

Chapter 12: Halfway There

Watching dispassionately as Shido's hand hit the floor with a loud splat, his scream of agony ringing through the bus, I calmly flicked the blood off Kotetsu and pointed it at the quivering man.

Shido scrambled backward, tripping over his feet and crawling away as he clutched his stump and looked up at me in wide-eyed terror.

"Y-You just... hurt a teacher," he whimpered. "I-I'll have you arrested for this!"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Saeko, one hand already gripping the hilt of Muramasa, her eyes locked on Shido and his little cult, ready to strike if necessary.

There was also a blush on her cheeks—and a distinct scent of arousal in the air.

"Arrested?" I echoed, voice calm as I lowered the blade to my side, tilting my head slightly.

"By who, exactly?" I asked, raising an eyebrow. "In case it hasn't sunk into that peanut-sized brain of yours yet... laws don't mean jack shit anymore."

I slowly sheathed my blade, letting the click of it locking into place hang in the air.

"From now on, only one rule matters—*survival of the fittest*. And I promise, you won't survive long if you keep testing me."

With that said, I turned toward Shizuka, catching the rest of the group's reactions as I did.

Rei, who had thankfully paused at the bus steps, was now staring at me in awe—admiration clear on her face.

Saya wore a blank look that softened into a smug, approving smile when our eyes met.

Saeko was now panting lightly, a deeper blush on her face and lust smoldering in her gaze—no doubt loving the display due to her sadistic streak.

Ciel simply watched me with quiet amusement, her usual calm expression tinged with affection.

As for Momo, Fumiko, Misuzu, Toshimi, Yuuki, and Kyoko—their expressions ranged from shock to silence.

Yuuki, of course, gave me a sultry look when our eyes met, while Kyoko looked away with a demure blush.

I didn't particularly care about most of them. They were already Stamped, and weren't much use to me.

Kyoko was the only one of practical use—I had plans to build a school later, and she at least had value as a teacher.

Turning to Shizuka, I found her still smiling, completely unfazed by what had just happened.

"Sensei," I asked, "how far is your friend's place from here?"

Shizuka blinked, then brought a finger to her lips in a thinking pose.

"Hmmm... Rika's house isn't too far, actually," she said with a pout. "But with all this traffic, it's gonna take forever."

I looked ahead at the bumper-to-bumper line of honking cars—each blaring horn drawing more undead like a dinner bell. Before we knew it, the streets became packed with cars as more people attempted to escape the city in search of a safe haven.

"Then this is a good time to ditch the bus," I said. "We're wasting gas just sitting here, and I don't feel like getting overrun in traffic."

"You want us to *walk*?" Kyoko asked, a little wide-eyed.

"That's a smart idea, actually," Saya muttered, adjusting her glasses with a nod. "I agree. Let's ditch the bus."

"I support this too," Saeko added, stepping closer to me and placing a hand on my shoulder. "I'll follow your lead."

Smiling in thanks, I quickly got to work grabbing our things, with the others joining in moments later—though not without a few grumbles. Rei slipped back onto the bus to retrieve the gear she'd left behind in her earlier rage, including her weapon: a simple metal pole.

"Thanks for that, Akari-kun," Rei said as she returned to my side, surprising me with a sudden hug. "I hate that man so much... I let my anger get the better of me and nearly did something really stupid."

"I *did* promise to handle him if he became a problem," I replied with a reassuring smile. She returned it gratefully, looking far more at ease as she stepped back.

"W-Wait!"

A strained voice made us pause.

Turning around, we saw a pale, sweating Shido stumbling toward us, a bloodied cloth poorly wrapped around the stump of his arm.

"Y-You may leave if you wish," he stammered, trying to regain some authority. "But... leave Shizuka-sensei here. I need urgent medical attention and she's the only one that could help me right now."

The air tensed instantly.

My hand drifted toward my blade. Saeko did the same, her grip tightening on Muramasa.

"Still trying to pretend you have any power, huh?" I sighed, visibly annoyed. "Be thankful a *hand* is all I took. Now fuck off."

Then, without a care in the world, I threw an arm around Shizuka's waist and guided her off the bus. She let out a pleased squeal and leaned into me with a contented smile.

"Oh my~ You sure are forward, Akari-kun~ Hihhi~" she giggled, wrapping her arms around my waist and pressing her head to my chest. "With my strong Akari-kun protecting me, I feel just like a princess~"

"S-Sensei! Stop being so shameless and walk on your own already!" Saya cried, clearly scandalized and blushing furiously.

Her words fell on deaf ears.

Ciel and Saeko flanked us on either side, keeping a wary eye out as we exited the bus and made our way off the main street.

"Alright, Sensei," I said with a chuckle, "as much as I'm enjoying being hugged by a beautiful woman, I need you to walk with the others. I won't be able to protect you if you're clinging to me the whole way."

"Aww, fine~" she pouted, reluctantly letting go. "But if I get tired, you have to carry me, okay~?" Without waiting for my answer, she skipped off to rejoin the non-combatants.

"She's like a kid despite having such a sexy and mature body," I muttered with a shake of my head, then took the lead again.

"Let's move, everyone. We want to reach the house before nightfall. In this chaos, zombies might not be the only things we'll need to worry about."

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About half an hour later, I heard footsteps beside me. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Saya walking up with a curious look on her face.

"What you said earlier... were you talking about *people*?" she whispered, glancing behind us to make sure no one was listening.

"Yes," I whispered back, stopping briefly to toss a brick I'd picked up down a side street, drawing a small cluster of undead away. "There's only so much some humans can take before they snap. With all the chaos and fear in the air, it's only a matter of time."

Normally this would not be enough to keep the undead away from our group since even after being warned some of the girls were still whispering in the back. That's why there was an invisible barrier around our group that kept all sound inside being monitored and kept by my cute Ciel.

Saya fell silent for a moment, studying me. "You talk like you're not human yourself," she said softly, watching my face with narrowed eyes.

"Let's just say my childhood and teenage years were... rather interesting," I said, glancing at her with a smirk.

Her eyes narrowed even further at my evasiveness, so I reached out and flicked her on the nose.

She flinched. "Tsk, jerk," she muttered, turning away with an adorable blush. "Hmph. Fine, don't tell me."

Then she mumbled, "Shizuka-sensei says we're almost there anyway."

"Aww, did you just want to talk to me, Saya? I don't mind, you know. I'm always happy to chat with such a beautiful girl. I'm flattered, really." I teased, throwing her a grin, trying to ease the weight behind her thoughts.

Saya, for all her collected and logical exterior, was a mess of nerves underneath it all. She was only holding it together thanks to my presence—and, no small thanks to that subtle thought I had implanted this morning: that she could trust me more than anyone else in this world.

“S-Shut up!” she stammered, her face already glowing red.

She spun on her heel like she was about to stomp off in typical tsundere fashion, but I was faster—slipping my arm around her waist and pulling her close. I gently rested my chin on her head, holding her steady in a quiet embrace.

“W-What are yo—”

“Shh... it’s alright.” I whispered, running a hand slowly along her back. Sticky Fingers helped soothe her further, subtle and comforting. “It’s okay to be nervous, Saya. Being afraid doesn’t make you weak—it makes you human.”

I felt her trembling against me, but then her hands gripped my shirt tightly, as if grounding herself.

“I’m not afraid,” she muttered, though her body betrayed her words. “I’m a genius, you know? There’s no way I’d be afraid...”

“It’s alright,” I repeated gently, not letting go. “I know we only met this morning... but I promise you this, Saya: I’ll protect you. I won’t let you die—or become a walking corpse.” I still refused to call them *them*.

She was quiet after that. But she’d stopped shaking.

“How can you promise something like that... so easily?” she whispered, voice quieter now. “We don’t even know what’ll happen tomorrow. Idiot.”

“And yet, I can—and I did~” My response was confident and immediate. So much so that it made her let out a tiny, unexpected giggle.

“Besides,” I added with a smirk, “it would be a real shame to let such a cute and beautiful girl like you die. The world would lose something special.”

“B-Baka! H-How can you say that stuff like it’s nothing!?” she hissed, burying her red face in my chest before lightly smacking it a few times in protest.

“Haha, glad to see you’re feeling better, Saya.” I replied, meeting her eyes and flashing her a genuine smile.

She froze for a moment, flustered again—then quickly turned her face away.

“H-Hmph! I said what I needed to say, I’m going back now!” she stammered, walking away stiffly with an extra sway in her hips.

I watched her go with a smirk.

‘Hmhmhm... such a cute tsundere.’

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A While Later

It wasn’t long before we reached Rika’s place. Shizuka quickly hopped off my back and unlocked the gate, humming softly as she did.

She had gotten tired of walking, of course. Not that she’d asked for permission—she’d just leapt onto my back with a bubbly giggle and buried my face in her chest like a human pillow.

Any complaint died after she did that.

Once we were safely inside and the door was locked and reinforced, nearly everyone except for me and Ciel let out audible sighs of relief.

“*Haah*, we made it,” Rei muttered, leaning against me with her head resting on my shoulder, eyes closed in exhaustion. “Thanks for protecting us this far, Akari-kun. You too, Saeko-san, Ciel-san.”

“It was no trouble,” Saeko replied calmly, giving me a glance of quiet gratitude. “Akari-kun deserves the real thanks. Without him, I wouldn’t have had a proper weapon—or reason—to protect anyone.”

“I was only following Master’s orders,” Ciel added casually, her gaze scanning the home’s interior, no doubt cataloguing every weak point, escape route, and possible blind spot.

“Indeed, thank you very much, Akari-kun~” Yuuki chimed in with a playful lilt, suddenly wrapping herself around my free arm like a seasoned temptress. “I don’t know *what* I would’ve done without someone strong like you leading us~”

I glanced down and barely resisted sighing. She’d undone a few buttons from her uniform, revealing a purple and black lace bra—and her arm pressing mine into very obvious cleavage. The way she stared up at me with bedroom eyes made her intentions very clear.

Before I could react, Saya suddenly appeared between us like a protective barrier.

“S-Step away from him, Miku!” she snapped, cheeks tinged pink with a familiar tsundere blush. She forcibly separated Yuuki from my arm, earning a pout from the flirty girl.

Choosing to de-escalate before things got ridiculous, I gently extracted myself and cleared my throat. “Alright, now that we’re safe, I suggest you all take the opportunity to shower while the utilities are still working.”

While I enjoyed the attention of beautiful girls like any normal hormonal teen, the looks Ciel was currently giving me made me a bit nervous.

“A bath sounds amazing right now,” Misuzu sighed dreamily, already tugging Niki toward the hallway. “Come on, Niki-chan, I’ll wash your back~”

“While you girls handle that,” I continued with a smile, “I’ll check the house for any useful supplies—firearms, knives, anything we can use.”

“Oh, there should be some sake in the cabinet somewhere too!” Shizuka called out cheerfully as she sauntered into the kitchen, hips swaying freely. She paused mid-step and turned to look at me with a teasing smirk. “Oh, and Akari-kun? You’re *more* than welcome to join us in the bath~ I wouldn’t mind~”

The way she winked after saying that nearly caused Saya to explode.

Surprisingly, the other girls didn’t have a negative reaction to Shizuka’s teasing words. They either looked away with a blush or gave me sultry or amused smiles — especially Yuuki and Saeko.

A few minutes later, all the girls except Ciel headed for the bath. I could already hear their laughter and splashing as they relaxed and messed around in the water, leaving me alone with Ciel as we searched for any additional firearms.

It didn’t take long before we found a locked safe upstairs. Inside, we uncovered a small arsenal of guns and ammo — enough to arm most of our group. I used Material Creation to discreetly craft a few more pistols and a generous amount of ammunition.

Then, considering who still needed weapons, I created a compact MP5 for Saya, a Unique Grade spear for Rei, and a Net Launcher with extra air cartridges for Shizuka.

“We’ll just say we found these lying around the house,” I said casually, glancing at Ciel.

She nodded, but her mind seemed elsewhere. Her usual calm focus was off.

"What's wrong, Ciel?" I asked, watching her expression carefully. "You seem distracted."

Ciel blinked her red eyes, looking momentarily startled. "N-Nothing, Master. I was just... discussing resource allocation with my Parallel Existence."

That was a half-truth. She was referring to one of our parallel selves currently out in the city scouting for certain people we wanted to find. I didn't push immediately, but I raised an eyebrow.

"Really now?" I said, voice light but skeptical. "My brilliant, beautiful Manas who can run billions of calculations in less than a second at minimum is suddenly stuck thinking about resources?"

Ciel squirmed under my gaze, her cheeks reddening. "Please think nothing of it, Master. It was just a silly distraction."

"Nope." I stepped closer with a soft smile. "You should know me better than that by now. If it matters to you, then it matters to me. So come on, out with it."

She looked at me for a long moment, blushing deeper as I gently rested my hand on her soft, silver-blue hair.

"Master is impossible as always..." Ciel muttered, pouting even as she leaned into my touch.

"Yep. And you love me more for it." I grinned when she didn't deny it.

"...Fine." She finally whispered, averting her gaze. "I just... I just didn't want Master to be with anyone else before... before I had a turn."

I blinked, letting her words sink in, then smiled warmly. Without another word, I pulled her into a tight embrace.

"You're seriously too cute, Ciel~" I murmured, nuzzling her cheek with mine affectionately.

"And if that's all you wanted," I continued, pulling back just enough to look into her eyes, "you only had to ask."

Her eyes widened with hope and surprise as I created a new Parallel Existence of myself — one that gave a brief wave before exiting the room.

Then, with a thought, I teleported us to the empty house next door and cast a barrier to block out all sound and interruptions.

“There. Now we can enjoy some time together, without distractions,” I said with a warm smile.

Ciel stood frozen for a moment — then with a soft glow, her clothes shimmered and changed into a stunning set of blue lace lingerie that hugged her perfectly.

I let out a low whistle. “Well, well... looks like my adorable Ciel has taking a liking to modern clothing.”

With a faint smirk, I dismissed my own shirt. “So tell me... do you like it when I look at you like this?”

“Does Master like it?” she asked in return, a shy but eager smile on her face.

“Hahaha, of course I do. I love everything about you,” I replied, gently taking her hand. “Now come on — we’ve got time to make up for.”

With that, we walked toward the nearest bedroom, hand in hand.