

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

**ANIKI'S
GARDEN**

Claire Cray

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

ANIKI'S GARDEN

By Claire Cray

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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ANIKI'S GARDEN

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Photo Description

A young Japanese man, naked except for a drenched white button-down shirt, slumps face up in a large, round wooden tub surrounded by flowers. A large red octopus is settled between his splayed thighs, its tentacles winding up the man's bare chest. The man is gagged with silk and bound in black rope that makes red marks on his pale knees. His cheeks are flushed and his eyes are narrowed, helpless and defiant at once.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

What intrigues me the most about this picture is the bondage. Is he a willing or unwilling victim? Just what did he do to wind up in this position? Did he upset his Dom, or did he just step on the wrong person's toes?

I'm leaning toward this being historical fiction (though obviously not too far in the past, as he's wearing a button-up shirt), but it can be contemporary. Can have an open ending. No needle play, rats, or Professor Dolores Umbridge-like characters

Sincerely,

Talasilverwind

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: yakuza/gangster, tentacles, Japan, bondage, era-1960s, masturbation

Word Count: 5,526

ANIKI'S GARDEN

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Tokyo, 1966

I'd heard my distant cousin Kazuo was the son of a degenerate. That was all my father had to say about it. It had been eighteen years since I'd last seen any of our relatives in Japan, eighteen years since my father had packed up my mother and me and carried us off to San Francisco for a fresh start after the war. I remembered Kazuo though we'd only been twelve. Even as a child, he'd been the type to make an impression. Like all the other children, I was most impressed by his cartoonishly fashionable hair and his strange, narrow-eyed smile, which I tried for days to imitate until my mother got tired of the faces I was making and swatted the urge out of me.

But that was a hazy memory, not one to be counted on. I had no idea what to expect of Kazuo, considering I didn't even know what kind of degenerate he was the son of. A gambler? A drug addict? A pervert? Who knew? My parents did, but they weren't telling. Astonishingly, they still hadn't figured out that withholding details from me only made me more curious.

Kazuo had written them in January, asking about me. They destroyed the letter at once. I would never have known about it if I hadn't come home that evening just in time to eavesdrop on them as they discussed the message in my father's study, both of them shrill in their outrage. "Artifacts!" my aging father practically whistled. "What does he mean artifacts?"

Right away, I knew I had to get to the bottom of it. I was a rising art historian, after all, working toward a PhD with a specialty in subversive works from Japan's Edo period. You couldn't just say "artifacts" and expect me to walk away. And besides, I remembered Kazuo, vaguely. A bit of snooping and I found what I assumed to be Kazuo's address and, acting bold, secretly wrote and asked if he'd like to contact me directly. A month later I had an invitation to Tokyo, expenses paid. I waited for the end of the semester, and off I went.

Jet-lagged and dazzled, I watched the lights of Shinjuku glide by the tinted windows of the Rolls-Royce my cousin had sent to retrieve me. Tokyo in 1966 was like a fountain of sparks in a house of mirrors. Even I, as an art historian loyal to all things dark and dusty, couldn't help but acknowledge the seductive

psychedelia of the city. It was difficult to believe this was the same city, the same country, that I'd last seen nearly two decades before. Stripped to its bones by fire and terror, Japan had reclaimed its pride by raging into the future.

Twenty minutes later we'd left the electric circus behind and drifted into the dark, quiet streets of Mitaka, a neighborhood in the western part of the city. Kazuo still lived in his father's house, though now it belonged to him, along with everything else his father had left behind when he died the previous spring.

I felt I remembered the old house, the dark wood, and the ancient shrine that stood towering behind the sliding wall of the waiting room, though my childhood memories of Japan often mixed and blurred together. But there were often times when, walking through Chinatown in San Francisco, I'd catch a whiff of cologne or wood or smoke that would throw me back to Japan, and for some reason, it was always Kazuo's father's house I pictured in those moments. Probably because it was the grandest house I'd ever known, and famous as such among the children in our family. I wondered how much this had to do with the alleged degeneracy. I was dying to know. It's quite something to grow older and wake up to all the grown-up secrets that have been carefully hidden in plain sight.

The driver cut the engine and opened my door before I'd finished gathering up my briefcase and bag from the floor. I thanked him in my clumsy Japanese, and was sliding over the plush leather when I heard the rough whisper of footsteps crossing the pebbled drive.

"Is that my cousin Yuuta?"

The smooth voice surprised me. His written English had been somewhat stiff, but he spoke it confidently, and his accent had an unusual panache. Instantly, I felt my determination to fumble along in Japanese wither on the vine. I got my feet on the ground and stood up in the broad, shadowy driveway at the front of the grand house. "It's me," I said, squinting slightly to make out his features in the dark. Behind him, a line of lanterns hung along the front of the house, and they cast a slight halo around his shadowy form, but I could see that he was tall and lithe and dressed in a narrow suit that glimmered slightly wherever the light caught it.

Kazuo reached me and embraced me outright, patting me on the back in a congratulatory manner before rearing back and gripping me by the arms. "Look at you," he said, his smile flashing white in the dark. "Little Yuuta's a grown-up American."

“For better or worse,” I managed, taken aback by the intimate greeting. I could see his face now, the shapeliness of it, the arched brows I hadn’t realized I remembered so well. Did I, really? Or did it just seem that way? Not only were my memories uncertain, but I was exhausted. I wasn’t sure I could parse even the present until I’d had some sleep.

“Both, I hope.” He turned me toward the house, clapping me on the back of the shoulder and fastening his hand there. “Thank you for coming, Yuuta. I hope you will enjoy the visit. I hope you are excited to pick through my father’s junk.”

“I am, actually.” We crossed the gravel and waited for the driver to slide open the heavy wooden door at the front of the house before we stepped into the stone-floored *genkan*. “It sounds like your father was quite a collector.”

“That is one way to put it.” Kazuo quickly slipped out of his shoes, hopped up the dark wooden steps and stepped onto the *tatami* before turning back to me. The hanging light fixture from the next room illuminated him at last. He looked like a damn movie star, a Japanese James Dean. “How do you feel now? Exhausted?”

“No,” I lied. Yes, the trip had been difficult, and I’d been awake for nearly forty-nine hours. But suddenly I wasn’t ready to look away.

Kazuo’s sensual lips curved, and his eyes narrowed lazily. That was the look I remembered. That was it. I wondered if it had stood out as much to anyone else. “Good,” Kazuo replied. “Leave your bags. We’ll have a nightcap in the garden.”

Crossing the grand old house felt like gliding through a dark wonderland from my distant past. The sliding doors were closed wherever I looked, and the halls were dark and quiet. The lights were dim, but the ancient floorboards were polished so smooth they glistened like a black river beneath our feet.

“Funny, isn’t it?” Kazuo asked as we passed through the house. “Your father makes a fresh start in America and you dive back to the Edo period.” It was almost a cutting remark, but the way he said it was charming.

“I suppose it is.”

“What made you go that way?”

“I never thought about it. I always loved the subject.” It was true. I’d been fanatical about Japanese history since I was a child, especially after my parents had swept me off to California.

“Well, that’s why you’re here. Wear these.” We’d reached the rear of the house, where we stepped into similar pairs of loafers. They fit him perfectly, and were only slightly too large for me. A moment later we were out in the night air once more, but this time I stopped short and gawked.

How could I have forgotten the garden? The gnarled and twisted pines that towered over the edges of the backyard, the thick groves of bamboo swaying peacefully on all sides, the showers of plum and cherry boughs, the lusty fragrance of camellia blossoms that bloomed in every corner.

“What’s the matter?”

“Sorry,” I said, startled out of my reverie. “Excuse me. It’s just I forgot all about this place.”

Kazuo smiled his narrow-eyed smile and turned to face me fully, putting his hands in his pockets. “Right.” He looked me over for a moment. “Whiskey?”

“Right on.”

“There’s the American.” Kazuo laughed and headed back toward the house. “Wait here. I’ll get us a bottle.”

Maybe it was the unexpected shower of sensory memories, or maybe it was just jet lag, but the atmosphere in the garden wrapped itself around me like heavy silk. I ran my hands over my hair and was resigned to find that my forelock had fallen out of place again. I already felt like a slob. While the brown slacks and chambray shirt I’d worn for travel were standard for a Berkeley instructor, they were like old dish towels compared to Kazuo’s impeccably cut suit.

I wandered further into the garden, mulling over my surroundings and the questions surrounding my host. I wasn’t an idiot. There was enough room between the lines for me to wonder how Kazuo’s father had managed to do so well during and after the war. There was space to wonder if there was a reason my cousin dressed like a dashing gangster from a Suzuki Seijun film. It was certainly possible to imagine why I might be asked to give a confidential appraisal of a private collection of artifacts that had been found beneath the false floor of a *kura* building on one of his properties. In fact, the only question that truly had me at a loss was why I was so determined to be here anyway.

As I walked the edge of the garden, slowly putting one foot in front of the other along the stone path that wound through the fat, lusty blooms of camellia and primrose, I was startled by what sounded like a whimper of pain.

I looked up sharply, my eyes following the sound to the back corner of the garden. I could see nothing but foliage, but as I squinted, I heard another strange sound. A gasp, I thought, or a splash of water? Perhaps just the rustling leaves of the plum trees. Glancing left and right uneasily, I took a step toward the source before I heard another sound. This time the human distress was unmistakable. I quickened my pace, concerned. What could be the matter? An injured vagrant? A dying gardener? "Hello?" I called quietly as I approached, not wanting to startle, but then remembered I was in Japan. "Uh, *dare... dare...*"

Never mind. It wasn't worth the embarrassment. Rounding a large cloud of hydrangeas, I tripped and nearly stumbled over the source of the strange noises I'd heard.

I wasn't easily shocked. But nothing could have prepared me...

The round wooden tub was tucked into the flowering bushes, canopied by the plum trees, and illuminated by an old-fashioned paper lantern flickering nearby. Water glistened on the cedar planks of the vessel, trickling over the edges as if it had splashed there moments ago. And in the tub, pale and quivering, was the young man whose small, anguished sounds had led me to this shadowy corner.

I stared at him in shock, trying to piece together an appropriate reaction. He was exquisitely shaped, with sharply cut features, and a lithe, lean body that folded in the water as prettily as the spindly bloom of some strange jungle flora. His black hair was parted straight and fell in a gleaming curtain over his temples and forehead, skimming his finely arched brows.

He was dressed only in a white button-down shirt, which was soaked through and spread open, revealing his naked chest above the dark water. His arms were bound tightly behind him, black cords tied in a meticulous, almost decorative fashion around his biceps. Black cords bound his knees, as well, holding his legs splayed apart; his pale skin was reddened where the restraints pinched his skin.

His only other dressing was a white silk gag tied firmly between his lips. Wordlessly, helplessly, he fixed his dark eyes on mine and held them there. And then he jolted suddenly in the tub, sloshing water over the sides as his head fell back and a shudder went through his slender body.

That was when I realized I'd missed something. My eyes settled between his legs in horror. It wasn't that the water was dark. It was that there was

something in it. My lips parted as I watched a single crimson tentacle break the surface of the water, slowly snaking its way over the pale ridges of his abdomen. The boy was shaking like a leaf.

“Yuuta?”

My eyes flew back to the young man's. He was looking at me now with an expression I couldn't read, but it didn't look nearly as distressed as his voice had sounded. Blinking hard, I tore my eyes away from him and went back around the hedge.

“There you are,” Kazuo said. He was standing near the other rear corner of the garden, setting down a bottle and unstacking two glasses atop a garden table, not twenty feet from where the wooden tub was hidden behind the hydrangeas.

It had to be his game. He had to know. Or was I meant to bring it up? I sat down in the chair he offered, still seeing that dark, serpentine length slithering over pale, firm skin. I watched Kazuo fill my glass, feeling dazed.

“Soaking up memories?”

I laughed through my nose, unable to manage more than that, and raised my glass to his.

“To family,” Kazuo said. “Thanks for coming, cousin. I wasn't sure I'd ever see a relative again.”

“Why is that?” I asked. My throat felt dry. I listened for what I'd heard before, a whimper, or a splash. I thought of the creature's weight between those slender thighs.

“I was wondering if you knew,” Kazuo said casually. “I'm *yakuza*.”

“Do you mean it?” It had seemed compelling before, to think of visiting my cousin the wealthy gangster and picking through his father's vault of black-market treasures from the era I'd specialized in. Was it still compelling now that I'd seen what this gangster grew in his garden?

“Yes, I do.” The smile again. It was a cat's smile. A snake's smile. I couldn't tell which. “I've taken over for my father. I'm sorry to lure you here without telling you.”

“I can understand the omission,” I said. My ears perked as I thought I heard a rustle from the bushes, but it was just the summer breeze.

“Can you? You should put up more of a fight.” The disapproval in his tone was startling in its genuineness. I couldn’t get a read on him. He’d embraced me like family on my arrival, but his conversation was a strange variety of friendly. I started to wonder what lay beneath it.

“I wanted to visit,” I said. “I jumped at the opportunity.”

“How is your Japanese? Forgot it all?” Kazuo placed a cigarette between his soft lips and bent his head over a lighter.

I nodded. “Basically.”

Kazuo raised an eyebrow and finished lighting his cigarette, then leaned back in his chair and blew out a neat spear of smoke. “*Mottainai.*”

“*Sou desu ne,*” I agreed. It was a waste. But I couldn’t blame my parents. Being Japanese hadn’t worked out well for them in their day. They would never understand why so many of us *Nisei* were so eager, now, to reclaim that identity... I resisted the urge to glance over my shoulder toward the bushes. Had I imagined it?

“You’ll remember it quickly,” Kazuo said in Japanese.

“When you say *yakuza,*” I asked, trying to keep up my end of the conversation, “do you mean...?”

“It’s too late at night to talk about my business.” Kazuo smirked, looking like a young Marlon Brando. “But it’s morning in California. Are you married, cousin?”

“No.”

“Girlfriend?”

“No.”

A splash echoed from the bushes behind me, and my head turned quickly without my permission.

“Ah,” Kazuo said, drawing my eyes back to him. “Unfortunate.” He stubbed out his cigarette on the table, shaking his head, and rose to his feet.

I watched, wide-eyed, and then got up and followed him. “Kazuo... *san.*”

“Relax,” Kazuo laughed. “Come along. You saw him before, didn’t you?”

“I...”

“Didn’t know what to do? Well, you don’t have to be scared of me, Yuuta. Let’s make that clear.”

We had rounded the hydrangeas again. The young man was leaning over one side of the tub, face hidden in shadow, as he shook and quivered. I could see why. The creature had come alive. The octopus had climbed nearly out of the water to spread itself over his lap, its tentacles stretching and winding wherever they could reach. Three of the creature's serpentine arms were plastered to the young man's torso, stroking and spiraling.

Why was I seeing this? I turned my eyes to Kazuo, who was taking in the scene before us as though bored.

"They're curious creatures," Kazuo said. "They love to play. And they can get in the tiniest places."

Why was I seeing this? "Is it hurting him?"

Kazuo gave that mask-like smile and tilted his head, his eyes sweeping over the pair before us. "You never know when to be quiet," he chided the boy.

The young man's eyes slid over to mine, gazing at me sidelong. They gleamed like black opals through a sheen of tears. His cheeks were flushed; the lanterns caught the pale pink high on his cheeks and across his delicate nose. My eyes traveled down to one of the ruby tendrils that clung in a swirling shape to his chest, glistening and impossibly dainty, impossibly dexterous at the tip. As I watched, it spiraled around one small pink nipple and covered it tightly. A choked little sound escaped the silk gag, and I was horrified to feel my cock growing stiff against my thigh.

"Who is he?" I whispered.

"My secretary."

The young man's expression was shifting slowly with the tides of his torment. One moment his shoulders hitched, his silky forehead creased with anguish; the next, his features would go slack and drowsy. His thighs would jerk toward one another with a sudden splash, straining against the black ropes that held them splayed, and then he would surrender again, bowing his head and breathing out through his nose.

"I find this very strange," I said.

"Good," Kazuo said wryly, adding in Japanese, "I wouldn't want to bore you." He stepped close to the tub and crouched down, reaching into it to stroke one of the tentacles. The creature seemed to recognize him, curling around his fingertip and then sliding to the edge of the tub nearest him. The young man

closed his eyes and shivered as his body was exposed beneath the clear water, and I didn't know how to stop myself from staring at the shape of his rigid shaft under the surface, his round balls, the globes of his ass, and the shadowed cleft between his buttocks. I couldn't help imagining those scarlet organs slithering, prodding, probing into the smallest crevice. How deep would they go? I could almost feel the tightness of his dark hole, the way it would clench around my fingers.

The young man's eyelashes fluttered like miniature black fans. I could see, now, that the silk gag was soaked between his lips, which were pink and shining and slack with surrender. One of the creature's arms slid back through the water and crept over the boy's tight sac, then wound around the base of his jutting member. He sobbed softly around the silk.

"I ask you to do one thing," Kazuo murmured, and reached up to untie the gag. "Be quiet. And you couldn't do it."

"*Aniki*," the boy whispered pleadingly.

"It was my fault," I blurted. My pulse was pounding. What was this?

"Yuuta, don't take responsibility for someone else's mistake." Kazuo laid his jacket neatly over a branch and started rolling up his sleeves.

"I don't understand. I should..." I was no stranger to liberal houses. I taught at Berkeley, for Christ's sake. But this was something different. I felt like I was drinking with a demon in his lair. What kind of degenerate had Kazuo's father been? The same kind of degenerate Kazuo was?

"*Aniki*."

"Open your mouth," Kazuo said, and pinned the boy's chin between his tapered fingers to draw his head forward and downward. He left him frozen there, then raised one of the tentacles to his prisoner's lips. "Kiss it."

This was too much. I had to go. But then I saw the boy's tongue slide beneath the tip of that crimson organ, saw him letting it probe him for one long, lewd moment before it slipped down his chin, and I couldn't stop myself from letting out an audible breath.

Kazuo's eyes were on me at once, sharp and delighted. "Yuuta," he said with pleasure. "Come. Kneel there." He pointed to the young man's other side.

This was a crossroads I'd never expected myself to come to, but I knew which path I was going to take before he'd finished speaking. I floated there

like I was in a trance, lowering myself to my knees at the side of the tub. This close I could see every detail. I could see each tiny bead of water shimmering on his body, the dark iridescence of the creature's flesh, and the saliva on his open pink lips.

"Do you want to touch him?"

"Only if he wants to be here."

"Christ, of course he wants to be here. Do you think this is how I torture my enemies? Touch him. He's been waiting all day. Don't be cruel."

As uncertain as I was, my cock was about to blast through my trousers. The perversions unfolding before me were doing me in. I reached up, tentatively, and brushed a lock of hair from the young man's forehead. His shudder in response revealed his desperation. I cupped his cheek in my hand, stroking my thumb over his soft, moist, pink bottom lip, and then I pushed it inside to feel his slippery tongue. I bit back a groan when I felt it swirling around me, and then the boy moaned and sucked it hard. I looked down to find Kazuo's hand under the water, beneath the octopus, and his arm flexing up and down.

"It's a punishment?" I whispered. I replaced my thumb with two fingers, working them gently in and out of the boy's mouth. I was no less fatigued as the moments went on, and each swell of my cock made me feel light-headed.

"Not if I let him come," Kazuo said, and shrugged. "Not in my opinion."

"Aniki..."

"Why does he call you that?"

"Because we're yakuza." Kazuo's wrist worked steadily under the water. "And I'm his superior."

"Why are you—?"

"Take out your cock, Yuuta."

Almost automatically, I reached down and unbuttoned my slacks. I wasn't even certain I was awake anymore, and if that was just an excuse, I was grateful for it. I had to bite my lips against a groan when I got my hand around my cock, and I let out a shuddering breath when I felt my fingertips reach the back of the boy's throat. I let my hand slip free of his lips and travel down his neck, down his chest until I found one pert nipple and flicked it with my thumb. I fell into a trance, stroking my cock with my eyes closed, savoring the lingering

impression of his soft wet mouth and the tight body I'd been staring at for God knew how long. I started when I felt the octopus wrapping a tentacle around my wrist, but then I relaxed and let go.

When I felt another hand between my legs, though, my eyes flew open. My spine went stiff as Kazuo molded against my back, but turned to jelly again when he wrapped his hand around my hand and started helping me stroke my cock.

"You do remember the garden now, don't you?" Kazuo whispered in Japanese, nosing against my neck.

I groaned, melting back against him and letting him take over. I surrendered completely, forgetting that he was scary, forgetting that this was strange. I surrendered to the steady up and down twist of his soft hand around my cock, and to the slippery feeling of the young man's muscles beneath my hand, and to the bizarre creature now curiously caressing me where it could reach. I crumbled steadily, quickly, and a broken sound fell from my lips. My thighs were clenching.

"Poor Yuuta. You're practically dreaming."

"Yes," I gasped, throwing my head back against his shoulder and digging my fingers into the hard stomach beneath my hand. "Yes. Yes..."

Kazuo clamped a hand over my mouth and sucked on my neck as I came. It wrecked me. It ruined me. It left me in tatters. I collapsed back against him, gasping and spent, unable to open my eyes.

"Look, look, look," Kazuo whispered, and I opened my eyes to find that he'd untied the arms of the boy in the tub, and the boy now had his hands between his legs. The octopus was sprawled along his thigh like a bundle of red velvet and ribbons, appendages spiraling around his leg and pressing into the crevice of his ass. His pale hand was moving up and down his tormented cock, making sharp little splashes in the water with each thrust.

"*Ikisou?*" Kazuo asked.

"*Aniki,*" the boy whined softly, nodding, his eyes squeezed tight. "*Aniki...*"

"*Ii yo.*" Kazuo's permission sounded so gentle it was like someone else's voice. And it worked. I felt the faintest twitch in my spent cock when the young man arched in the tub, throwing his head back as his cock spurted several streaks of pearly white across his chest. "Good," Kazuo purred again, running the back of his hand along the young man's cheek. "Perfect."

I watched the boy sag in the tub, releasing his lips from between his teeth. They were bloodless for a moment from being clamped down on so hard, but he'd stayed quiet. I wondered how long he'd been in the tub, how long it had been going on. My eyes were drifting closed.

"I'll take you to your room," Kazuo said a few minutes later when I was swaying on my knees. But when I got into the large, plush bed upstairs, Kazuo lay down beside me.

"Shuya's gone home," Kazuo said. "Don't worry about him."

"You don't have to stay," I mumbled, confused and half-asleep. Visions of neon lights, and gardens, and octopuses were flickering through my head—Kazuo's touch, and the scent of his house, and the outrage in my parents' voices when they'd conspired not to let me come near this place.

"Don't worry," Kazuo said calmly. "It's my room. And Yuuta"—he lifted my chin to look into my eyes—"I think you'll do just fine here."

I blinked at him blearily. "It's only two weeks."

Kazuo's sensual lips curved, and his eyes narrowed lazily. "Mm," he said, and closed his eyes. "Goodnight, Yuuta."

The End

Glossary of Japanese Terms

(In Order of Appearance)

Aniki: A respectful Japanese term, common among yakuza, for an older brother or a superior.

Genkan: Traditional Japanese entryway areas where shoes are removed before entering the main part of the house.

Tatami: Woven rush mats used as flooring in traditional Japanese houses. They often give off a sweet, grassy smell.

Kura: Traditional Japanese storehouses where valuable commodities are kept.

Dare (ga imasu ka): “Is someone there?”

Yakuza: A member or members of Japan’s highly organized crime syndicates.

Mottainai: “What a waste.” A notoriously loaded Japanese expression conveying a sense of regret over something valuable being wasted.

Sou desu ne: “That’s right. I agree.”

Ikisou: “Are you gonna come?”

Ii yo: “Yes, good.” “Go ahead.”

Author Bio

Claire Cray specializes in M/M romance and stories of an offbeat nature. Her tales feature intelligent characters, a vivid sense of atmosphere, and a (sometimes twisted) sense of humor. Born in a strange little village in the Pacific Northwest, Claire was raised on rain, trees, and spooky stories. An addiction to misadventure has carried her from the backwoods of Oregon to Portland, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and New York, where she currently resides.

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