

Fujiwara no Mokou cursed. She considered herself a reasonably tough girl that was not bothered by a little bit of rain, but the torrential downpour which she had gotten herself into on her way back home was so intense that one could hardly blame those who genuinely feared the heavens themselves were about to come crashing down. Small fountains of rainwater and the mud exploded upwards with each of her hurried steps, and the constant blur of falling liquid around her was so dense that she could barely see where she was going.

That she was all out in the open did not help. Were she still back in the Bamboo Forest of the Lost, the sheer density of the plants that lent their name to it would have absorbed most of the fluid bombarding her, but fate and its twisted sense of humor had seen her visiting Eirin in the Human Village on this of all the days. The sprawling fields and rolling hills that she had to traverse during her return trip certainly were picturesque when she started it, but the sudden onset of the deluge made her realize they were woefully lacking in any form of proper shelter.

Mokou already feared that she would drown on dry land when her eyes suddenly registered an ominous silhouette becoming visible in the curtain of water that still surrounded her on all sides. It was a tree – a proud and tall specimen that, while perhaps not quite as old as she herself, certainly had seen its fair share of centuries. Judging by how thick its regal crown was with leaves and foliage, there was a reasonable chance that she would be able to wait out the storm underneath its natural roof without ending up completely soaked.

For a moment, the eternal pessimist that was Fujiwara no Mokou actually thought that the random hand of fate had mercifully decided not to screw with her for a change. This feeling sadly underwent a prompt reverse when she, getting closer to the tree, found that someone else already occupied the place.

“Yoooo-hooooo! Moooo-kouuuuu!”

Sitting against the trunk of the tree was Kaguya Houraisan, who immediately started waving towards her in a comically exaggerated fashion and patted the ground next to herself. The rosy flush on her cheeks strongly implied that she was not entirely sober; and so did the worryingly empty bottle of liquor that her free hand clambered with a fierce grip.

A considerable part of the human immortal felt the immediate urge to tie the Lunarian to the tree and set it on fire. She mentally counted to ten, told herself that the current weather was not

conductive to this procedure, and instead approached her old nemesis with slow, controlled steps until she stood right at the edge of the tree's canopy.

“I probably should not even ask, but what in the pit of infernal blazes are you doing here, you dense knucklehead?”

Kaguya placed a finger upon her lips as if she herself was not quite sure of the answer. “Well,” she finally began, “Eirin needed to have something picked up from the Human Village, and it was such a nice and sunny day – so I offered to get it for her. But just as I was heading back to Eientei, a mild drizzle started, and I took refuge under this tree.”

Well, that made sense. In about as much as anything the lunatic said could make sense. There was one curious little detail, though.

“Kaguya?”

“Huh?”

“That thing you were supposed to pick up for the good doctor wouldn't happen to be that bottle of booze you are holding, would it?”

The Lunarian blushed, let out a shy giggle, and fidgeted around while trying (and failing) to put on an embarrassed face that looked more genuine than playful. “It's not my fault if it just won't stop raining and I have nothing else to do. Besides, I only drank a teeny, tiny sip – just to see what it tastes like.”

“Looking at the bottle, those actually must have been awfully big sips, Kaguya.”

“It's a very complex taste!”, the moon princess pouted as she locked her arms across her chest and demonstratively turned her head away from her interrogator. But her indignation was not meant to last, and before long, she was fixating Mokou from the corner of her eyes.

“...well?”

“Well what?”, the human immortal replied.

“Won't you sit down next to me?” Kaguya's pursed lips divided to reveal the smug grin the human immortal had come to hate so much over the centuries.

“After all, it's still raining, and I would feel really guilty if people came to say that *I* was at fault for you becoming *wet*”.

Mokou flashed a perfectly homicidal smile and wondered what kind of sound the head of the Lunarian might make if she repeatedly smashed it against one of the nearby rocks until her body stopped twitching. At the same time she knew that the princess fully expected, even wanted her fuse to go off. Attacking her now would only feed into her superiority complex, and so would staying out in the rain.

In other words, the immortal had very little choice other than to try and bring as much distance between herself and the Lunarian as she could while she circled around the tree and sat down at part of the trunk opposite to her. It would have been a simple, elegant move – were it not for the fact that Kaguya ruined it by promptly following and seating herself next to her like a duckling chasing its mother.

“Would your highness graciously consider to fuck off and bother somebody else?”, Mokou inquired with perfect mock politeness.

“Nay verily”, Kaguya snickered as she inched even closer to her until the arms of the two women touched. It would have been a stark violation of the pyromancer's personal space even if the two of them actually got along, but as it was, the human felt as if a board full of sharp nails was being pressed into those parts of her body where it came into contact with that of her immortal enemy.

“You know, Mokou, I could get used to this. Just the two of us sitting under a tree; rain pouring down all around us, but we are safe and protected. Really romantic, isn't it?”

'Romantic' was not the word Fujiwara no Mokou would have used to describe the given situation. In part because she considered it and the person of Kaguya Houraisan to be mutually exclusive. And in part because she had to use every last fiber of her willpower in order not to bludgeon the Lunarian to death while screaming bloody murder at the top of her lungs.

Still, it was a provocation. It all was one big provocation; and she would not fall for it. Not when it would clearly bring that stupid bitch such an enormous sense of satisfaction.

As if sensing that her teasing was not strong enough to make the human explode, Kaguya suddenly rested her head on Mokou's shoulder and let out a long, content sigh. It very nearly drove Mokou insane. The annoyingly sweet smell of the alcohol on her breath. The sensation as her silky hair brushed against the skin of her cheek. And, perhaps worst of all, the soft expression on her face, as if she was actually enjoying it, rather than just doing this to make her angry.

But the human immortal prevailed. Even as she had to prevent every muscle in her body from tearing itself apart, even as her insides felt as if someone had pumped molten steel into them, she did not allow the Lunarian to break her composure. She was stronger than that.

Minutes, each like a small, self-contained eon in itself, passed as the two immortals remained silent; the white static of the rain being the only noise that could be heard.

“You really aren't going to kill me, huh?” The voice that spoke the unusual observation seemed unfamiliar at first, but quickly transformed back to that she knew belonged to her old rival. “My. Could it be that you actually have started to like me, Mokou?”

“Like fucking hell I would. You're just gonna have to do better than that if you intentionally try to make me angry. And besides, you're drunk out of your stupid mind. Killing you now would feel like beating up a retarded child. More than normally so, at any rate.”

“Oh Mokou. I know you don't really meant that, but please don't say such rude things to me. They really hurt my feelings, you know?”

“Is that so?”, the human said with a dry laugh. “Funny. It would not have thought that someone whose kinks include drugging and then abusing other people as live-sized body pillows in their own bed might have such fragile sensibilities.”

“That is so. And besides, it's your own fault for always being so cruel to me.”

“So it's suddenly *my* fault now?”

“Of course”, Kaguya replied and wrapped her arm across the shoulder of the woman she had been killing for several centuries by now. “It's really frustrating: If I'm mean to you, you hurt me. If I'm nice to you, *you also hurt me*. So unless I take away your ability to hurt me, there's no point in being nice to you in the first place – even if I myself would really like to be nice to you.”

“And that justifies injecting me with a paralyzing venom and molesting me in how far?”

“Well, If I want to sleep wi-...alongside someone, I'd normally try to be nice to them, right? But that doesn't work on you. So I had to improvise a bit in order to make you be nice to me.”

“Ain't that grand. You're such a bitch that the only way you get people to 'be nice to you' is to poison them.”

“Not always”, the Lunarian whispered as she cuddled up a bit tighter to her old enemy. “I haven't poisoned you today, have I? And yet, you've been really nice to me all this time. Are you sure you haven't finally begun to like me?”

“Poisoning also counts if you do it on yourself. Let me repeat this: I'd be more than happy to pull your teeth out right alongside your obnoxious tongue, but when you're drunk like that, you're plainly not worth my attention.”

Kaguya let out a disappointed huff. “Not worth your attention? Fine, have it your way. Then I'll have to get that another way.” Before the other immortal even had a chance to guess what the princess had in mind, she grabbed her head and pressed her lips against the side of it; moving them towards its center at a deliberately slow speed. Needless to say, this caused Mokou to sweat bullets, but no matter how much she tried to wind herself out of the amorous advance, she could not dislodge Kaguya from her face unless she would resort to physical violence. She needed plan. Needed something. Needed...

“Booze!”

“W-what?!”, a rather startled moon princess stammered with enough confusion to release her grip on her unwilling lover.

“Your fucking booze. Give it to me! Now!”

Kaguya had barely picked up the bottle from the ground next to her and lifted it towards her adversary when the latter already tore it from her hands; an expression of complete mania in her unblinking eyes. Without delay, Mokou pulled the cork out of the bottle and began to empty its remaining contents into her throat; greedily gulping down the brown liquid inside.

Too greedily, perhaps, for the human promptly choked on the liquor, causing her to spit out a mouthful of it before she fell on all fours and into a violent fit of coughing. To make matters worse, the stuff had a hellishly sharp aftertaste, which now was cauterizing the insides of her windpipe.

Wheezing and gasping for air, she barely noticed how two soft hands tapped her back and used gentle force to pull her body on its side. Only after several deep breaths for air had allowed her to saturate her lungs with fresh oxygen again did she notice that her head was resting on something that was quite a bit softer than the ground to her feet could possibly be.

She opened her eyes and was greeted by the sight of her enemy's skirt and her outstretched legs.

“Really, Kaguya? A fucking lap pillow?”

The expression that formed on the head of the Lunarian which was hovering above her had something warm, almost motherly to it. She closed her eyes and softly shook her head. “Well, it isn't me who can't hold her drink, is it now?”

“Having to cough my lungs out still was better than getting kissed by you, though.”

“But I still scored an indirect kiss, Mokou. After all, we drank from the same bottle, right?”

Despite of how trivial this detail was – something about which young girls might get excited before they experienced actual love for the first time – it was the straw that broke the camel's back. Mokou bared her teeth. Clenched her fists. Looked, for all intents and purposes, as if she was going to turn everything – the tree, Kaguya, herself – into a heap of smoldering ashes.

But the disaster did not come. The muscles in the body of the immortal that had been tense like wires of steel relaxed and came into a resting position. She turned away, looking at the surrounding gray landscape.

“Kaguya?”

“Mhh?”

“If you already insist on this lap pillow bullshit, won't you at least pat my head as well? I heard that's supposed how you do it.”

Mokou cursed herself before the words had fully exited her mouth. What was she thinking? Across this entire encounter, the Lunarian had sought for nothing more than opportunities to tease and annoy her, and now she gave her a point of attack the size of a small star. 'Oh, Mokou really does like me now', she would say. 'Oh, Mokou gave up and wants me to pet her like a little girl'.

Her inborn pessimism made the sensation as long, slender fingers entered her hair and slowly began to comb through it all the more surprising. Something inside of her screamed that they belonged to a woman she hated; a woman she could not possibly allow to touch her like that. Yet another voice urged her to move closer to the abyss at whose edge she was standing, even if it would be impossible for her to climb back out again.

With a feeling of content resignation, she gave in and allowed herself fall forward.

The world as she knew it ceased to exist. There was no disgraced father. No honest man whose blood stuck to the bottle of the elixir. No oath of eternal vengeance in a little realm that humans and time itself had forgotten.

Only the murmuring of the rain. A soft hand that was still gently caressing her face. The feeling of cozy, blissful warmth seeping into her from the body of the one that was now – perhaps had always been? - watching over her; and who would protect her from the wet coldness that drowned all of existence around them.

The seconds as she remained like that, her consciousness on the very border of sleep, turned into minutes. Minutes into hours. And hours into something more. But something kept her awake. The teeniest, tiniest tidbit of information that something about all of this was not; could not be real. Her eyes wearily moved upwards until they met that of the Lunarian.

“Kaguya?”

“Yes, Mokou?”

“Please stop messing around with the time.”

The soft, affectionate look that the princess had worn froze. Shattered. Was replaced by a sad, knowing smile.

“I have been found out, have I not? The scheming deceiver is finally unmasked”. She sighed. “I am sorry Mokou. I did not mean to trick you. I really did not. It's just that I...”

(I don't want this moment to end)

With a wave of her hand, the localized space-time anomaly she had woven around herself and her old foe collapsed. Time ran fast-forward as the rain stopped, the clouds receded, and the sun finally shone again; only for it to sink beyond the horizon and make way for a black night sky glittering with a myriad of stars.

They were funny things, Mokou thought to herself. Bright enough to shine through the vast dark of empty nothingness, yet even these seemingly timeless sources of life were transient in nature, and the sheer distance between them and earth meant that many of them were like specters; already dead and burned out when their glow still was visible. No - at the end of the day, not even the stars weren't eternal. She would see all of them flicker out until the universe itself froze to death.

But hey, at least she wouldn't have to do it alone.

A soft tug at her shoulder tore the human from her thoughts. Kaguya was looking down at her, clearly not looking forward to what was going to happen, but also unable to resist the tension building inside of her any longer.

“Mokou...don't you want to go? It's no longer raining, I mean. And that was the sole reason we sat under this tree, was it not?” She fidgeted around anxiously. “I also suppose you have every good reason to be mad at me. For the time-bending and...well, everything. Kind of messed it up, didn't I?”

Her nemesis did not immediately respond, and although she was trying to hide it, it was clear that the girl whose head was still lying on the Lunarian's lap was very careful as she tried to find a proper answer.

Suddenly, her face darkened. “You really messed it up, Kaguya. I didn't notice how late it was getting thanks to that stupid shenanigans of yours, and if I go home now, it will be morning before I even get a foot through the door. Do you know what that means, huh? You know what?”

“It means that, If I want to get any sleep this night at all, I'll have to get it here. Right here. And I'm gonna do exactly that!”

Kaguya's rapid blinking did little to belie her confusion as Mokou stubbornly crossed her arms in front of her chest, and wriggled her head around until she had sunk into her skirt just a tad deeper than before.

Then, she laughed. “But Mokou, my legs will go numb if you're going to stay there for the entire night. And besides, what was that about body pillows you said earlier?”

“Numb legs are the least of the things you rightfully deserve after what you did to me in my own house; and only using a part of someone else as a pillow does not really count as turning her into a full body pillow atop of that. Also, aren't you forgetting something?!”

Now the Lunarian really was confused. At least until Mokou grabbed her hand and forcefully dragged it back onto her head; all while staring at her with the most vicious face she could muster in the rather absurd situation.

“Apologies”, Kaguya giggled and resumed stroking the immortal's head with all due diligence. “I obediently accept my punishment and promise that the headpats will not cease unless I get a cramp in my arm or pass out from the effort.”

“They better not. Otherwise I'll kill you.”

As the princess from the moon made good on her words, the grimly clenched lips of her best enemy relaxed into a grin and, from there, into a soft smile which signaled that she had fallen asleep. It was a beautiful sight; one that Kaguya cherished dearly as she leaned back against the trunk of her tree

and allowed her own eyes to fall shut.