows that want to cause trouble." I took a long swig, not quite tasting it. I dropped it on the bar. His eyes followed the drink, watching as I poured again.

"As you wish, sama."

"And..." I sighed, lifting it to my lips once more. "Be ready." I looked to him. "They might beat on you a bit. But they can't know what I don't tell you. Right?"

He swallowed hard and gave a small nod. "Of course, sama."

"...You tell them you answer to a higher authority." It was an old line, and in Blackwatch days, we
could back it up. "You tell them that. That you're ready to take it if you have to." I take my swig, and he looks away from me. "...You're a good man, Tenshi. I can tell. Kid like you is charming, slick. But you also got your priorities right. You got out of that game. So you use that to your advantage. Make them wonder what someone else is offering you that is better than what they got. You repeat the line back to me."

"...Answer to a higher authority," he echoed, and I could see his life flashing before his eyes.

I nodded. "And when they're done with you, you run straight to me. I want them to know that you're more scared of me than you are of them."

...Which is when I realized it wasn't the glass he was following. It was the skull on my arm.

"As you wish. Sama." He bowed his head, a bow.

Hanzo had heard tell of someone sniffing around for him, wanting him dead. Genji had told me he would be kicking garbage cans looking for clues. They weren't following me exactly. More they knew I was a contact, and were hoping to follow me back to whoever it was that was watching Shimada. I was at the edge of their radar. What they wanted was Genji. But if the greens (don't ask me the clan name, I don't have an intel dossier on the local colors) were watching me because they'd seen me, it was only a matter of time before one of them bumped into the other and played show-and-tell.

Let Genji be the can kicker, making noise and getting their hackles raised. I was the hired gun. Those were the facts. Thing about being Blackwatch is, you really were a higher authority. You took down corrupt governments and nuked rebel camps and decimated small armies with a party of three. Sometimes two. Thesefuckers had absolutely no idea who they were toying with.

And I knew how these bastards worked. They wouldn't just kill a kid like Tenshi as a 'warning'. If they wanted a hostage, they'd pick Sezumi, my hopping bunny, or my battered wife bookworm, just to get under my skin. But someone as hard as me, they might not be so ham-fisted. They'd know I was the type to calculate collateral damage. I might not answer to such a threat. Which is just a waste of time hunting her down, abducting her, putting out threats... It was amateur shit. And amateurs didn't spook the Head of the Shimada Clan into planning to kill himself before someone else made him suffer.

I made a note to ask Genji exactly which cans he'd be kicking and what he'd been shouting to the shadows while he was doing it, because he had them good and spooked.

...Hanzo was right. Tenshi was going to get his ass kicked for this. But he knew something that they didn't -- who I was. Not just some charming cowpoke, I was Deadeye McCree. That name put fear into a lot of people. And the Shimadas should be on that list, if they could get the name and the intel together. And former-Blackwatch operative laying low in a shitty little bar in Koenji that showed up four months ago out of nowhere? It was a god damn set up.

It was a really obvious god damn set up. Geni and I weren't really going for subtlety. We wanted them spooked. All of the help was collateral damage. Hell, I had procedures in place to set the whole damn block on fire. And my apartment. We were prepared to be ruthless. Go out with a bang. Go in guns blazing and take them all out.

If Reyes was here, he'd just kill them all. We'd be out in two days.

I finish my drink, and I toss the ice, leaving the cup in the sink. I didn't fuck with keeping a tab on my comp or paying myself back. I opened the drawer and pulled out all of the cash.
"When you get off..." I told him, counting it in my head. "I want you to take this to the bank and deposit it." I wrote down the pin number for him and reached into my wallet to pull out a card. I handed them to him. He stared at it, shaken. "You take as much as you want. Or need." I put back in some change-making bank, and put the rest of it into the bank envelope I kept for just such a purpose. "But put the rest in the account. Take whatever drink you like when you head out, I don't care. Gift it to friends, pawn it, whatever you wish."

I watched him put the card and note in his wallet, and I noted that his hands didn't tremble. There was a familiar dead weight to his eyes.

He was a good soldier. A good man. I hoped I was right and that they wouldn't kill him.

I grabbed three bottles of Jose, another of Jack, and another of my Johnnie Black. I put them in a paper bag and made myself some food. A good four jumbo quesadillas, mostly onions and chicken and cheese, easy on the spices. I packed it up in a box and even dropped an order of fish tacos. I ate two while I stood there, and saved the last one for later. I grabbed an OJ also and headed right out the front door.

The days of the Jack Rabbit were numbered. I didn't have a lot of time to pack, but it was something. I grabbed some trash bags and packing tape on the way home, and threw away most of the things I had scattered about. I did the dishes, washed out my coffee, re-sealed a few boxes, and checked my phone twice.

One message from Hanzo was an apology that he had left so rudely, but he was being ushered away. They were preparing him to leave, he hoped back to Tokyo, but he wasn't entirely sure. He would let me know when he found out more information.

I set my phone to charge and ran a factory reset. By the time it was done, my apartment looked almost as bare as the day I'd moved in.
Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ~Hebrews 13:2

Angels come in many shapes and forms.

HOW ABOUT THAT SEXY SCION HANZO?! God, it has me RPing again! I'm on Twitter as @MancoMcCree if anyone wants to watch me be fanboy all over the damn place. Rating is just as high as it is here, fair warning.

It's raining in the morning. I didn't sleep without the help of Jose, and yet it took more than I'm comfortable admitting to get me there. Thinking of him only hurt, it didn't help. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 0230 and 0300 I woke to check and found a text.

They're taking me home. But we're on high alert. I do not know when I can talk to you again. Please anata. Be safe.

There were other words there that weren't written, weren't sent, and yet I could hear them. Could almost feel his arms tight around me, like ghosts. I sniffed, rubbing away tears. It took another three swigs of tequila to get me drowned enough to rest some more, but by the time dawn was breaking after 0700, I gave up. I made breakfast, a hearty omelet of whatever veggies I had left, diced and sautéed until they were mush and satin, and I took my time and had a whole pot of coffee. Before 0815, I was showered and dressed and out the door with my boxes in the truck. There was no bug. I checked all the cars on the street, too, but I didn't see a tail. I went to the post office and sent my packages to an alias in Santa Fe, where an abuelita and her chavo made sure that any packages that arrived were collected promptly and put into storage somewhere else. It was a dangerous favor, but one I didn't ask of them often. And considering they were also getting a salary from another alias of mine, I made sure they were well compensated for their trouble.

I tried not to think of it being Sezumi and Meiko, the former hopping about with excitement while Mei complains loudly about me being paranoid. I was quiet and probably surly by the time I made it to the next teller, and he did his level best to keep our exchange courteous and prompt.

I grabbed the laundry. I took it home and folded it, and picked a few items -- including that damn Elvis tee, I couldn't help myself -- and packed a bag. The rest were bagged in trash bags and I put it all in my truck and took it to a donation center for the less fortunate where, quite frankly, I'd picked them up in the first place. I stopped at a shop for donburi for lunch and took what kitchenware hadn't come with my apartment to a pawn shop to unload.

And damn it all, it never stopped raining.
I pulled up at the rabbit around 1500 and relieved Rufio, but slipped him a large bill as he went out. His eyes went wide, but he didn't ask. Nor did he complain when I handed him two bottles of his favorite spirits, although he certainly looked concerned. Ami watched him walk out with the bag clutched under his arm and later cornered me at the bar.

"McCree-san, you are scaring me," she said.

"Good," I answered, a dark growl in my voice. "Means you're paying attention."

She crossed her arms, leaning on the bar beside me as I counted the bills in my till after a rush, taking some of the fluff out of the tip jar and counting it out. "You are acting strangely. You don't even sound the same. Your drawl is... I don't know. It is not there. You speak short. You smile thinly and then you stop when someone is not looking..."

I looked up at her, trying my best to be patient. "...You about done?"

I saw her fluff up, perhaps trying to seem less like a target to the big bad wolf standing next to her. "What is going /on/?" she hissed. "Tenshi said he's closing from now on, your orders. What about my hours?"

"Get another job."

I might as well as have slapped her. Her jaw dropped. "Excuse me?"

"For your own damn good," I said. "Get another job." I shut the drawer a little louder than I probably should have and offered her the cash from the tip jar -- plenty more than her half share. She stared at it like it was a poisonous snake, but as I offered it to her she took it, if hesitantly.

"...What is going on?" she asked again, this time with a healthy amount of fear.

"Ain't gonna be a whole lot of hours to go around," I said, voice low. "I'm cuttin' down. Between me and Tenshi at night and Ru in the mornings, I think we can handle it."

Her eyes narrowed, trying to figure out what I wasn't saying. "Is it because I'm--?"

"Because it's for your own damn good," I said again. "You got a kid." I raised my eyebrows. "Are you hearin' me?"

...The mention of a child almost always changes the tone of conversation with a parent. Tells you a whole lot about a person if it doesn't. She was instantly on defense and snatched the cash into her pocket. "Are you firing me?"

"Not strictly," I told her, grabbing a glass to polish. "But I know you got a baby to feed. I advise you go looking for another job before you lose this one. You won't want it to fall on your head."

She eyed me, probably trying to figure out if I meant that literally as she glanced up at the roof. I might have found that amusing on another day. And then she put on a smile and started her rounds again.

When Tenshi showed up around 2000 in anticipation of the after-dinner rush, I sent her home with the full tip jar. The pursed lips told me she didn't like this, but the cash mollified her a bit. When she was gone and we had a moment, he offered me back the card and cash envelope.

"You keep it," I told him, not looking up from the rocks glass I was polishing. "You gonna do the same thing you did last night. We're not ordering any truck, any food we need I will get personally
day by day." I looked up at him as I stocked it, reaching for another. "At this point, it's only a matter of time until we get pinched. Things are gettin' spooked. I want you to be on your guard. You hear me?"

He nodded, arms tight around him, leaning just away from me. He gave a sad smile. "...So much for the better job."

"Well... That depends entirely on how this goes down." I stock the glass and pick another. "If this thing goes supernova, there will be a nice insurance policy at the end of it. If it doesn't... Well. Maybe I'll need a General Manager."

He looked up at me at that, his jaw dropping. "What?"

I offered a thin smirk. It was more genuine than the rest, but still not to my usual charm. "I mean... You got the style. Can't hope to think you bought them boots cos of me."

We both looked down at his crocodile skin boots and he gave a shy smile. "No. No, I... I've had these for years."

"I figure of all of you, you know the bar life best. You know the local color, you're friendly with the Shimadas... If it has to happen that way, I think you could do pretty well." I stock the glass. "Keep Meiko and Rufio. Ami needs a better job than this, kids are expensive. Sezumi will burn herself out in a few months, but this will look real good on a resume. And you... Well. You worked hard to get to where you are. Feels like I owe you a lot for what I'm about to put you through."

He does not meet my eye. "...It is strange for you to phrase it that way. To owe me." He rubbed at his eyes. "Used to be I was just a foot soldier. Expendable."

"Ain't no one expendable," I growled, a bit more of a bite to it than I wanted, but it was a good bite. "Anyone who can put someone else's name on the bill ain't no leader. You been there. You know how cruel and wrong and unfair it is. I expect you to keep them from that."

...As if on cue, the door opened with a soft bell, and Mezumi-chan came in. Shy smiles, and I put on my own, waving back. I watched her eyes narrow, seeing the difference that most wouldn't, and after a furtive glance around the place, she came straight to the bar.

"You want somethin' a little stronger today?" I asked.

She tilted her head to one side. "You... Look different today."

A sharp, unkind smile. "Got some bad news." I made up a glass of ice water for her and set it on the napkin for her. "Hate to say it's gonna trickle downhill and ruin everything."

"Oh no... What happened?" Genuine concern, and I marveled at how selfless it was. God, she was so strong.

"Customs issue," I said, looking up at the place, gesturing with a hand. Letting that sorrow bleed through, honest and painful. "They're gonna deport me. I'm tryin' not to break down about it."

"Oh, Jesse, that's awful," she crooned, reaching a hand to me. I took it in my good hand, squeezing. Her grip was solid and anchoring. "You were doing so well here!"

"I know..." I didn't have to pretend to make a tear happen. It was easy to let one slip through. I rubbed it away. "I just... Man. I got so many people depending on me here. You... My usagis." I sighed. "I feel like a failure."
"No no, Jesse, please. You aren't a failure." Her smile is so kind... I wonder if she ever had children, she's got such a beautiful maternal warmth sometimes. "You're a blessing." She pat my hand. "I thank the ancestors for you every day. You are my sanctuary."

...And then I saw it. I knew that look because I used to see it in the mirror all the time. A sort of... Resignation. A premature acceptance. It's that look you get when you come home from deployment and the person you left behind for seven months is fiddling with a piece of jewelry that you didn't give to them, and you know what they're gonna tell you from the moment you get off the phone with them to set up the coffee date -- the coffee date -- and before they can get the nerve to spit it out, because you've already danced this tango a few times. It gets predictable, and you just learn to accept it as your lot in life. It squeezed at me.

"Mezumi-chan, I..." I looked to Tenshi, and he moved to check the room. "Look." I looked her in the eyes, squeezing her fingers. "Mezumi, baby, look at me."

She did. Her eyes were dead, already coming to grips with the hell I was going to leave her to. Her smile is thin, empty... God, it hurt me. "Hmm?"

"...Run away with me."

She blinked. "Nani?"

There was that spark in her eyes, and it got her out of her head. I gave her a smile that was more real than the rest I'd given that day. "Okay, maybe that's a bit much. But... Run away. Please. I... I know people." I squeezed her again, and she looked down at my hand like she'd forgotten it was there. "They can get you paperwork. ID, new name, passport... I can get you a plane ticket to anywhere you like. Mexico, Italy, Paris... Hell, I even have a friend with a sheep farm in New Zealand if you want something quiet. Anywhere you want, I can get you there. Can get you a little place of your own, a job where you can be you..." She was so stunned, she didn't even flinch or back away when I tapped a finger to her chin. "And you don't have to deal with him no more. Please. I want to get you out of here."

Her jaw worked, trying to answer, but... And then those instincts snapped into place and she bolted to her feet. "McCree-san, I--"

"Think about it," I insisted, and I pulled out a card for her. She hesitated, not wanting to... But I scribbled down the email address to a ghost in the deep web that I knew could help her. "You take this. You email this address. You tell her that Michael sent you. Like the angel, Michael. You hear me?"

She hesitated still... Staring at my offered gift like it was a snake. And yet...

...And yet, she lived with a snake. She knew what snakes looked like. And she knew damn well I was no snake.

She reached for it, that morbid curiosity and that drive, just enough to find a place to hide and come back time and again, and I hoped to god that the months had been enough to get a rapport for her to trust me, to take this leap. She wasn't my first, and she wouldn't be my last, but it always broke me how few of them took that ticket to freedom.

"Think about it," I whispered. "Even if this don't work out, that offer still stands. You hear me?"

"I... Hai." She nodded, clutching it to her breast like a precious thing.

"Michael. You remember that name."
"...Like the angel, hai," she whispered. She looked about, furtive, and she stuck it in her pocket, and she zipped right back out, into the rain.

I prayed to god she was going to go to a library or to think about it, and not go back home to him. Please, god. I hoped it wasn't too soon.

When Tenshi came back, I had my face in my hands, all of this catching up to me so bad, and all I wanted to do was cry. I needed my Hanzo. I needed to be able to give him one of those little cards and smuggle him out of the country, get him a new life where he wouldn't have to deal with these people anymore...

"Are you okay, sama?" he asked.

There was a hand on my shoulders, and I swear I flinched. Not away, but... A tension. God, how long had it been since I'd been touched? Weeks? I looked at him, my eyes red, and I hid my face behind a hand. "Jimbo, I ain't well," I answered, my voice thick. "I'm scared as hell. I'm gonna lose all of this. People are gon' get hurt..." I tried to rise, to move away to my office, but he grabbed me by my collar and held me there.

"You are a brave man," he growled. "You are strong. So much stronger than you can realize..." He blinked, a tear slipping down his cheek. "Damn you, you care too much.

"I been told that," I muttered, miserable.

"You can not be a good man and care so much and endure so much and not have the pain," he whispered. "It is what makes you so beautiful." He swallowed hard. "I cannot imagine what it is like for you. To have so much on your plate. To have... Him as well." He shook his head. "I cannot imagine that you do not both make each other so much stronger, with all that you must endure."

That was the last of it. What I had left in me snapped, and I broke. My hands were on his shirt and I pulled him to me, and yeah, we probably looked a mess, but fuck it, it was raining outside, no one was coming in. It felt good to have a body to wrap around, to cling to, to weep into, and I felt like my lungs were burning and I was a big ugly mess and--

The doorbell rang. I didn't have time to be embarrassed when my eyes darted to the mirror behind the bottles and I saw the face of the man who walked in.

I whipped about, my face white as a sheet, and Tenshi stumbled back as I practically launched myself over the bar, and into my lover's arms.

"HAN! Oh my god, Han!" His arms clung to me, and damn it, I turned us, I squeezed him tight and lifted him off his feet, and I heard the gasp of his laugh in my ear. "Oh, baby, please... I must be dreamin', please tell me I'm not dreamin'..."

Oh god. What an assault on the senses. The smell of leathered oil from his jacket, slick and cool with rain, his hair damp against my cheek, the cool musk of his aftershave, the soft flowers of that shampoo he liked, black silk and a ribbon of scarlet draped over his neck, a neck a kissed and clamped onto with my mouth, needing the taste of him--

"Oh, Jesse..." he breathed. A soft breath, and I just squeezed. I needed him. And here he was...

"I ah... Can't compete with the real thing," I heard Jimbo say from behind the bar. "[Can I offer you a drink, Shimada-sama?]

...And at that, I pulled back, holding him at arm's length. There was a dazed, pleased smile on his
lips, his eyes glistening with his own tears. "Wait. Wait, honey, you can't be here. They gonna know..."

"It's okay, Jesse," he whispered, his fingers like claws around my arms. And he squeezed back. "I'm here alone." And he reached up for a kiss, and I... I couldn't argue with it. I melted into it. Letting him take from me, and damn it, I needed his strength... His hands were on my shirt, pulling me close, and I slid a hand to the small of his back, the other sliding up that leather, over the wide of his shoulders. It was a long moment of reunion, and to be perfectly honest... My mind vanished.

...When we parted, he let out a soft, satisfied sound, and a hand moved to my cheek. My heavily lidded eyes peeked under lashes to watch him giving me that little smirk. Softer with affection, his fingers teasing at my beard. "You need to shave," he purred, and I'm sure I shivered.

"I-I can do that," I answered. And he gave me that soft sniff of a laugh, the hand still on my chest pushing me back a step, and he danced -- I tell you, danced -- to the bar, taking a seat. "Give me a hot sake, please. It is wet out there."

...I almost pinched myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming as I watched my angel turn on the stool, Jimbo answering in Japanese and getting the sake ready. I moved to the door, locking it and flipping the sign around. I was dazed as I moved back to the bar. I saw Hanzo's head turn to one side, watching me out of the corner of his eye, and when I came behind him, hands squeezing his shoulders, he leaned back into me with a hum, and I took to his neck again, big open-mouthed kisses and a nip, a growl, and he purred, his hands sliding over mine.

"...God damn, you are gorgeous," I growled, moving up his neck, teasing my whiskers in his ear. "Mm..." He was biting his lip, eyes heavy. "It is true."

I glanced up at the mirror, enjoying the sight of him, smug and content as a cat with a saucer of milk, and watched his fine porcelain skin move over my red dirt road. I tugged at his ear with my teeth, and his back arched, shameless and decadent. Tenshi, for his part, took his time in the back and sat with the sake to let it cook.

"Ye ain't supposed to be here," I warned, a low growl, even as one hand moved to wrap around his throat, pressing kisses over his cheek, his temple. The other trailed down his chest, reaching for his groin, his legs parting for me, knowing damn well it was just us.

"I was told to go to a safehouse," he purred, and then he let out a wicked giggle. "They worry there is a rat in the complex. I was to tell no one where I was going."

"How convenient..." He turned his head to meet me, and there is another kiss, my thumb stroking over the edge of his jaw... I sighed into him, and when I pressed my temple to his, that beatific smile made my heart skip a beat. "How long?"

"I will be on notice." His hand wrapped around my wrist, pulling it snug, and I obliged by squeezing. His eyes rolled in the back of his head as I pressed a kiss to his hair, and he hummed, the vibration delicious against my skin while my other hand stroked...

Another kiss. "...You know. Been meaning to break in the office."

He chuckled in my grip, his eyes parting to look up at me with dark hunger. "That sounds lovely..." His voice was a soft whisper... And then a gasp as I made it past his zipper, stroking him through the silk. He bucked gently into my grip, and it was just so... Easy to get lost in him.

He was a whimpering, quivering mess when I finally let go, and he whined, not wanting me to
"Your sake will be boiling over by now," I purred, relishing his need. I stood, and pulled out my keys, offering one to him. "Office."

He bit his lip like he was a wicked high schooler, and not some yakuza prince stealing away to see his forbidden lover, and I watched him awkwardly hold his pants in place before obeying, watching me over his shoulder with eyes that warned I would be held accountable to these promises. I watched him, predatory and ready to ruin him, and slipped into the kitchen. The sake had not even been cooked, and I grinned, seeing it waiting for a fresh bath to be made when we were ready. My Jimbo poked his head out of the back, the little blue light of his cell phone illuminating his face.

He cocked his brow. "No way you two are done so quickly."

"Oh, hell no." I grinned, pleased he knew me better than that. "But I think it's a bit unfair to leave you locked in here. I'm taking him to the office. Turn up the music and open shop back up. Just in case someone does want to come in -- don't want to look suspicious."

He smirked. "As you wish... Sama."

...Sama was an honorary you earned. I gave him a two-finger salute and went back to the bar, adjusting myself as I went...

And then on a whim, I made a quick pink passion, stealing a sip before taking the whipped cream with me, and joining my lover in the office.

Chapter End Notes

Fun trivia: there's an old Mexican sitcom from the 70s called El Chavo that my grandfather was a big fan of. As a clown, watching these grown ass adults playing children characters in such a hammy fashion just tickled me so much, you can enjoy it even if you don't speak a lot of Spanish. It's a goal of mine to watch it at some point and see how much I can understand, push the limits of my Spanish.
Like I'm Gonna Lose You

Chapter Summary

Jesse's new tactics are making the usagis nervous. Things get worse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I made it to the office, his expression was one of lazy disapproval, a hand continuing what I had started, and yet when he saw what I had brought with, he laughed.

"You are ridiculous," he said, shaking his head with a grin.

"Cheesy enough for ya?" I teased and licked some whipped cream from the drink.

"It is going to melt..." he sing-songed, his hands reaching for me as I moved to lean over the chair he was lazying about in.

More sweet kisses, these ones still hungry, but more indulgent than possessive. This time /he/ was the one to touch me, and I growled, pressing into his grip.

We took turns peeling off layers, distracted by kisses and wandering hands and no words. When I had him stand to get those pants off of him finally, he turned us about and gently pushed me into the chair, and I obliged with a wolfish grin. He took the drink then, taking a moment to tease me, wearing nothing but a handsome wristwatch and a necklace of leather thong and a jade ring. And of course, those lovely little piercings everywhere... He propped up that tattooed arm on one hip, taking a loooong drag or four from the drink, and I drank in the sight of him. I stroked myself, and he came over and knelt before me.

"Oh no you do--" I started to protest, but he did it anyway, and I yelped as he took me in his mouth, my back arching, toes curling, hands clutching at the arms of my chair. There was a low, remorseless chuckle as the sweet and sticky and cold warmed to something hot and wonderful... I groaned, rolling my head back, fingers toying with his ribbon, peeling it from his hair. His eyes were like storm clouds, looking up at me with nothing but smug satisfaction, my knees tucking him close as he took to me, hand and mouth, the other sliding over my hip, squeezing at the small of my back. It was nothing but indulgent, and outside, I could hear the radio playing...

In the blink of an eye
Just a whisper of smoke
You could lose everything
The truth is you never know...

Even with my eyes closed, feeling that warm, hot mouth around me, his hands on my skin, my face twisted, and I could feel tears threatening. My hand clawed into that silky black hair, teasing through his scalp, and I found myself singing along under my breath.

"So I'll kiss you longer, baby... Any chance that I get. I'll make the most of the minutes and love with no regrets..."
He stopped, and I opened my eyes.

He was looking up at me, enraptured by my song, and god, how beautiful he was, those lips slipping from around me. His eyes darted, listening to the serenade (Here's what we got before it's all gone...) and I reached down to stroke his cheek with a thumb, and I lifted my voice a little louder, finding the chorus.

"So I'm gonna love you... Like I'm gonna lose you," I sang, and he rose, and I found his hands, and our fingers entwined. "I'm gonna hold you..." I promised him. "Like I'm saying goodbye-e-eye-e-eye..."

He silenced me, needing my mouth for his own need, climbing into my lap, pinning my hands to the back of the chair as he straddled me, the song continuing outside.

Wherever we're standing
I won't take you for granted
'Cause we'll never know when, when we'll run out of time...

By the end of the song, the sweetness was gone. He was grinding on me like a wild man, that incredible dexterity of his that I could not fathom as he /ruined/ me in my own space. He even snarled at me that I was /not/ to move those hands, and he took me in hand himself and pressed me inside. He anchored an arm around my neck, and he rode me, taking what he needed from me, covering me with kisses, his hands everywhere, sweet nothings and 'anatas' and more and I just whined, whimpering, needing everything he gave to me, needing to not think, needing to not be the one in control, needing him...

He thrust his fingers in my mouth as I got louder, cursing me for being such a loud boar, and yet he would keep doing whatever made me make those noises, and I kept making them. When I finally came, bucking and wild, he'd thrust his wrist into my mouth, and I was biting down on him, my fingers clawing at the back of the chair in desperation. He egged me on, wanting more, grinding my mind into oblivion as he took his own selfish need from me, and by the time I was ruined, panting and jelly-boned, he finally took one of my hands from their invisible bindings and gave me his own need. I took great delight in watching him rock while I was still inside him, squeezing the life and pleasure from him, until he came with me, cursing and blessing my name in the same breath.

...I let out a chuckle after a moment, a dizzying, light-headed thing. He growled, leaning over me for another hungry kiss.

"You can not be serenading me like that, Makuri-san," he growled. "You make me lose my mind when you sing."

"Noted," I purred, my voice gravelly. I nuzzled him, and he did the same, and he gave me another kiss.

...There was a moment where I listened to the music outside of the office and I laughed.

He gave me a crooked smile. "What is it?"

"The song on now is 'What Was I Thinkin'?' by Dierks Bentley," I said, grinning. "He takes this chick out on a wild date, gets into all kindsa mischief. Worth it, though."

"Hnn..." He considered that, and he rocked his hips, making me gasp, and I lost my train of thought again.
I swallowed hard. God damn, this angel was a piece of work. How on earth did I get so lucky?

He gasped too when he pulled away, and I saw how he barely caught himself from stumbling, his own legs shaking. I'm still marveling at how he managed the range of motion he did in such space.

"By the way... You're amazin'," I told him. "I don't know how the fuck you did that, but... Damn."

He chuckled, that smug smirk on his lips that I just wanted to slap off of him... Damn, he was gorgeous. "I am glad you appreciate it."

"I mean... I was gonna pin you on the door and fuck your brains out, but that was good, too," I reached for the drink that was a layered drink now, with ice and cream and soda. I took a good three swigs before he confiscated it from me and took his own drag. I laughed, reaching a hand to slap that gorgeous ass, and he turned to oblige me, and I got a better strike in.

"Mmmf... Damn, you are beautiful," I purred.

"Mm. I am aware." He sat that beautiful ass on my knees and pressed his shoulders back against me. We were both slick with sweat, and I leaned over him to steal a kiss. We both tasted like fruity drinks, and it was a little silly, but I really didn't fucking care. He was /here/ and he was beautiful and it was all I wanted right now.

We polished off the drink and I pulled out a fresh bar mop for us to clean up with ("Oooh... Is this pure cotton?" he teased. "So soft..." "Oh, only the finest for you, honey bee.") and we dressed. Just to make me crazy, he didn't put his hair back up in his usual topknot, but pulled it back into a loose ponytail, just enough to pull it back but let it dangle between his shoulder blades. I stared at it as I followed him out, my fingers reaching out to tug on it, and he just let out that soft sniff of a laugh that was so god damn addictive.

I was surprised that there were actually several customers in the bar. I realized that opening it had been a good choice.

"Jimbo, my friend, I think it's time that my gorgeous friend here gets his sake," I announced. I ran a hand over his shoulders, and up to squeeze at his neck, giving him a kiss on the temple. He purred like a cat. Behind me, someone was calling my name, and I did my rounds. Two pitchers of beer and five parties later, my baby was on his second bottle of sake and Meiko had come in for the late night rush. As soon as she saw Hanzo at the bar, she gave him a tearful hug, and he was surprised.

"[What is wrong?]

"[You have no IDEA how insufferable he is when you're not here!]

"[And he has a REALLY annoying ringtone for you, makes us all crazy.]

"Hey, come on, now!"

"[Annoying ringtone], eh?" he teased, grinning, reaching for his phone.

"Now, Han, don't be that way," I warned him, pulling a finger gun on him.

"Hmm? What way?" he asked, that stupid fucking smile on his face that I just wanted to slap off of him as he stabbed at his phone with his fingers.

A moment later, my phone went, /Awoo-oo-oo!, and he burst out laughing.
"Is that the Good, Bad and Ugly one?" he asked, his words barely decipherable through his laughter.

"Now, don't you tease me..."

"It should be a whipcrack if you ask me," Meiko said, pulling on her apron.

"See, this is why you can't come in here anymore, Han," I growled. "Y'all gang up on me."

"Gaijin problems," Jimbo noted airily, and Hanzo laughed, offering him a fist bump for that one.

It almost made you forget that he was a yakuza prince hiding from the world in a shitty little cowboy bar in Koenji.

Gaijin or not, the night went by fast enough. We laughed and danced and poured our Scorpion bites, and a wet day had given way to a busy night. The first hint that something was amiss was when I was closing up the drawer at 0130 and I handed Meiko and Jimbo half shares instead of thirds.

She frowned, staring at the two fists of cash, one presented to her and the other to Jimbo. "What are you doing, McCree-san?"

"What does it look like? Givin' you guys your tips."

"And where are yours?" she insisted.

I nodded to Hanzo. "Didn't you know? I got a sugar daddy. I don't need it."

Hanzo snorted. "Oh, didn't I tell you? I got disowned. You gotta pay for this," he said, his voice only slurring a little bit as he gestured to his third drink.

"Aw, shit, now you tell me," I grumbled, taking back the cash from her, and she protested, taking it.

"Do not play with me!" she insisted. That caught me off guard, and the laughter died on my lips. "You've been weird! You come in... Spooked. And it's not just him," she said, nodding to Hanzo.

"You look different. You act differently. You even talk differently, and it's scary. You were comping drinks left and right, and you didn't even write them down."

I blinked at her. "...So?"

"SO. Last week you were a drunken mess. Then you say you are 'paying it back', and now you aren't even writing it down anymore. There's three bottles of tequila missing from yesterday! And a scotch and a whiskey. All of your favorites. And two of the elderflower and rum as well. There are whole bottles missing. I am not stupid! I pay attention!" She pointed to her eye. "Also, Ami texted me, said you were talking about firing her! I do not know what it is about!"

I could feel Hanzo's eyes boring into me, but I didn't dare look at him.

'Cause we'll never know when we'll run out of time...

I looked down at the sink. "You want the truth?"

"I am asking you," she said, her fist still wrapped around the cash.

I looked to Tenshi, and he gave a discreet nod. Then I looked at her. "We're getting into some
Yakuza trouble. I'm a mite worried that it's gonna get gnarly."

She scoffed. "Shimada-sama is sitting at your bar. Who is fucking with you?" she said, point blank.

I glanced at Hanzo, but he was enough in his cups to just shrug and nod in agreement with her argument.

"...Meiko, honey, I'm not just some cowboy. You know that, right?"

Her eyes narrowed at me... Trying to figure out what I meant.

"Meiko-san," Hanzo said, tapping a finger on the bar beside her. She looked at it. What he said after, I didn't quite make out, it was so soft, and in Japanese. She answered in kind, and... And he said something else. And her eyes went wide.

She looked up at me, face white as a sheet, eyes like saucers. And all she said was, "Kaiju."

There was a tense moment where I wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing, and Hanzo just started cackling, a wheezing laugh as he bent over the bar. Meiko stared at him... And then back at me. "...I think he's very drunk."

"Yeah..." I agreed, watching him with concern. "I'll take care of him, don't worry about it." But the look she gave me... She didn't argue anymore, just put her money away and went to the back.

"I'm making myself food," she announced.

"Help yourself," I called back. "Shit, make me some nachos while you're back there. Sounds like a good idea."

I put out last call and people trailed out one at a time. When the last customer was gone, Hanzo snatched at me as I walked by and dragged me in for a kiss. I protested softly, a hand reaching out to lean on the bar as I let him take me, eagerly answering his lips with mine.

I sighed... Nuzzling him. "You smell like whiskey, honey," I purred.

"Hnn... I like it hard. And rough. Like my cowboys."

A soft grunt. I gave him a tease of a kiss. "Let me lock up. Okay, honey?"

He bit his lip, but he let me go. I reached for his hair as I went back around the bar, and he squeaked, nearly falling from his stool in surprise. I chuckled but went about cleaning up and preparing for tomorrow. I watched Jimbo sweep the place for bugs while I restocked the tomato juice. Meiko returned with a platter of her own loaded quesadilla and a box of kaiju nachos in a to go box, although she left it open and set it on the bar where Hanzo could reach into it. I took some too, and even Jimbo stole some without asking. We bid Meiko good night and made quick work of the chores. "Jimbo, get out of my face," I called out to him when I realized all that was left was the till, trash and lights.

"Get out of my face," he teased. He collected a box of fish tacos from the fridge he had made earlier and tucked it under his arm. "Are we open tomorrow?"

"As far as I know," I said, trying not to let it weigh on me. "Until something bad happens, we keep on keepin' on."

He nodded, knowing that was as good an answer as any of us were going to get. He pulled on his
jacket, and I watched Hanzo stand and make his way over to him...

His voice was soft. Quiet enough I couldn't make out what he was saying, but the slight sway to his steps was hard to see if I wasn't looking for it. Tenshi answered him in kind, and the two clasped hands. My Jimbo looked at me and then slipped out of the bar. I opened a bag and started replacing the trash bins.

"...What are you sayin' to my bunnies, Hanzo?" I asked.

He gave me a sad smile. "Perspective. Let them think me drunk." He limped to the bar, I realized, and I blinked, having never seen him limp before. His smile brightened. "Hey, cowboy. What time do you get off?"

"I get off when I get off," I answered in a teasing purr. "Way to change the subject."

He stole a chip. "Suffice it to say there are some things that I can say as the man I am that would take a lot more explaining from you." He crunched. And then a soft hum. "You know... That day. When you first brought him in," he said, thumbing over his shoulder at the gone usagi. "You had promised me nachos." Another crunch. "I was starving. Had to find somewhere else to eat, I was fuming the whole time." He had the nerve to look shy and contrite. "Been wanting to try these damn nachos for weeks now."

I chuckled. "Worth the wait?"

He hummed. "It's the company more than the food, but... Hai." He nodded. "It is nice to taste something that reminds me of you."

...I wondered if he would forever see me in tacos and quesadillas and nachos. I stopped what I was doing and moved to the nachos, taking a bite myself, humming as well. "...I mean, nachos are nachos. But the chili is where a lot of people go wrong." Another bite.

"Agreed," he said.

I took the time to sit and eat them with him, serving us both a soda and just sat with him. It was like our own sweet, silly date. Domestic and uncomplicated. I looped a metal finger into his belt loops and he rested his head on my shoulder. I teased the ribbon out of his hair, and as I slid my fingers through his hair, he sighed, nuzzling into me. I pressed soft kisses to his skin, and he just clung to me.

I think he started crying first. Before I knew it, we were wrapped in each other, quietly mourning this, even as it still was. The fact of the matter was, our days were numbered. We had no idea what was going to happen next, and the odds of it ending well were getting smaller and smaller by the day. There were no hungry kisses, only desperate claws scraping through shirts and clinging to flesh. At some point, I opened my arms to him and he climbed into my lap again, dexterous fuck that he was, and damn it felt good to have him wrapped around me, faces buried in shoulders. When we quieted to sniffles, I just... Breathed him in. That smell of his aftershave, his shampoo, the lingering of his musk and the leather of his jacket. He had a clean handsome edge to him, with that oh-so-subtle blossom of fruiting flower that no one could know about, and it just suited him. But you had to dig in under his shirt to get to it, at the nape of his neck, and damn it all, I could bury myself in that hair and stay wrapped in him forever.

...But even that had to end. He muttered something about being tired and needing to go to bed. I spoke gently with him, and there was a kiss, but it was chaste and heartbroken and mournful. I rose, finishing my tasks and taking out the trash. I was closing the dumpster when I heard a shout. I
tensed, worried, and slipped back into the Rabbit, locking the door behind me. Long legs stalked through the back of the shop, and when I came out with a hard face, Hanzo straightened.

"What is it?" he asked, turning on the stool.

"Shouting," I said.

"At this hour?"

My thoughts precisely. I unlocked and stepped out the front door, my hand instinctively going to where my gun would be if I wasn't in fucking Japan. My eyes scanned the horizon, and there it was -- a shape, coming from the West, and it looked heart-wrenchingly familiar.

"Sama!" my Usagi-Jimbo called to me. He was windmilling as he came, his boots and feet unsteady as he hauled himself into the light of the Jack Rabbit. "Sama! You said to come to you! You said to come to you--"

"Hold on now, son, I gotcha!" I said, catching him in my arms. He was bloodied. And bad. There was a streak of crimson over his shirt, his jacket off-kilter. A burst eye and a face that would be red and purple tomorrow. "Come on in, I gotcha..." I carried him in through the front door, and Hanzo stood, face white, looking down at him as I set him down on the first stool. "Who was it? Talk to me, baby."

"It was Shimada," he panted, looking past me to Hanzo. "It was Shimada! They are scared! They want to know-- Know who the Kaiju is." He panted at me, that fear in his eyes... Like a jackrabbit in the grip of a wolf. "They said... They said to warn you. To warn you they are coming for you. And they mean war."

Hanzo and I shared a glance and I looked down at Jimbo.

Well. Happened faster than I thought.

Chapter End Notes

I swear, I wasn't planning on Hanzo stepping in like that, but I was writing the scene, and the doorbell just rang and when I looked up, IT WAS HANZO. But damn, it worked.
Surrender

Chapter Summary

Hanzo has a way of handling things that... Is unorthodox, but might have a method behind it. Trick is if Jesse can surrender power to him and let him do it.

Chapter Notes

Just a reminder: they have an established safeword. Some pretty heavy kink in here, but probably not as explicit as some of you might like (but that's what Shades is for!). I'm slowly working on getting back into my fanfic rotation. Promise you folks that you aren't forgotten!!!

Reminder that you can find me most anywhere online as BlakesDungeon, SmutWithPlot and LoonyMoonyProds/LoonyMoonyProductions -- including Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, Patreon, Reddit (BDQM is a subreddit now!!!), Discord (COME JOIN USSSSSS) and a few other places besides. If you follow me on Patreon, you can keep up to date with all of the stuff I'm working on, not just the writing. That would be cool of you.

Way things stood, we had a few options. I could skedaddle, leave town, abandon Hanzo and all of my usagis and just lay low in a safe house in Cambodia for six months and pretend it all never happened. I could also rig the whole block to blow, some rather unfortunate mishap involving a burst gas main (which happened to have a bomb strapped to it in several strategic places) and do the first part, but in somewhere less third world and wait for the insurance policy. I could also try it with the 'set fire to the flat and fake your death' trick, but really, I save that shit for when I'm dodging bounty hunters. They got extra persnickety about the skedaddlin' part. Setting fire to anything with DNA evidence on it was just me thumbing my nose.

I could also close down the shop. Send all the bunnies home. Let them keep what fortunes they have and cut their losses. Give up. The typical Yakuza gang banger would think I was a coward who got roughed up for tribute ONE TIME and turned tail and ran. The neighbors might cluck a bit about 'What a shame' and then forget I exist. But my battered wife would show up tomorrow and have no safe haven, my bunnies would have no work with which to pay the bills, and even though I had warned them, it felt a lot like waving a white flag.

I could also just keep the shop running, pretend I wasn't bothered, keep up the farce for a bit. It would be a reasonable plot. I had started this pub to keep it, right?

All of this is whirling around in my head as I patch up my usagi, who is toughing it out like a proper soldier. It's clear he's worried sick by the darting eyes and the pulsing heartbeat I can see throbbing in his throat, but he puts up a good front. So does Hanzo, who watches us with a trained disinterest that I imagine is his default response to that kind of blood. Like getting a Hallmark card. It makes me uneasy, because it just reminds me how much bullshit and heartache my honey bee
has had to go through, and he sits there and sips cola and eats his nachos like this was perfectly normal.

"You wanna work tomorrow night?" I asked my Yojimbo, gently tapping a bandage over a cut on his jaw. It feels wrong to touch him like this. In another variant of this story, I might have caressed or kissed him -- he was very pretty, and apparently obliging -- but he was right, there was no 'competing with the real thing'.

I wonder if Hanzo was hiding some jealousy over there as he chomped on his nachos, and the thought gave me a little tickle. A tiny one, because I was mostly playing medic, but it helped.

"Of course," Yojimbo answered. "As you said. You need my help." He glanced to Hanzo, and then back to me. "I am here for whatever you need from me, sama."

"Well... Be damn careful of yourself," I said, putting up the last of the kit. "Let me get you home, at least." I looked to Hanzo. "You brought your car, honey?"

Hanzo shook his head. "I was dropped off." Another crunch. "I was disowned, remember?"

I snorted. "Right." I looked back to usagi. "I can call you a cab?" I offered.

He nodded. "That would be good." I do so, and I fix him up a drink and he helps with the chips, but it's oddly silent. It's as if Hanzo has something over the boy, and suddenly he isn't speaking. Almost like Jimbo is waiting for Hanzo to say something more, and this is just the anxiety before the other boot falls. The cab arrives and I stand in the doorway to see him off, safely in and driving away. As I stand there, Hanzo shuts off the music and the lights and joins me, his arms slithering around me, and it feels... Possessive.

"What do you keep telling my bunnies, Hanzo?" I asked him again, but I make it clear I'm not moving until I get a decent answer.

He just rubs his face into my neck, seemingly not bothered by the question. "Perspective," he said again. "I told her, 'Naku neko wa nezumi o toranu.' The mewling cat will not catch the mouse." A kiss on my skin, and I fought the urge to lean into it. "Then I asked her, 'But if you are not after mice, but dragons, what kind of animal do you use?'"

"Kaiju," I answered, but giving no quarter. Monsters. Big ones.

"For the other... It is clear he favors you. I told him, 'Yoraba taiju no kage.' You take shade under a large tree." He seemed to take my stubbornness in stride. "It is clear he wishes to be of service. The problem is finding a master worth bowing to. You are a worthy man. But that is a high price to pay for anyone. He must decide in his heart that you are worth that sacrifice. That you will, to use the metaphor, protect him as the taiju shades a man from the sun. To trust that you will treat him better than the Shimadas have." He used a little teeth, and really, that's unfair. "I reminded him that he is not doing it for me. But for you."

I bit back a groan, trying to keep from making any sound at all. "That man is ready to die for me." I hated the idea. I never wanted that kind of power. It's why I left Blackwatch. Among other reasons. I knew that Reyes and Morrison both expected me to pick up that mantle, and I didn't want it. I had enough blood on my hands from strangers. I didn't want to be responsible for people who would reach out to me in their last moments and smile, thanking me for the pleasure. Shit like that gave me nightmares.

"He is ready to do more than die." Damn bastard slipped a hand into the front of my jeans, right
there in the god damn doorway, calling my bluff. I could feel my face get red, my whole body
growing warm, skin crawling with the need to answer him, but I stayed still.

...Well. Most of me did.

"It ain't right to ask that of anyone," I answered him, and it sounded a touch strained to my own
ears, and I hoped he couldn't tell.

"No..." I couldn't help how my hips twitched when he grazed against me, a fist squeezing against
the door frame. "It isn't." There's a careful, cautious amusement there. "But it is what it is." Damn...
He shamelessly strokes, and I have to shut my eyes to hide how badly I am losing.

"Han, I'm tryin' real hard to have a serious talk here." I tried my best to sound severe, but it was too
soft to have the edge of discipline necessary to pull it off. Damn bastard is in my pants.

His hand stills, but it does not retreat, a warm weight over my desperate need. "Real hard?" he
 Teases, and damn him, he sounds almost childlike and innocent, and fuck me sideways, it's making
me melt.

I swallow, and nodded. "Yeah," I whisper, voice ragged. "Real hard... And I am havin' a hard time
tellin' you no."

This time, he pulls his hand back. But his claws catch on my hips, and when he tugs on me, I give
away easily, as if that frame was all that kept me standing. I slam the damn door, locking it, and I
feel his hands on my skin, and this man dives under my shirt, face and fingers crawling all over me,
and I have to brace myself against the door as he takes to teeth, and I let out a desperate moan, a
breathy beg. "Han, please..." and I feel that scruff, those teeth going down my spine, and my back
arched, hips rocking.

I hear a hiss. I feel a tongue as he dips my jeans down, a keening whine that's... definitely me.

"You are too worried," he growls, and it's inhuman. It makes my knees buckle. "You want to have
me humor your paranoia and I won't do it." He's tugging on my jeans, and I'm not fighting it. My
belt is pulled loose, and then there's only skin. He pulls my hips back, and I feel him behind me. "I
will fix this. When you can think, then we will talk."

"I-I can talk..."

"Like hell. I have tortured enough men to know when you are just feeding me a line. Even if it is
just one you tell yourself." I hear an hawk, and it's like electricity up my spine as I feel it slide
through my crack.

"Han, baby, this is the bar..."

"It's closed," he growled, those strong fingers sliding to spread his spit, and it's so raw, so
improvised, and I've done it so rarely, there's a thrill to it.

"I had just the one rule..."

"That time is over, Jesse," he snarled, a finger teasing, and much as I protest, logically, the rest of
me is game to his tricks. My hips press back into him, needy, and the part of me that has been
hungering for him for weeks is too eager to betray me. "Look at you... You are a mess."

"You been gone," I whined. "Honey, I am doin' all this shit on my own--"
I'm surprised as that hand wraps around my mouth, and I am pulled back, back arched, hands and belly braced on the door, but hips and now shoulders pulled back to him, stretched taut. Fuck anyone who says a smaller partner can't take control -- if anything, when they pull it off it's even hotter.

"You are not, as you say, 'doing this shit on your own'," he growled, and in another situation, hearing him curse would do me in, but right now I'm already done. "You think you are. Yet here you are, with me. With your usagis. With Genji. You like to think you are alone, but you are not. You find people to tie yourself to, always. Here four months, and you already have a crew that loves you, a hero to the forsaken and abused, and even a heart or three around here ready to kill for you. How can you say you are alone?"

I... I don't know what to say to that. And he seems to have a smug chuckle behind me.

"Maybe I am not just some pretty boy yakuza prince, Jesse," he purred. "Perhaps I have a big, sexy brain that is part of why you are still talking to me. Perhaps it is these mind games that keep you engaged when others would only want you for your sweet voice and charming good looks. The downside is that I am as twisted and broken as you are, anata. And I have seen how your mind works."

There's a squeal, muffled by his hand as a finger presses inside me, a sob, and even though instinct is to move away, all I really accomplish is a pathetic attempt to climb the door before giving in to it. Fuck. He isn't exactly gentle, and yet, that blinding pain is a cruel kind of blessing, and I huff and puff through his hand, like a beast in need. I feel him move inside me, turning, twisting. And yet, I don't stop him. I could. I could fight. But I don't.

"You don't want to be in control," he purrs in my ear. It's almost like a cruel tease, like he would tell me what a shameless, filthy whore I am, but the content is not the usual kink. "You fear it. You've been given power, and it scared you. You don't like blind soldiers. You don't like scare tactics. You don't like bullies and people who take advantage." I sob as a second finger squeezes in with the first, and I have to be careful to slam my flesh hand against the door as I squirm in his grip. There's a hungry groaning from him, as he devours my pain and anguish and need and lust and all the ugliness in me, and he gobbles it up like a fine meal, rather than an oozing, putrid, infested wound eating me up inside. "Oh, you fit so well as a man of power, Jesse. You make a fine boss. A grand king. A true leader. It's very attractive. It's why people always want you. And yet you always succumb to someone else. You're no Alpha. You're a Beta. You're a dog. Not a wolf, or a coyote or a hyena. You're not quite so wild or cruel, even if they trained you to be. No, you're a dog... A ferocious, fierce protector, but no less loving and kind and there to help, but just as much you need to have a pack, and you need a Master. You need to be able to lay down that power to someone else now and again, or it will consume you... Eh, pup?"

I'm trembling, my hips moving so slightly to compliment his stroking, and my mind... I can't think. All I hear are his words. Beta. All the Alpha male, bravissimo, machismo bullshit... I'd seen it in Deadlock. In my father. In Reyes and in Blackwatch. So many Alpha-types. They would pick fights, and I wanted none of it. I never wanted to be in charge. I didn't want to be team captain. And yet, it's because I didn't want it that I always seemed to end up picked. Because I didn't just go in to win, I kept my casualty count down. I saved the civilians. I got the job done efficiently. Maybe not by the book, but in the best way I could...

They used to call me Reyes' lap dog. I didn't care. They didn't know the man like I did. Or... Or thought I did. But then, I guess none of us did. That was his final trick. Good magician never reveals his secrets, and even as his apprentice, he left me with a few things to learn on my own.
...But Hanzo. Hanzo got it. He got me. He seemed to read between my cues and hear what I wasn't saying. And he had the brass to say it out loud.

"Please..." I begged again, but what it is I was asking for, I don't know anymore.

"Give in to me," he whispered in my ear, and if it sounded a bit ragged this time... "Let me help you, anata. Surrender to me. Let me take this burden from you. Be mine for tonight. No one else's."

I... I didn't know who else's he thought I was. I always felt so alone...

...But I wasn't. He was still here. This wasn't over yet. And right now, I had him. I had him, and I was wasting time, fighting the man I loved when he was trying to help me. To break me of this, so I could become undone for a while. Maybe... Maybe a reset would help. Maybe at the very least, I could get rid of some of this frustration. And maybe...

I don't know. Maybe someone else could take the reins for a while, and they would have a better idea of what the fuck to do in this situation right now.

If Reyes was here, he'd have killed them all. We would have been gone in three days. Now, I wondered Shimada would do.

"Yes."

It was barely a whisper, and I wasn't even sure if it was loud enough for him to hear, except that the fingers he'd had around my mouth moved to my throat. There was a shaking sob of need as I felt that pressure around my neck, blocking the blood to my brain, that delicious dizzy feeling as the oxygen left my brain. The sliding digits inside me were pulled away, another dose of his spit -- and this time I gave a lewd moan as it hit me that I wasn't even ashamed to enjoy -- and he went into me raw. He pegged me to the door, senseless pleas and begging spilling from my lips like so much praise, and somewhere, I lost my mind. I remember pain, I remember pleasure. I remember looking up at him from my knees at one point, that Matsuta scowl on his lips, eyes gleaming in the dark, the soft glow of the bar's back lights silhouetting him like an oni. He used my body, he used my face, and there on the floor he used my cock, too. By the time he'd finished with me, I was a mindless, jibbering, muttering, spent piece of flesh. I don't remember him dressing me again, only warm hands and soft kisses and a sweet voice. I don't remember much of the ride away, except for soft music and the passing Japanese neon zipping by as I stared out the window. I definitely don't remember coming home, because we didn't go to my home. I remember shivering in the cold, mewing for him, and him not being there, only to come back with such sweet apologies and kisses, before practically carrying me in his arms to a new place. I followed blindly, not caring to look, not looking to care, and I remember a bed, cold, with odd linens, and he set me down and undressed me like a doll. He took me to the shower and bathed me, and as we swayed arm in arm under the hot water, it felt like heaven. Those strong hands dried me off, tousled my hair with sweet giggles, and I gave him a faded smile, eyes too gone to see. There was a tv show I didn't watch, a meal he fed me that I don't remember, and when he bound my hands to the bedpost to use my body again, it felt like worship.

I remember him untying me with a warm, murmured 'good boy', and I hummed, amused. I remembered him fastening a collar around my throat, careful to keep it away from my hair, and I remember going to bed, naked but for that stretch of claim staking leather, one of his legs wrapped around mine, my head curled up to his breast, and the blankets tucked up around us while he cooed soft native lullabies in my ear.

I don't remember any nightmares, either.
"Koinu," he says gently, wondering. "You sit so pretty."

I swallow hard, and look down at nothing in particular, hands on my knees. "I... I've had training."

"Training," he echoes. His eyes narrow. "What kind of training?"

There's that smidge of jealousy. I realize he's... Probably not had nearly as much experience as me. Maybe he's realizing this.

"Umm..." I rub a hand over the back of my neck. "You ever heard of the Story of O?"

// The morning after. Hanzo has to come to grips with the fact that his significant other was trained to worm his way into people's hearts... Just as he has here.

Chapter Notes

If you've never heard of The Story of O, it's a French book of erotic literature, specifically very BDSM erotica, written by Anne Desclos under a pseudonym. The story follows a woman who goes through rigorous, methodical BDSM training and a couple of masters/owners during the process. I've never read the book, but I have seen the 1975 film, which I watched with my local munch years and years ago. Unlike other stories where women are objectified and dehumanized, it's important to note that in this situation, not only is O participating in the whole thing with knowing consent, but it's also written by a woman. Despite this being a classic of the medium, most anyone who ISN'T educated in BDSM has likely never heard of it. It's not for the faint of heart, forewarning. McCree was likely introduced to this story (god knows by who...) and decided that's what he wanted to do. I write a LOT of kink, being a sapiosexual myself, and McCree is very similar. He's sexed a lot of people, but only the ones who can fuck his brain, too, can really capture his heart.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When I come to... It's daylight.

There's an alarm clock on the dresser, but it's dead. Or, more likely, it's been pulled out of the wall. I frown at that, but don't say any--

As I move to sit up, that pressure on my neck is... Grounding. I sway for a moment, caught off guard by it. The last time I woke up with a collar was...

...Training? Like, actual training? Story of O type shit, because Reyes said if I wanted to be that kind of intelligence officer, I would need training. He gave me lots of options and decidedly
didn't pay attention to which one I picked, he just made sure that some of the cash Blackwatch made in some of our less legal dealings (gotta do something with that confiscated merchandise...) paid for all of it and that Morrison (and anyone else for that matter) didn't find out about it. Especially considering I was barely legal at the time. There was two weeks of collar training, where we were to strut about in nothing but a collar. Sometimes scanty outfits or underwear, especially for the play parties that happened on the weekends, but very often just the collar. So this... Doesn't feel weird.

It feels bizarre though, because that was a long time ago. Like being in a jock strap for the first time since high school. I would assume. I didn't exactly go to high school.

There's a voice through the wall, muffled, that I recognize. I settle back on the pillow, my mental image something like a yawning pup flopping back down into his bed after woken by a weird noise, waiting for his Master to come back. And yet, the thought was comforting. I let my eyes droop as I laid my face against a soft white thing. Some hotels had shit pillows, thin and cold places that made you wonder why you paid any kind of money for it, but this place was nice. Pillow top mattress, one of those medical-grade pillows with the memory foam that slowly re-inflates when you get up. The sheets are soft, too. I wondered if they were that 'Egyptian cotton' everyone goes on about, and smiled at the thought.

...I'm not sure how long I wait, but eventually the one-sided conversation ends. He's trying to be quiet, but if it's so I don't hear what he's talking about or to not wake me, I can't tell. The door to the bathroom opens, and I look up again, the D-ring making a soft jingle as I do so.

He stops mid-step, startled. His eyes are wide in surprise, but his lips spread into a smile that I might categorize as shy. "Ohaio, Koinu-kun!" he calls to me, using a silly, high-pitched voice that makes me chuckle. "Look at that cutie." He's wearing a simple bathrobe, loosely tied around his waist with silk pajama bottoms, and he spreads his arms out like one might to play monster with a child, and I hide my face in the pillow, blushing, embarrassed by how fucking adorable he is.

"Gonna get the pup!" he announces, hopping onto the bed with me, arms going around me. I wiggle, grinning, eyes almost closed, and he squeezes me tight. I hum, contented, and he starts peppering my shoulders with kisses.

...I have the passing thought that I should know what time it is, and what he's on about, but I can't find it in me to care.

The kisses slide up my neck and I coo, close-mouthed, as he does. Then those whiskers are on my cheek, and he's crawling over me, a warm weight that is just... Wonderful. A kiss to my temple, the apple of my cheek, a tapping finger to my beard. "Koinu..." he coos. I assume that's a nickname, given the honorary, but I don't know what that word means. Or if I did, my brain doesn't have the capacity to translate at the moment. I turn my head a little towards him, eyes sparkling with joy, and he nuzzles in, and gives me a kiss. I'm twisting myself at the waist to do so, but I kiss him back. A hand slides under my jaw, following the direction of my scruffy, uneven beard, and I'm sure this close he can see the scarring that ruins it all, but his eyes shine with such fondness and affection, it's like he can't see them at all.

Or he doesn't care. Or doesn't mind. It's a freeing notion.

The kiss deepens, and I roll over to my back. He weaves our fingers together, flesh and mechanical alike, and we kiss like youth, uncaring and in love. And yet, it's chaste. So chaste... And my heart is so full of love, and joy, and peace.

He settles against me, and the weight of him is grounding and lovely. "Koinu-kun... Did you sleep
Alright?" I nod. A shy smile. I nuzzle at him, our noses touching. He chuckles. A curse in his own tongue, "-- you are too damn cute, Koinu-kun. Too much." Another kiss, but this one is less chaste. A hand touches me, and his mouth begins to wander back down... I whine a little, squirming and shy, but it does not dissuade him. I feel my face get hot with blush, clutching to the sheets, but he takes me in his mouth until I'm keening and begging for it. When he relinquishes me, just shy of my finishing -- fuck, edgeplay. I'm a sucker for it -- he flips me over to my belly, and carries on behind. My hips press back, too innocent to be shamed, and when he takes me, I howl out my satisfaction for everyone to hear. After, he leaves me there, a messy creampie, and I am so blissed out. I wonder if he'll leave it -- and me -- there and just come back when he's ready to go again, and I have no motivation to move.

I drift off again.

...This time, I'm woken by his voice. My face is still in the pillow, drool staining it from our coupling as well as my sleep, and as I turn my head, a concerned whine, I can still feel it, and I groan. Christ... Been a long time since I woke up like that, too.

But his voice sounds angry. Whoever he's on the phone with, he is far from happy, but I can't quite translate the words I hear. I wonder if he's purposefully keeping me out of it so that he can... Attend to things while I'm not awake to notice, and I'm not sure if I should be flattered or worried. I want to call to him, but my words won't come. Even a sound is a struggle...

But I manage something. The door opens immediately, and I get the last bit of it, which sounds like a death threat, and the lack of honoraries mean someone he does not respect at all, or is very intimate with, and I'm gonna vote not the latter. He comes to me, that phone perched on his shoulder, and he shushes me gently, as a parent might a mewling babe in the middle of the night. "[It's okay, puppy,]" he coos to me -- Koinu. That means 'puppy'. -- and he sits down on the side of the bed, fingers combing through my hair. He offers me a strained smile, and I pout up at him, not sure what he's doing that's upsetting him, but hoping it isn't about me...?

He leans down to give me a gentle kiss, and after another three seconds pointedly hangs up. Oh boy. Whoever that is has really pissed him off.

...He kisses me, but I can feel my brain returning, concern furrowing my brow. I try to speak, but there's just a murmuring, a whine of concern.

"Shhh. Don't worry about it, pup," he says gently. "I'm just taking care of Shimada business, okay?" His fingers scratch gently at my scalp, but I do not stop pouting. I see his expression fade into something sad, and he tucks that phone away. He scoots closer, bringing my head and arms into his lap. "Hey. You just sit here and be my good boy, okay?" He looks behind me, and I see that glitter of satisfaction, the twist to his smile. "How about that gift, ah? Does that feel good?"

I realize he means... And I blush. I nod. "H-hai," I manage.

His mouth bursts into a smile and he coos again. "Oh, such a good boy! Do you want another? Hmm? I bet you would, wouldn't you...?"

It's getting to be too much. My body is sore, and he seems to already know that, because he is gentle with me, coaxing me with his hand while his other arm holds me so close. I feel safe in his arms, and I want to focus on nothing but him, but...

But I keep looking at that clock. I should know what time it is. It's concerning me that it isn't on.

He seems to realize that his trick isn't working anymore. He stills in me, deep in me, and squeezes.
I hiss at the pressure, which has become pain, and look back to him. His eyes watch me, and then he grabs at my hair, pulling suddenly, cruel and unkind.

"Hnnngh! Dammit, Han!" I hiss, voice raspy. "Fuck!"

"What are you so worried about, Jesse?" he growled. "Ha? What is it? I could keep you here forever, sweets and food and sex and keep you happy, yet still you fucking worry!" I flinch at the words. "What did I say to you yesterday? Do you not trust me?" His grip on my hair turns my head so that I can stare at that blank clock. "It's that thing, isn't it? You want to see numbers on it, and you don't. That's it, isn't it?"

I... I can't answer him. A hand slaps me, and I flinch, which causes a chain reaction to where we're joined, and I groan.

"You are an ungrateful beast!" He tosses my head forward and exits me without preamble, and I let out a cry...

"Damn, you are so mean," I protest, voice still raspy. I cough. "Fuck. How long we been out?"

"Not so long!" he barked back. "It's not even 10a! I swear! You were awake with the dawn, you ridiculous creature. After closing at an ungodly hour! I put you back to bed and you wake up less than two hours later. I thought maybe you were greedy, but you just can't help yourself, can you?"

...I'm getting the impression I'm not the only one he's mad at. I turn to watch him, but he's got a bag -- a bag I realize was in my truck, and is now on the twin bed by the window -- and he's pulling out clothes for me.

...Did he drive us here in my truck? I decide it might be best for me to... Be quiet a while. He stomps about, frustrated by how I've managed to worm my way out of this, even wearing a collar, and I have the decency to be sheepish. He returns with a warm, wet washcloth for me and a towel, a muttered grumbling as he cleans me. His hands are gentle, but I can see he wanted me to be out longer.

Probably because of the conversation we're about to have next, that he's been putting off.

I keep quiet, and the joy of the moment has passed. I get him credit -- someone with less experience would probably be out for days, but the whole point of me going to training was to strengthen myself physiologically. I'm a man who grew up on pain and body punishment, so BDSM just translates naturally for me. But I've been on the bottom and on the top and back and forth so many times, it requires actual effort to succumb.

Useful when you're a spy that's pretending to be a bottomed out slut so you can comb through your Master's computer when he's sleeping. It takes a lot of work to keep me in sub space. I'm slippery like that.

Once I'm washed up, he offers me my clothes, a half-hearted attempt to dress me, but he gives up when I stand to pull on my jeans on my own. He's hurt, I can tell. There's a defiance as he wants to keep up his charade, but I just... My resilience is stronger.

I wonder if I've bruised his ego a bit by bouncing back so quick. It's no discredit to him, but I doubt he knows that.

I watch him change into clothes, too, as I sit on the side of the bed, but I keep the collar on, the practiced good posture and presentation of a pet -- some habits die hard. He's shrugging on that handsome leather jacket I like so much, and he regards me sideways.
...He blinks.
"Koinu," he says gently, wondering. "You sit so pretty."

I swallow hard, and look down at nothing in particular, hands on my knees. "I... I've had training."

"Training," he echoes. His eyes narrow. "What kind of training?"

There's that smidge of jealousy. I realize he's... Probably not had nearly as much experience as me. Maybe he's realizing this.

"Umm..." I rub a hand over the back of my neck. "You ever heard of the Story of O?"

He blinks, and shakes his head slowly.

A grimace of a smile. "It's... Um. BDSM t-training." I look away again. Do not look your Master in his eyes, pet. "I've been... Trained."

When I peek up at him, he looks pale. Like a normal person might if you told them you were a trained assassin. Apparently finding out your squeeze is a trained whore has a similar effect on assassins.

"...Trained," he says again. Before I can blink, he's before me again, a hand raised to strike me, but I merely... Blink. My body posture stiffens, bracing for the strike, but I do not move to defend myself.

If anything his eyes go wider. A string of curses, and, "--when? How? WHY?"

I offer him a tiny, shy smile. "Blackwatch," I said simply, gently.

He looked like he was going to be ill. "Black...? Did everyone in Blackwatch do this?"

Genji. He's asking if Genji... I shake my head quickly. "No. I made that decision. That was me. It's my specialty. I was, um... Mm." How do you put this delicately? "I was trained for sabotage. Interrogation. Collecting intel. Sensitive intel. From very private targets."

...And that's the part where I realize that this is not how I should have said that, to a very private, very powerful man with a very dark secret that I have so recklessly discovered and indulged and--

"It's not what you think--"

"Am I a target?!" he hissed, a hand grasping at that collar, and my body jerks forward at it, even if my hands come up in innocence.

"Of course not! Jesus, Han, I didn't even know you were him until--"

"Was I then?!" I see that hand rearing back for another strike, but I also see the panic in his eyes as he wonders if his usual threats of violence would even have any kind of effect on me.

"In an abstract!" I insisted. "Christ, Han, I'm working with Genji. Yeah, you were the target! The implication is that I shoot you dead, yeah! But that was before!" I watch him wither away, that fear coming out to dominate his face. "Jesus, baby, that was before. I don't know what Genji is doing right now. That person spookin' you? That's probably him. I don't know what he's been saying to people, he has me a bit out of the loop, too. I'm just the hired gun, alright?" I licked my lips, anxious, but he's listening, so I carry on. "Jack Rabbit was just a cover. A front. A money pool so we would have liquid to get in and out if need be, or a clever alibi. We were gonna kick some cans,
see what rats turned up, and then go about whatever our mission would be. But damn it, he's out there rogue. He doesn't give me any way to contact him, he comes to me. And now your people have guys roughin' up my help and you're hidin' out at my bar and he's out there in the wind. I couldn't call him if I wanted to, baby. I'm just the gun."

I'm just the gun. I get put in my protective casing and collect dust in a box behind the driver's seat until I'm needed again. Nobody tells me shit.

He loosens his grip, letting me go. Given the situation, I want to think he believes me, knows me well enough to know I'm not lying. But he seethes. I watch him crick his neck, like a lizard readjusting his scales, that dragonhide coming over him. I mean, fuck, he's beautiful like this. Just enough cold-blooded killer to be sexy, but I've gone and found the chink in his armor and plunged a knife in there. He has his claws around my throat just the same. I've had so many opportunities to twist and pull, do the kill, so he has to know I don't mean to do it.

He has to. At worst, maybe he thinks I'm holding the spot for Genji, so he can make that last blow, but right now there is no Genji. Vulnerable, sure. But he's in no danger with me.

He huffs, "Come. We should eat at the very least." His eye moves to that collar, and I can see him debating removing it, but I pointedly tuck up my shirt's collar around it, framing it, but keeping it on. I'm not much of one for rings, but that collar and the jade dragon he had to have found tucked in my bag are as claiming as anything. I think back to the Tuzki I'd gotten him, and I wonder if he has it stashed in this room somewhere too. I won't dishonor him by taking it off, and if there's something selfish in me that needs to wear it, maybe I can just argue that it's so he feels a little safer, prouder, more secure in having me wearing it beside him. We slip out of the room, me a step behind, and he locks up. He pulls a spare room card from his pocket and offers it back to me over his shoulder without a word or a look, and I pocket it. We're at room 316. There's a stairwell beside it that would make a quick getaway, but we're taking the long route to the elevator in case we're watched.

Man has training, too. And I, for one, enjoy that. Can't stand having someone with no sense of situational awareness. If I can knock you out with a suckerpunch, you sure as hell can't handle me in bed. Not the real me.

As we get into the elevator, he taps the ground floor button. The doors close. I move quietly behind him, an arm going around his waist, and I expect him to flinch, to push me off, but he melts into my embrace. His eyes are trying their best to be vacant, but the modicum of success he has is because he's avoiding mine. I press a gentle kiss to his neck, just holding him. I scrape my whiskers over his skin, and I can feel him shiver ever so slightly as he sways on his feet, leaning back into me.

"Sorry for wakin' up so early," I say so softly. I am truly sorry. "Did I... Do you need to finish?"

"I have no appetite for that right now," he admits just as quiet.

"Alright... I'll make it up to you later, okay?"

He turns to me, and those eyes give way, the heartbreak and desperation in his eyes as he turns in my arms, just as the door opens. He stops, body tensing, looking out of the side of his eye, but there is no one. I see him debate, swallow hard. He turns back to me, a fist tangling in my shirt, and gives me a quick kiss before he steps away. "I'm going to hold you to that, Makuri-sama."

I smile sadly as I follow. Sama is something you have to earn.
BUT HEY HOWDY HEY!!! Good to be back! Did I tell you I live in Los Angeles now? I live in Los Angeles now! Currently in the process of getting a second job so I can get my own place and begin this rat race proper... As always, you can find me on Insta and Twitter as @SmutWithPlot or as LoonyMoonyProductions on Twitter, Patreon, Insta, Facebook... ALL THE THINGS. Follow if you like, be a Patron if you want to help keep me from starving to death! That would be really cool of you.

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