Summary

Old flames and prospective lovers threaten to derail your budding romance with Victor before it even begins. How will you extricate yourselves from a web of misunderstandings?

Notes

Hi everyone!

This story is especially significant to me as a writer because it represents the culmination of a number of milestones: the first time I’ve created an original character, my first attempt at writing a crossover story, the first time I’ve written in both first- and second-person perspectives. It is also the longest piece I’ve ever written!

There is a mild spoiler for Victor’s family history and a slight bending of the MLQC and KBTBB canon universes via the addition of an original side character.

Please note the warnings listed above and happy reading! 😊

Nb. This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and incidents are used fictitiously and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.
Hello Diana

“There really Vic, I thought you were beyond name calling by now.”

Her voice is sultry and low, smooth in your ears like the whiskey in her tumbler. Completely at ease in a couture Givenchy pantsuit that likely cost more than one of your production budgets, she sat with her legs elegantly crossed in a leather armchair, tipping her glass to vermilion lips. And as the flames danced in the imposing marble fireplace of one of Shanghai’s oldest and most exclusive supper clubs, they reflected off an enormous ruby ring gracing her middle finger.

Victor scoffs, taking a sip of his own whisky and glancing at you as you follow suit with the virgin cocktail he ordered on your behalf while you were in the restroom.

He was so infuriating at times, but at least it wasn’t warmed milk.

“First of all, you weren’t meant to hear that. Secondly, I hardly consider ‘dummy’ name calling. Far worse exists when it comes to options, as I’m sure you can attest to, Diana. You’ve used quite a few in your day.”

Amusement spreads across her fine features as she throws her head back in laughter, the sound enticing even as it disrupts the low chatter in the room. However, none of the men looking her way seemed to mind. She was brimming with so much joie de vivre that even you weren’t immune to her charms, smiling despite the anxiety that sat heavy in your chest from the very moment Victor introduced you to Diana Shum that evening.

You didn’t quite know why you felt ill at ease, especially towards someone who was doing you a favour by brokering a major deal on behalf of your company. Well, more like doing Victor a favour, since he was the one who made the request. Perhaps this was how all men felt in the presence of such a woman: elegantly confident and unapologetically vivacious, drawing attention everywhere she went.

“Are you still dredging up stories from our Oxford days, Victor? Not very gentlemanly of you. How do you put up with him?” Diana turns to wink at you and the spotlight of her attention makes you feel like the only other person in the room. “Let me assure you those boys deserved every insult in the book; one-track minds and transparent to boot. They should consider themselves lucky I even acknowledged their sad existence.”

“Di, you made the Prime Minister’s son cry. You should’ve seen those puffy eyes the next morning at the swim meet against Cambridge.”

Victor raises his brows, subtle amusement colouring his expression. And simple though it was, the sight of his handsome face so transformed by the faint smile on his lips made your heart race.

No, there’s no way. It’s probably just the fatigue catching up to you. The flight to Shanghai from Loveland City must’ve been more taxing than you initially thought, even though Victor had graciously offered to let you hitch a ride on his private jet. You place a hand on your chest, trying to calm the frenzied rhythm of your heart. The gesture goes unnoticed by Diana but Victor throws a worried glance in your direction. You smile to ease his concerns. He furrows his brows.

“Oh please, I should’ve ripped him a new one with the way he tried to get frisky on our date. He’s lucky I didn’t call Soryu to deal with him and his wandering hands.”

A sudden change seeps into Victor’s eyes, dark irises softening as if focused on something miles
away. “Soryu. How is your cousin doing, by the way?”

Diana leans back, taking another sip of her drink. “You’ll see for yourself soon enough. I take it you are accompanying this lovely producer to Tokyo to meet with Eisuke and wherever the Ichinomiya heir is, Soryu isn’t far behind. In all honesty though, Vic, surely you would know better than I. Weren’t the three of you thick as thieves during prep school?”

You perk up at the topic of Victor’s childhood. It was a rare chance to learn about the formative years of this stone-faced man before he became the slave driver of Loveland Financial Group.

“I was only there for a year and a half with Soryu and Eisuke before…before my mother passed. My father sent for me shortly afterwards. I haven’t seen them since.”

Deep voice trailing off, Victor’s gaze shifts to the fireplace where it remains, as if hypnotized by the flicker of orange flames. And as the silence stretches on, you become disconcerted to see him so uncharacteristically lost in his thoughts. You reach out to touch him but Diana beats you to it, laying a delicate hand on top of his much larger one as it rests on the leather armrest.

The gesture is ridiculously small for how much it blindsides you — the sight of her hand on Victor’s dazzling like the light reflecting off her ruby ring.

He blinks at the touch, long lashes fluttering in the split-second it takes for him to compose himself and suddenly, the unflappable CEO is back again.

“T’m sorry, it’s been a long day and we should probably call it a night. But you have my thanks, Diana, for setting up this meeting with the Ichinomiya Group.”

It was Diana’s turn to scoff. “Can we please dispense with the formalities, Victor? Soryu mentioned Eisuke was having difficulty finding the right people to make this documentary on the anniversary of his Tres Spades Tokyo hotel, so it was serendipity that we bumped into each while on business in London. It’s a win-win situation. Meant to be.”

Meant to be.

There is a spark of something in Diana’s eyes when she makes that last statement. It stays with you long after you part ways with Victor for the night, lying awake in your hotel room as you wondered whether the LFG CEO was already asleep in his.
“You’re awfully quiet. Should I take this to mean that you already know everything about Eisuke Ichinomiya and his chain of luxury hotels?”

Victor speaks without raising his head, leafing through the documents on his lap and stopping periodically to leave his signature with the same gold pen that marked up your reports. Its barrel glowed warm, reflecting the soft lights of the cabin of his private jet, en route to Tokyo from Shanghai.

Letting out a shaky breath, you try to steel yourself despite the rising heat in your cheeks. Because after a night spent tossing and turning in your hotel room, you arrived at a conclusion so absurd it could only be true:

You were in love with Victor Li.

Against all odds, the bane of your life had become your biggest ally and mentor. All the pieces of the square puzzle that was the LFG CEO had fallen into place to form one coherent and beautiful picture:

His exacting demands transformed into standards of excellence, his workaholism a paragon of commitment and dedication.

And though you were loathe to admit it, each soft utterance of “dummy” leaving his lips made the corners of yours turn up in the goofiest of grins.

Oh god, how did it ever come to this?! Where and when along the rocky path of your working relationship with the slave driver did you fall in love with him? But that wasn’t even the worst of it. If your intuition about the previous night’s events served you well, the beautiful Diana Shum was also enamoured of him.

You turn to Victor, meaning to inform him with utmost confidence that you had already conducted extensive research on the Ichinomiya Group’s charismatic CEO and his chain of casino hotels. You even thought to throw in a snarky reminder that he himself had been marginally impressed with the presentation you gave on the topic back in Loveland City.

“Are you close to Diana Shum?”

Was NOT what had you meant to ask. Especially in a voice that cracked like a 12 year old pubescent boy’s. And if there was a way by which you could’ve drowned in a bottle of water, you would’ve gladly done so. Instead, you settle for gulping it down, trying to keep your stupid mouth from spewing more nonsense in front of the man who was your de facto boss.

“Ahem.” Victor clears his throat, long legs uncrossing as he shifts in his seat. Out of the corner of your eye, you catch the muscles of that chiseled jaw settling firm.

“I-I’m so sorry. It’s none of my business. You don’t have to answer-“

“I’ve known her for a while, if that’s what you’re asking. She’s a classmate from university and also a cousin of a friend of mine from prep school, as you’ve probably gathered from yesterday’s conversation. Since graduation, she’s taken over her father’s role as CEO of Shum Property Developments and we’ve partnered periodically on various business ventures...”
He continues and you nod at the appropriate times, half listening as a million thoughts filtered through your head: your surprise at how unusually verbose Victor was being, the relief you felt to see that he was as determined to avoid your gaze as you were his. Because the truth was that the longer he went on about Diana — so beautiful, polished and charming that you couldn’t find it in yourself to hate her even if you tried — the harder it was to keep the clouds from darkening your face. And when Victor says,

“Not like it has any bearing on anything now, but we also dated for a short period of time…”

…It hurts to breathe.

Finally turning in your direction, Victor fixes you with a scrutinizing gaze. “Why do you ask?”

“Oh, um, I just…wanted to know a bit more about the person who helped me and my company. So I can better thank her later.”

You speak without meeting his eyes, hoping to placate him with a quick smile as you pretend to rummage through your purse. Thankfully, he drops the topic, returning to his documents. And though the rest of the plane ride is spent in near silence, the thoughts in your head have never been so loud.
She wore *that* dress today. The same one she had on when she impudently stormed my office to insist that I give her company a final chance before pulling funding:

Fitted to conform to every curve, yet formal enough to be professional. Beautifully sensual in her usual understated way. My favourite shade of red.

“It’s my go-to outfit when I need a confidence boost,” she told me once in between bites of pudding at Souvenir. “It makes me feel like a queen, like I can do no wrong. Perfect for business meetings I just have to nail, you know?”

“Dummy,” I had said then, feigning dismissiveness so she wouldn’t pick up on the way my eyes kept drifting towards her lips, so soft and plush I couldn’t help but wonder if her kisses would carry a hint of caramel sweetness.

It *was* true that the girl could be incredibly dense at times, playing at being queen when she already ruled my heart. Or how oblivious she was to the fact that the British doctor was completely smitten with her during today’s meeting at the Tres Spades Tokyo hotel.

Dr. Luke Foster.

Completely absorbed in reading through what looked to be like a stack of medical journals, Dr. Foster had largely ignored us while Eisuke and Soryu made quick work of introducing the eclectic mix of other associates in the room:

Ota Kisaki, the so-called “Angel Artist” whose work I was well-acquainted with, having previously spent a small fortune on his painting, *Koro of My Kokoro*.

Baba Mitsunari, a charming man whose handsome features were made all the more striking by the black fedora and red suit he wore. The girl pointed out that he bore an uncanny resemblance to the cashier we saw at a convenience store earlier that day and I had to agree.

They glossed over a man named Mamoru Kishi, apparently sound asleep in one corner of the room with his face covered by a newspaper and a full ashtray by his side.

Finally, they came to Luke Foster, a blond-haired man with the air of an English gentleman. Eisuke explained that Dr. Foster was the hotel’s on-site physician as well as a fellow alumnus of our prep school, apparently having left for reasons no one wanted to articulate the year before I transferred in.

And when the doctor finally looked up at us from his readings, his eyes took on an almost maniacal quality to see the girl standing by my side.

“Those proportions, those angles….perfect…absolutely perfect!” He exclaimed as if in a daze, standing up suddenly and causing the reading materials to spill from his lap in the process.

He looked completely unhinged, almost like a zombie as he reached out a pale hand towards her collarbones of all places. I stepped in front of her on reflex, only to have the doctor fix me with a piercing gaze as if he had just become aware of my existence and found it thoroughly offensive.

“Annnnd there he goes again,” Ota’s tone was one of exasperation, but there was no mistaking the amusement in the smirk that spread wide across his face.
“Ooh, Lu’s got a new victim! Maybe now he can finally stop staring at the Boss’s girl every time she comes in to clean the penthouse!” Baba chimes in, fingers stroking at his chin as if hatching some mischievous plan.

“Will the lot of ya shaddup!? I’m tryin’ to sleep over here...zzz...” The man with the papers over his head gave a muffled shout before promptly rolling over onto his side.

Soryu just sighed, running a hand over his face. And just when I began to worry that the girl was scared out of her wits, having wandered into this strange den of wolves, she surprised me by chuckling under her breath.

*Did the dummy find this funny?*

“Tch, ignore them, Victor. Let’s just get on with the presentation,” Eisuke said as he took his seat at the head of a long table. The girl straightened up and immediately got to work, transforming into the consummate professional she always was when it came down to business. I couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride as I watched her nail her pitch.

Taking a surreptitious glance around at her rapt audience, I stopped at Luke. The intensity of the doctor’s stare made me uneasy, the way those blue-grey eyes hovered above the scooped neckline of her red dress, tracing along her collarbones as if he were caressing them with his gaze alone. I mentally berated myself for not putting my suit jacket over her shoulders before she got up there.

And though it was spoken under his breath, Dr. Foster’s murmur of “sexy bones” rang loud and clear in my ears.
“Victor, you won’t believe my luck! Not only did we cinch the Ichinomiya account, I also found the perfect candidate to appear on our *Mystery Finder* show!”

The girl was practically breathless on the other end of the line, words jumbling together as they came a mile a minute. And though her enthusiasm is as infectious as it is adorable, I remind myself to play it cool. “Really. And who might that be?”

“Dr. Foster!”

*HONK!*

I swerve back into my lane on reflex, narrowly avoiding an accident as the driver next to me flips me the bird before speeding away. My heart raced, beating fiercely against the cage of my chest, but it had little to do with my near brush with death.

At this moment, I was more concerned with a man who looked like Death himself.

“Oh my god, Victor, what was that? Are you okay?” The concern in her voice is palpable and it makes me think of how kind and tenderhearted she is, of how easily someone could exploit that to their advantage. “This is a bad time, isn’t it? I’m so sorry, I’ll call you ba-”

“Don’t worry about it, just some idiot not paying attention on the road. And what’s this about, *ahem*, Dr. Foster?” The name itself was unsavoury, sticking in my throat until I spat it out. I hoped the vitriol escaped her notice.

“Okay Victor, get this: it’s like the man has X-ray vision!”

She whispers for dramatic effect, and my grip tightens on the steering wheel as I picture those slate grey eyes sweeping over the curves of her body, a lewd expression falling over the doctor’s features. He was a handsome enough man, that much was true; intelligent and a first-rate surgeon according to Eisuke and Soryu. Goldman confirmed as much when I had him dig up all available information on Luke Foster. On that basis alone, many women would find him to be an extremely attractive suitor and ludicrous though it is, I can’t help but think the worst. Luke had been quite open in his admiration of her, especially her collarbones. *What if she returned the sentiment?*

In retrospect, it was a horrible idea to leave her to her work (and that wolf) in Tokyo while I returned to mine in Loveland City. While she had the company of her coworkers, clearly none of them sensed the danger in Luke Foster that I did. I no longer had the right to call her a dummy when I was obviously the idiot here.

“I’m telling you Victor, he can just look at somebody and tell you everything about their bone structure. It’s too accurate to just be guesswork! Apparently, he can remember anyone he’s ever laid eyes on based on their bones. It’s incredible. I’d love for Professor Lucien to meet him. If only he had the time to fly out to Tokyo…”

The girl continues and I catch sight of my furrowed brows in the rear-view mirror, deepening the longer she goes on and on about men who weren’t me.

“…He’s already agreed to be a guest on the show! But…he did make a rather strange request.”

For a moment, I can barely breathe. The skin over my knuckles blanches as it stretches tight, my
grip on the wheel growing harder as I brace for unwelcome news. God knows what she would’ve agreed to in my absence. Filled with a sense of dread, I had to know all the same. “Which was? …”

She pauses, the hitch in her breath subtle but speaking volumes nonetheless.

“Just say it, dummy.” I soften my tone in encouragement though my mind was already racing, thinking of all the ways my legal team could dissolve a contract should the girl have already signed papers.

“Well, he…he asked if he could examine my body in lieu of payment for appearing on the show. You should’ve seen him! He was so desperate he was practically begging and I…I just couldn’t say no.”

*MOTHERFUCK!*
“STUPID VICTOR LI!”

You had meant to throw the rolled-up magazine in dramatic rock star fashion, sending it flying across your suite at the Tres Spades Tokyo hotel to give at least a resounding smack as it hits the wall. Instead, it flutters to the carpeted floor, barely a few feet from where you lay sprawled out on a bed much too large for a single person.

And from the surface of that glossy cover, Victor’s handsome face — all sharp eyes and chiseled jaw - staring up at you from beneath a headline that read: “Man On Top: How Victor Li Conquered The Business World.”

Man on top. What a tease if there ever was one — especially since you’ve developed the recent habit of falling asleep to the fantasy of having the broad expanse of Victor’s muscular chest hovering over you.

“The only thing he should be on top of is ME!”

Your voice echoes in the room, empty save for you. Even still, your cheeks burned from embarrassment over the absurdity of your current situation. Victor Li didn’t belong to you. Not when he had someone like Diana in his life.

Victor and Diana. Diana and Victor. A perfect match regardless of how the pieces fit. And for an instant, your anger flares to remember the nonchalance in Victor’s voice when he told you that their past history as lovers had no bearing on the present, as if they didn’t look like they belonged together when you saw them just now in the lobby of the hotel, moments after you purchased the magazine with Victor’s face gracing the cover from one of the shops.

Practically ecstatic in your surprise to see him there at the Tres Spades, you were just about to call out to him when his name died in your throat, choked by the sight of the woman at his side. Victor was escorting Diana to a limo waiting just beyond the revolving doors. And the last thing you saw before the chauffeur pulled away was the two of them slipping into the vehicle together.

He hadn’t even told you he was coming to Tokyo.

It was only after you became aware of the fact that you were blocking the entrance to the shop that you recovered from the shock, murmuring apologies as you pulled yourself together just enough to make your way back to the safety of your hotel room.

Rising up off the bed, your feet sink into the lush carpeting as you pad over to where the magazine lay. You pick it up and smooth out the crinkles, fingers tracing the outline of Victor’s profile as you do — gentle, as if you were touching the man himself. And when your nose begins to tingle, you know it won’t be long before you feel the familiar sting of tears behind your eyes.

“Think you could stop being so nice to me, Victor? You’ll give a girl the wrong impression.”

Heaving a sigh, you slip the magazine beneath a pillow on the bed. A quick glance at the clock on the bedside table told you it was almost time for your dinner date with Dr. Foster. Sitting around moping wasn’t an option, at least not tonight. Lightly slapping your cheeks, you push the image of Victor and Diana out of your head and get ready to step into the shower.
“I’m glad you remembered that you owe me a dinner, Victor Li. And though I practically had to drag you to this restaurant, I guess the means don’t really matter if the end result is the same. But still, what a lucky coincidence that we bumped into each other again at the Tres Spades of all places. Now that’s something to drink to.”

Diana holds up her glass, Cabernet Sauvignon swirling as it meets mine with a delicate clink. Under the table, the tip of her stiletto pushes against my oxfords before sliding past my ankle, inching its way up my leg. I pull away, watching those red lips spread into a smile as I do.

“You might be the first man who’s ever been able to resist me. Has anyone ever told you you’re one stubborn asshole?”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

She laughs at that, taking another sip of her wine before setting it down. “So, tell me about her.”

“She?” I focus on cutting into my Kobe beef, already aware that Diana will see through my bluff. She always did.

“Surely there must be another woman if you keep turning me down over and over again, Victor. A girl has her pride too, you know.”

“We are **not** getting back together, Diana.”

“Tsk, you’re no fun, Vic. All work and no play, **all the time**. I’ll have to remind myself of that the next time I start entertaining thoughts of calling you up again.”

She pouts, but it isn’t long before her eyes take on that familiar spark of mischief as she continues.

“But seriously, tell me about your cute little producer. That is the girl you keep rejecting me for, I presume. I need to know about the woman who’s finally managed to infiltrate the entirety of Victor Li’s notoriously impenetrable heart. She must be quite the lover if she’s got you wrapped around her little finger like that, pulling strings with all your friends left, right and centre.”

It annoys me to no end that the mere mention of the girl is enough to reduce me to a swooning idiot. I fight to keep the smile off my face.

“You’ve got the wrong idea. She’s not my lover.”

Diana begins to protest, but her words are lost on me because I’ve stopped listening. In fact, the only thing I **can** hear is the blood rushing in my ears, propelled by the adrenaline racing through my veins to see him enter the restaurant.

**Dr. Luke Foster.**

**WITH MY DUMMY, NO LESS.**

And my dummy looks...**absolutely gorgeous**. Her hair is done up, leaving her graceful neck and collarbones exposed in a little black dress I’ve never seen her wear before, I realize with not an insignificant amount of jealousy.

But wait...**collarbones**?!
Sure enough, that surgeon is staring at her clavicle like some kind of pervert. The sight alone incites the beginnings of a dull throbbing in my temples, no doubt exacerbated by the vice-like clench of my jaws.

I follow them with my gaze as they are led to a table for two; fixate on Luke’s face even as the sommelier arrives to make his recommendations to the pair. The doctor stares at my girl like he couldn’t care less about the meal, as if the only thing he hungered for was precisely what I myself had desired for so long: the woman. And she—

Just looked my way.

Surprise etches itself onto her beautiful features — the brows I had dreamt of one day lightly running a fingertip over while she sleeps lifting into a delicate arch. And why shouldn’t she be surprised? I had given her no indication that I had rushed over to Tokyo from Loveland City as soon as I heard what Luke had requested of her.

But there is no nod of acknowledgement, no smile in greeting. Just her, looking away as if she hadn’t seen me at all, her smile apologetic when she retrain her attention on the doctor. And while it was only for a fraction of a second, I could have sworn her eyes carried a hint of sorrow.

Or perhaps I’m projecting.

Because her obvious avoidance feels like a rebuff, a sucker punch to the gut. She’s never blatantly ignored me like that, no matter how wound up she was even during those times when I verbally tore her sub-par proposals to shreds. The feeling of rejection sits heavy on my chest, the tie around my neck much too tight.

“Victor, are you all right?”

Diana’s voice cuts through my thoughts. She is looking at me curiously. I reach for my glass of wine, suddenly feeling like I was on the verge of choking. “Of course, what could possibly be wrong?”

“ ‘What’s wrong’ is the fact that you haven’t listened to a single word I’ve said for the past ten minutes. Even if there’s no chance we’ll ever get back together again as you so adamantly insist, the least you could do is pay attention to the person you’re sharing a meal with.”

I take a deep breath, more than a little disconcerted by the girl’s ability to affect me. “Of course. My apologies, you’re absolutely right. Please, continue.”

Across the candlelit table, I look Diana in the eye, resolved to keep up at least the pretence of being interested in what she had to say when all I wanted to do was storm the table where Luke sat with my girl. With each sideways glance in their direction, my grip tightened on my utensils to see them chatting, seemingly engrossed in the world’s most interesting conversation.

And when she hands over a manila envelope to the doctor, my heart skips a beat.

_Could it be…marriage documents?!_

One tiny corner of my brain berates me for how ridiculous I am being but when it comes to her, I simply can’t help it, and the fantasy in which I casually stroll over, flip the table onto Luke Foster and steal my girl away in a bridal carry becomes so vivid in my mind’s eye, it almost seems like a good idea.

Diana excuses herself to use the restroom and I pounce on the opportunity to send the dummy a
“MEET ME AT THE BAR IN THE TRES SPADES HOTEL IN AN HOUR. DON’T BE LATE.”
Choked Up

“Is there something wrong, Dr. Foster? You haven’t touched your meal.”

You do your best to school your expression into one of polite neutrality as you take in the strange sight of the pale, blond-haired man shaking out an alarming number of pills onto the palm of his hand, tapping loudly on a bottle seemingly produced out of nowhere. He pops them all into his mouth at once and you pray you won’t have to perform the Heimlich maneuver as he chases them down with a few gulps of water.

A smile spreads across the doctor’s lips as his eyes fall upon your collarbones once more. You were used to feeling like a third wheel by now, even when alone with Luke Foster, given his penchant for carrying on conversations while staring intently at your bones. But you took no offence at his behaviour, especially after Baba’s attempts to give you insight into Luke’s peculiar mannerisms:

“Try not to take it personal, Miss. Lu will look at anyone who’s got beautiful collarbones. It’s a well-known fact that he’s obsessed with the boss’s - he’s even framed the X-ray films of Eisuke’s bones. He likely just wants yours to add to his collection.”

Strange though it was, the request that Luke be allowed to have X-rays films of your collarbones in exchange for appearing on Miracle Finder was innocent enough. Certainly nothing that warranted the stony silence you received on the other end of the line when you called Victor the other day to tell him that Dr. Foster wanted to examine you. After a brusque “I have to go,” he had hung up. No goodbyes, not even a mutter of “dummy.”

But Luke Foster had been nothing short of a perfect gentleman, never once laying a hand on you. Moreover, he even insisted on paying for tonight’s meal despite the fact that you had invited him as thanks for appearing on the show.

“Please, just call me Luke. Vitamins and water are all I need to survive. I only ordered because Eisuke said it might be awkward if you seemed to be the only one dining.”

“I-I see.” You smile, taking another bite of wagyu. And for a moment, you are too wrapped up in the blissful way it seemed to melt on your tongue to be disconcerted by the strange events of the evening.

You weren’t, however, too distracted to continue throwing surreptitious glances in Victor’s direction, fighting to keep composed each time Diana’s laughter carried over to your table. What were the chances that you’d find yourselves at the same restaurant in all of Tokyo? You know that he knows you are here; even Chik couldn’t put on a performance convincing enough for the LFG CEO to believe for a second that you didn’t see him.

With your dismal acting skills, you definitely didn’t stand a chance.

“You’re in love with him.”

COUGH, COUGH!

You clear the steak lodged in the back of your throat with a few hacking coughs, half of your face hidden behind your napkin as you tried to be as discreet as possible, the words “Death by Wagyu” flashing through your mind. After soothing your throat with a sip of wine, you ask:
“I beg your pardon?”

“You’re in love with that man sitting just over there with the woman dressed in red. That Victor fellow who accompanied you to that first meeting with Eisuke.”

For someone who seemed to pay very little attention to matters that didn’t concern bones, Luke Foster was surprisingly perceptive. Or maybe you weren’t as discrete as you thought you were and it was obvious to all but yourself that you were staring at the golden couple.

“I…how did you…what makes you—”

“Please pass this message on to him for me. If he doesn’t treat your collarbones with the respect they deserve, he can’t blame me for swooping in to take his place.”

Then, for the very first time that night, Luke Foster looks you in the eye, the intensity in blue-grey irises making your breath hitch when he says: “Until then, I hope you find happiness with him, Sexy Bones — especially since he also seems to be exceedingly fond of you. Quite the annoyance, really.”

And for the very first time that night, you smile freely, naturally, at Luke, blushing hard as you contemplate his words. Suddenly bashful, you drop your gaze only to catch sight of the manila envelope you brought with you. You pass it across the table to him.

“Here. Your payment for agreeing to appear on Miracle Finder.”

The expression on Luke’s face can best be described as euphoric when he takes the films from you, momentarily excusing himself from the table as he murmurs something about requiring brighter lighting to examine them.

That is when you hear the buzz of your phone from inside your purse. And when you finally fish it out, you see a single text from Victor, commanding as always:

“MEET ME AT THE BAR IN THE TRES SPADES HOTEL IN AN HOUR. DON’T BE LATE.”
Green-Eyed Monsters (Victor's Perspective)

“Another whiskey on the rocks for you, Sir?”

I nod to the bartender, watching as he chips away at a block of ice to produce a perfect crystalline sphere — still spinning in the glass when he pours the amber spirit over it like a libation. It almost takes my mind off the fact that the girl is late. By exactly ten minutes, according to my watch. And for a moment, I’m gripped by a sense of panic when I consider the possibility that she might not come.

She never did answer my text though I knew she saw it — having witnessed her reaching into her purse to pull out her phone seconds after I sent the message. And while the logical part of my brain is telling me I’m being an absolute idiot, worst-case scenarios are already running through my head: the girl is side-swiped by a car while crossing the street, or somehow managed to fall into an open manhole and is currently standing knee-deep in sewage.

Or maybe she is pinned to the wall in a dark corner somewhere, hemmed in on either side by the gifted hands of a world-class surgeon by the name of Luke Foster.

I lift the glass to my lips, too impatient to even savour the smooth burn of the drink as I reach for my phone to send her another text. That is when I see her:

Cheeks flushed and chest gently heaving as if she had rushed to get here. An errant lock of hair falling from her up-do, framing that beautiful face like I had dreamt so many times of doing with the palm of my hand.

She makes her way towards me in that dimly lit bar, and though I’m aware of the faint ticking of the second hand of my watch, time may as well have stood still. Because I could have lived in that moment forever, gazing upon the light in her eyes as if they held every last star in the sky, as if those heavenly bodies had fallen just for her in precisely the same way I had: deeply, irrevocably.

And I know there is no turning back.

“Victor, sorry I’m late! What are you doing here in Tok—”

“Why did you ignore me?” My voice comes out stern, even to my ears, and I curse myself for losing my cool around her yet again. The girl furrows her brows, eyes dropping from my face to the half-empty glass of whiskey sitting on the counter. And when she looks up again, something in her countenance has changed — soft surprise giving way to a hardened expression.

“If it’s the text you’re referring to, I’m here now, aren’t I?”

“That’s not what I’m talking about.”

She looks away, refusing to meet my gaze as she perches on the stool beside me. “Surely you wouldn’t have wanted me to interrupt your dinner date, especially when you and Ms. Shum seemed so intimate.”

Intimate?

The bartender approaches, interrupting our conversation before I get the chance to formulate a reply. “What can I get for you, Miss?”
“She’ll have a glass of warmed milk—”

“Whiskey. On the rocks, please.”

She speaks over me, turning slightly in my direction as she does. I ignore the murmur of “Ladies’ choice” from the bartender as well as the smirk on his face as he begins preparing her drink. The thinly veiled challenge in the girl’s expression — elbow propped up on the counter with her chin resting atop a loose fist — only serves to highlight how incredibly alluring it is when she pushes back.

“Hmm. Bold. Since when did you start drinking whiskey? I don’t think you need me to remind you of your non-existent alcohol tolerance. Besides, didn’t you already have enough to drink at dinner?”

“There’s a lot of things you don’t know about me, Victor Li,” she says, reaching for the glass the bartender sets down before her. She takes a moment, staring at the rich, golden hues before finally taking a sip. I fight to keep the smile off my face when hers pulls into a grimace from the sting of the alcohol she clearly wasn’t familiar with. **Dummy.**

“I’m surprised you even noticed me at all, not with the lovely Diana there. But I guess old wounds really do have difficulty closing, no matter how much we say they’ve healed.”

“You’d have to ask for the expert opinion of your overly friendly doctor about that.”

“Excuse me?” She sets her drink down a bit harder than likely intended, sending the liquid sloshing about the glass to kiss the pink of her lipstick imprinted on its edge.

I don’t like where this conversation is going, the ill-disguised barbs only serving to increase the tension between us. It was foolish to have what should’ve been a very private discussion in a public space but, as always, the thought of her and Luke together is enough to make me forget my place and position, throwing caution to the wind and behaving with reckless abandon.

And still, the heat beneath my collar goads me on.

“Luke Foster. The one you’re so enthralled with that your manners seem to have been completely swept from memory. I presume that’s the reason why you didn’t acknowledge my existence when you saw me in the restaurant.”

Her eyes widen in disbelief as she leans in close, voice dripping with sarcasm: “Just like how you didn’t remember to tell me you were coming to Tokyo? Or maybe you weren’t planning on telling me at all, since it clearly looked like you weren’t here on business. But then again, I guess your business is none of mine.”

I don’t know whether I want to push back or kiss her senseless.

Instead, I settle for a deep breath, trying to keep my frustration in check. Having a heated argument with her was not how I had intended my evening to go. In fact, my entire day had not proceeded as planned, and if I hadn’t been accosted by Diana as soon as I stepped foot in the Tres Spades hotel, I would have been having dinner with the woman who occupied all my thoughts, all the time. At the very least, I could’ve saved her from the clutches of a pervert doctor.

I glance in her direction, study the beautiful melancholy of her silent profile as she watches the ball of ice slowly melt into her drink. Then I take another sip of mine, steeling myself for reparations I desperately needed to make.
“I am only going to say this once, so listen closely. Diana Shum and I dated shortly after graduation for all of two months before we decided to part ways on amicable terms. We make for much better business partners than we ever did romantically, and while she has expressed occasional interest in rekindling our relationship, I have never been of the same mind. I can assure you this will never change.

“The reason I came to Tokyo is not because of her — professional or otherwise — but because I was in a rush to prevent a certain dummy from doing anything she’d regret later on. But…”

I knock back the rest of my whiskey, emptying the glass.

“…I’m afraid I’m too late.”

She looks at me now, eyes wide as if she were still processing the words. Her next question comes on a whisper: “Why would you be too late?”

And it is my turn to look away.

“Well, you seemed to be pretty intimate yourself with Dr. Foster during your dinner date. I can only presume that…”

The girl moves closer and I can’t help the way my eyes are drawn to her mouth — the tremble of her lower lip, full and pink and lush. Without thought, I allow my gaze to trace along the graceful column of her neck, settling at the delicate notch between her collarbones and in that instant, I come to a visceral understanding of the extent of Luke Foster’s obsession, for mine was magnified a million times over:

I yearned for the entirety of this woman before me — needed her for myself, now and forever.

“Presume what?” Her voice is low, shaking.

“I can only presume that you’ve already allowed him to…examine your body.”

There is a moment of silence — each torturous second seeming to stretch into eternity to smother the last embers of hope.

“I have…”

Oh god.

“…given him X-ray films of my collarbones as he requested. That is all. He’s never touched me, not even once. I took him out to dinner tonight so I could give them to him as thanks for appearing on the show.”

Petty. Sheepish. I felt all these things, but none so powerful as the staggering sense of relief that washes over me to hear her say these words. Closing my eyes, I let the revelation sink in, finally feeling like I can breathe for the very first time that night.
The Big Bang

You don’t quite know what made you do it.

The ambience of the bar, perhaps: sultry jazz and flickering candles purposefully placed to create just enough shadows for a veil of privacy.

Or maybe it was the crestfallen uncertainty that painted the handsome features of Victor Li’s face, his sudden display of vulnerability both novel and endearing.

Most likely however, it was the way in which his downcast expression morphed into one of ecstatic relief when you told him that Luke Foster had not laid a single finger on you.

Because when Victor tilts his head back, eyes closed and sighing deeply as if some unfathomable burden had been lifted, you cannot help but bring your lips to the Adam’s apple bobbing along the length of that strong, thick neck.

Cedar wood and pine.

The notes of his cologne are so familiar you didn’t realize how much you missed his scent until you literally came face to face with it. Victor is warm, so very warm beneath the skin of your lips. And under your touch, you become vaguely aware of the fact that the rise and fall of his chest has stilled.

At any other time, you would’ve questioned your sanity for how boldly you were behaving, especially towards someone who was your boss. You had never been one to put yourself out there when it came to matters of the heart. Something about the moment however, about Victor, made you feel like the one thing you could not do was let this chance pass you by.

So when you hear that shuddering breath, feel the faint scratch of his five o’clock shadow when he nuzzles against you in return, you know you’ve made the right gamble. Being with Victor Li feels right. And the surreal sense of belonging you find within the embrace of his muscular arms gives you the courage to say, “You must really believe I’m a dummy if you think I’d let any man other than you touch me.”

He slides a finger beneath your chin, gently lifting until all you can see are those jet black eyes, swimming with heat and emotion. The sudden silence of your surroundings sinks in: no more music, no idle chatter. Not even the rustle of limbs moving about in the dimly lit bar. And there, in the strange privacy of suspended time…

…Victor kisses you.

“Are you sure…this is…what you want?”

The deep timbre of Victor’s voice sends a thrill vibrating along the surface of your skin as he questions you between kisses — laid on your mouth, the line of your jaw, the pulse of your neck. His firm body presses you into a corner of the elevator, empty save for the two of you writhing in unison against a mirrored wall.

Each movement of his soft lips against yours is purposeful, imbued with meaning: longing in the gentle teeth that nibbled on your lower lip before drawing it into his mouth, in the sensual slide of the tongue that sought yours. Affection obvious in the hands that rose to cup your face, thumbs
tracing circles on the apples of reddened cheeks to tell you in no uncertain terms that Victor Li belonged to you as much as you yearned to belong to him.

So you had no qualms about answering in the affirmative, nodding your head because the press of Victor’s muscular thigh between your legs already left you breathless and wondering whether he could feel your wet heat seeping through your panties.

And all he really did was kiss you.

*Ding.*

The elevator stops at your floor and even before the doors slide open, Victor has hoisted you up, wrapping your legs tightly about his tapered waist and whispering into your ear, “Which room?”

You knew Victor was fit, had seen him move fast and effortlessly through the waters of his Olympic-sized swimming pool that one time he had you deliver a report to his mansion on a Sunday. And yet, you could not help but admire the sheer perfection of his physique — the bulk of his biceps, flexed beneath strained layers of clothing; the ease with which he carries you all the way to your suite.

And when he sits you down upon the king-sized bed, you wonder if it is, in fact, *too small* for all the things you cared to do with him.

The LFG CEO shrugs off his suit jacket, loosening his tie just enough to pull it over his head before dropping to kneel at your feet. You watch him reach for you, shiver when he caresses the sensitive skin behind your knee with a light graze of gentle fingertips. Large hands trail down your calf — touch barely there and teasing — until his palm finally cups the heel of your stiletto to slide it off your foot.

He looks up at you then, the intensity in ebony irises rendering you still and mute as you patiently await his next move despite the frenzied pounding in your chest. There is a stroke of something almost feral in the dark depths of the gaze that falls heavy upon you — searching your eyes, lingering on your lips…tracing the neckline of your dress.

“I’ve never seen you wear this dress before.” Victor says, taking the same amount of care to remove the shoe from your other foot.

And if you were able to think straight under the influence of his touch — the hands that pushed back the hem of your dress as they roamed higher and higher up your thighs towards your heat — you might have found it strange that Victor was choosing now, of all times, to comment on your wardrobe choices. As it was, you answered without second thought: “It’s new. I bought it especially for tonight’s dinner.”

Victor stills and when he speaks again, there is a faint tremble in that voice, as if fighting to contain some unfathomable emotion.

“The doctor couldn’t stop staring at you. I know because I was the same way. I couldn’t look away from the moment you stepped foot in that restaurant.”

The revelation leaves you silent, waiting with bated breath for Victor to continue.

“Forgive me…”

Fingers entwine with fabric, gripping tight.
“…but I can’t stand the thought of you looking so beautiful for anyone else.”

RRRIIIIPPPP!

You fall back, wincing at the sound even as you feel your body respond to the sudden shock of having your dress torn right down the middle. Victor’s display of brute strength was so at odds with the façade of composure he was synonymous with and yet, there was no denying that you were incredibly aroused by this show of power — by the fact that he was now straddling you on all fours like some wild beast, tearing away the rest of your undergarments to leave you completely bare.

You’ve never been so desperate to feel him inside you, deep and rough and untamed. The thought throws you into a frenzy of lust.

Digging your fingers into the front of his dress shirt, you yank it open to send buttons flying in haphazard directions, but the only thing that concerned you was the sight of that broad chest and muscular torso, so impressive it actually elicits a moan from your lips and a smile from his in return.

Propping yourself up onto your knees, you press against him, flesh to flesh — one hand running over the burning surface of his skin even as the other tugs at the buckle of his leather belt, impatiently moving to palm him when his dress pants fall and gasping to finally see and feel the full extent of the LFG CEO:

Victor Li is rock hard and intimidatingly large.

And the sight makes your mouth water.

Sinking onto your heels, you trail your lips along Victor’s chiseled body, tongue teasing at his nipples as you do and relishing the catch of his breath in his throat.

But just as you begin to lay kisses along the deep V of his abdomen with the intent of tracing lower and lower, Victor stops you, puling you up for a kiss before laying back on the bed and positioning you above him…

…with his face between your legs.

“This way,” he says, voice muffled, and you might have commented on his inability to relinquish control even in the bedroom were it not for the sensation of his flattened tongue sweeping hot and wet along the seam of your already dripping pussy, teasing from end to end.

The sensation is so intense it’s almost unbearable. You throw your head back, mouth dropping in a silent scream as you sink onto Victor’s face, fighting the instinct to grinder lower onto that talented tongue despite the encouraging grip of Victor’s hands, strong on your hips and thighs.

“I’ve wanted to taste you…for so long,” he murmurs, sucking the swell of your clit into his mouth and humming in approval against moist flesh to hear you moan above him. “Your flavour is absolutely exquisite.”

Gathering your wits, you fold forward — intent on giving just as much pleasure as you were receiving. Victor twitches once within your grip, not quite contained by the circumference of your palm and fingers, running up and down the sizeable length of his cock, hot in your hand like his breath on your slit. And after placing a few wet kisses on the smooth, hard head, you open your mouth to taste him.
The tepid salt of his arousal. The groans originating from deep within Victor’s chest each time your lip brushed past the tender underside of his cock. The subtle rhythm of his pelvis, lifting in time to your mouth swallowing more of that solid shaft, quickly becoming slick with your saliva.

And then you catch sight of your reflection in the mirrored closet. See the bulge of Victor’s bicep as he grips your hip, the flex in the muscles of his neck when he lifts to bury his face deeper into your folds. See yourself: hair disheveled and eyes half-lidded, drunk on sex. Observe the messy smear of your lipstick as your mouth stretches to accommodate more and more of your boss’s cock. And when the tip of Victor’s tongue begins its relentless tease of your clit, you watch as a most debauched expression falls over your features, the tension in your body breaking as you find release on his lips.

You are still shaking when he enters you, sensitized by an orgasm that left tiny sparks of electricity running along every nerve, priming you for second helpings. A true paragon of patience, Victor Li takes his time, deliberately slow as he pushes — savouring the sensation of drenched, swollen flesh parting just for him.

It was almost unfathomable that you could experience such extreme pleasure, each powerful swing of Victor’s hips driving him deeper into your body — hitting just the right angles until your very senses were extracted along with your second release of the night, running slick between your legs to ease the slippery slide of your bodies.

It draws out Victor’s own, your lover moving to pull out moments before you surprise him by taking him once more into your mouth — gaze locked onto those dark eyes from below as you taste him on your tongue, euphoric to see him bite his lips when your lick yours to swallow every last drop.
You roll over, eyes still closed as you reach out to hit the snooze button on the alarm clock.

Except your palm comes down on warm flesh with a resounding smack, echoing throughout your hotel room and accompanied by a deep voice that says, “Are you finally awake, Dummy?”

Your eyes shoot open to see Victor lying naked in bed next to you, a splotch of red blooming on his chest where he had been attacked. He sets his phone down to hand you a glass of water from the bedside table, and even though memories of the previous night come rushing back to burn your cheeks, you cannot help but notice how glorious he looks bathed in morning light. You hope he doesn’t see the way your hand shakes when you accept the glass from him with a meek “Thanks.”

Victor clears his throat, waiting for you to finish drinking before he says, “That was the fourth time you slept through the alarm. I’ve already informed your colleagues you’ll be taking the day off. We didn’t get much sleep last night and I think you’ll need some time to…recover.”

You bite your lip, turning sideways to feign a sudden interest in the curtains so he wouldn’t see the giant smile spreading onto your face. It was almost surreal that Victor Li was your lover, and if it weren’t for the exquisite soreness you felt between your legs, you would’ve been hard pressed to believe it for yourself.

The sheets rustle and before you know it, Victor has his chest pressed up against your bare back, laying a soft kiss on your shoulder before he rests his chin on it.

“How are you feeling?” He asks.

“Okay. Pretty good, actually.” It was too early in the game to tell him you were already doing cartwheels in your mind.

“Good. I’m glad to hear that because I found this under your pillow…”

He places something in your hands. Your eyes widen when you recognize the magazine with his face on the cover.

“…And this ‘man on top’ wants to know what it feels like to have this woman on top of him for the rest of the day.”

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