

Chapter Twenty-One

I should be urging Himi toward the tunnel and the safety found there. I should tell her that we could discuss this new conviction of hers once the palace lay far behind us.

Instead, I clenched my jaw while something unwelcome flooded through me. What was it?

"I know what *gidae* wanted from me. Surely you can relate," Himi continued. "Let me carry out his wishes."

Ah. That was what it was. Envy, green and unbidden, had sent snarling tendrils through me. How had she unraveled the puzzle of Nokoribi's dying words before I had?

"I understand," I said. "I also know that once you're outside that door, you won't get far before a royal guardsman kills you for intruding on this place. When it comes to eliminating threats, I didn't train them to wait."

"I could show them this."

Himi gestured at her face.

"*Gidae* had eyes like ours, and he was the emperor," she said. "That must mean something, right?"

So, despite how secluded she'd always seemed, she'd figured that out on her own.

"It does, but Himi? You should consider everything that revealing yourself would entail," I said. "Please. I know how badly you want to make up for 'ribi's death. I have the same urge, but give yourself time. Take a night to review your options."

What was this? Why was I discouraging Himi from taking the throne? Wasn't that what I wanted?

"Don't let emotions make this decision for you," I continued. "Come home tonight. Just one more night. Do it for me?"

Himi deflated, giving me a small nod, and just in time too. I could hear faint boot stomps moving toward us.

"Good girl," I rushed to say.

Taking Himi's hand, I ducked and dodged through wayward branches toward escape. Zhao had long since left, and Brennan, apparently content to let me handle Himi, had followed him, so I shoved the girl through the tunnel's opening with a shouted 'go' to speed her along.

Once that was done, I waited in the threshold. I had one last task to accomplish.

The door on the far side of the room slammed open before someone ducked their head through it to check for hostiles, and as I'd hoped, the royal guard's commander led their charge into Nokoribi's bedroom. A perfect room breach, just like I'd taught them.

"Ryoko!" I called.

Tensing, the commander jerked toward me, grunting as if he'd been gut-punched.

"Kasai," he breathed. "Your eyes-"

When I lifted my finger to point at Sunada's body, it cut him off.

"A traitor for you," I said.

Sparing the indicated corpse a glance, Ryoko said, "What-? How are you-?"

That man really needed to work on controlling himself. Still, his baffled expression had me cracking a smile.

"Katanti didn't want me," I said. "Good luck with explaining this to the guilds."

"Wait... most blessed!"

Rolling my eyes, I sprinted to cover the distance that had formed between me and Himi.

"Can you block the path behind us?" I asked.

"Certainly," Himi said.

There. A glimpse of the cheerfulness I'd grown to expect from her. Maybe she could recover from this.

Behind us, the tunnel rumbled, and I cast a glance behind me, watching roots spring free of stone walls. They created a heavily intermeshed wall in the tunnels' open space, leaving barely any part of the room we'd fled peeking through.

"That should hold them for a while," I said.

"I should hope so," Himi said. "I can't have them getting in my way."

And there was the woman I was afraid of her becoming. Grim. Set on what she believed and willing to do anything to accomplish it. A faint echo of the person I'd been. I wouldn't wish that on anyone, which begged the question of why. I didn't regret what I'd done but... but...

But what?

In the chamber at the far end of the tunnel, Himi and I caught up with the others. With the downtrodden looking on, Zhao had lowered Taro to the floor while Brennan was kneeling beside the injured man, and they were arguing.

Loudly.

“-not leaving a man to die when I can save his life,” Brennan was shouting.

“We. don’t. have. time,” Zhao barked back. “After the mess we caused, an operative team will come straight to this place, and it won’t take them long to arrive.”

“They won’t get here within a half-hour, though,” I said as I joined them. “That should give us enough time to at least stabilize him, yes?”

While Zhao frowned at me and Brennan gazed at me with bright eyes, Himi trudged to sit at the foot of the stairs. I kept an eye on her as she curled up on herself.

“We should use that time to get as far away from here as possible, most blessed. You know this,” Zhao said. “Besides, how are we supposed to stabilize this stain of a man? Look at him. The patch Brennan placed on his wound is barely holding, and we don’t have the medical supplies we’d need to finish the job.”

He was right about Taro’s condition. Blood had stained his bared chest with a piece of someone’s oil-slicked coat secured over the hole in him, and with him barely conscious, a sheen had accented his unhealthily drained pallor.

“If I had my satchel, I could use my friend’s stasis device to keep him alive until help arrives,” Brennan said. “Someone would have to stay with him until the last minute, though. I can’t leave the device on him. Mixing iteration is bad, and I can’t do it any more than I already have here.”

“Your satchel’s where you’ve been storing drugs for me, right?” I asked.

Brennan nodded while Zhao clicked his tongue.

“You’re talking about taking an unnecessary risk for Taro,” he growled, “the man who-”

“I know what he did,” Brennan snapped. “A few days ago, I wanted to kill him myself. I still do, but he took this wound while helping us. I can’t repay that sacrifice by letting him die.”

“And I need to speak with him again.”

I extended a satchel to Brennan, and she took it without questioning its obvious manifestation, digging through its contents. With my foot jittering, I met Zhao’s glare with a blank canvas, one I had to fight to maintain.

“You were right all those days ago. All my hang-ups about strength and weakness are related to my childhood,” I said. “I didn’t want to admit it, but you had the right idea. I’ve been thinking it

over while watching Himi, alone in your house with it and ribi's last words. I think those two ideas are connected, and if they are, my only chance to confirm it lies with him."

I pointed at Taro, who now had a black disk lying near his wound. All motion around it had halted, as evidenced by a blood droplet that had stopped midway through its roll down his side, but I couldn't consider that impossibility yet, not with Zhao requiring all of my attention.

"You had to pick now to have this revelation?" he hissed. "Not yesterday, when we could have had a nice, safe conversation with him?"

Grimacing, I shrugged.

"I can't help the poor timing," I said. "Bren, are you finished?"

Glancing up, Brennan said, "Almost. Just have to finish with a last option..."

She fiddled with the disk for a few more seconds before grinning at me.

"I've limited the stasis field to shroud only the injured lung, so he'll be... uncomfortable. Once help gets close, just pull the disk off of him. He'll probably survive for a few minutes without it."

"Meaning I should make sure help's close before removing it. Understood," I said. "Will you take Himi back to base for me?"

Furrowing her brow, Brennan said, "You want me to leave you here, especially with what you want to tackle? No! If any of us will be facing danger, we should do it together."

Dropping into a crouch, I leaned over Taro's unconscious body.

"Bren. Stop thinking about your own needs for one second," I said under my breath. "Himi just killed someone for the first time. Of her own volition, at least. Do you know what that's like?"

Biting her lip, Brennan hesitantly nodded.

"I'm afraid she'll do something foolish if left alone," I continued. "So, I need you to take her somewhere comfortable and act like nothing's changed. I know this will break my promise to you, of a sort, but--"

"It's needed. I get it."

Growling, Brennan roughly rubbed her hands through her hair before puffing out a defeated sigh.

"What will Zhao be doing while I'm playing babysitter?"

I knew without a doubt that the old man's gaze was piercing the back of my head, and with my lips pursed, I tried to ignore the sensation. I was already struggling enough with his disapproval.

“He thinks I’m Hiyuki’s next emperor, remember?” I said through gritted teeth. “Having volunteered to serve as my bodyguard, he won’t leave my side without a compelling reason to draw him away, not until I’m safely ensconced in the palace or somewhere similar. So, he’ll stay with me, although I hope he’ll be giving me as much privacy as possible here.”

I’d raised my voice to aim those last words at Zhao, and on hearing them, he moved away, making his shadow on the wall opposite me shorten in stature before disappearing. All the while, Brennan tracked his progress.

“This iteration is so weird, but then, all of them have been so far,” she said before slapping her knees. “Ok. You be safe, K. Don’t take too many foolish risks.”

“I’ll do my best.”

“Remember what I said about Taro’s condition,” Brennan kept right on rambling, as if I’d said nothing. “Oh! And bring my toy back with you.”

“Bren, you’re stalling,” I said with a smile.

“I know that! I was just hoping-”

With a groan, Brennan got to her feet, brushing off her knees once there. She reached out as if to touch me but dropped her hand before it came anywhere close to my head.

“See you soon,” she said before spinning toward the stairs. “Himi! Let’s go.”

I watched the ladies make their climb out of the earth’s bowels until they’d vanished. Then, I collapsed beside Taro with my head resting on the wall, ignoring the downtrodden around us.

I had no idea where Zhao had gone, but without a doubt, he’d reappear when we could no longer delay our escape. Until then, I was alone with Taro. Mostly.

Almost, I decided against rousing him because I hadn’t told Zhao the full truth. Yes, as I’d had time to think over the last few days, his opinion about how I’d handled my past had often come to mind. Yes, I’d seen that avoiding what had happened to me was not only an unhealthy approach to processing it but an unhelpful one. A weak one.

And yes, Nokoribi’s last words to me had near constantly been ringing in my head, begging me to find better definitions for strength and weakness. Perhaps facing my past could provide another step in bringing that goal clarity.

All of this had pushed me out of a stubborn refusal to touch the matter, but what had gotten me to see the necessity of seeking its resolution had been Himi. She’d purposefully forgotten the moments of a loved one’s murder, but circumstances and new companions had forced her into remembering it.

Having seen both sides of her experience, I could say without a doubt that the Himi of now seemed... perhaps not happier, but more at peace than the girl I'd met. She had a lightness about her, as if her burdens had fallen from her shoulders, and while she often descended into times of quiet sorrow, she also seemed more like her true self than the overly quirky girl from before.

That precluded today's events, of course. Her progress might have just been undone in a few passion-fueled seconds.

This moment, however, wasn't about Himi. Only I sat with this gravely wounded man, and almost, I couldn't drag my hands out of my lap to slap Taro awake.

Somehow, though, I defeated my reluctance, bringing the guild chairman back to the pain that his mind had fled. After some initial moaning and attempts to faint once more, Taro focused with his eyes clearing, and once I'd seen recognition in his gaze, I relaxed, resting my wrists on my knees.

"Why am I alive?" was the first thing Taro said.

The words had seemed to come from him with difficulty, and he feebly pawed at his injured side. Grimacing, I shoved his hands down.

"Don't do that," I said. "You might dislodge the patch we placed."

Taro wheezed for a moment, presumably gathering his strength.

"Why?" he soon repeated.

"Because Zhao carried you here, probably hoping to make you the scapegoat for our crimes. He'd have had you draw the heat off of us, in a way," I said, "and once we got here, Brennan refused to let you bleed out into your lung. She still wants to kill you, but... letting you die was too much."

One rasp filled the air. Two.

"That's fair," Taro said.

"You're not curious about why I haven't ended your life?" I asked. "I struggled with sparing it once. Twice? I'm having a hard time with stopping myself from ripping your bandaging off."

"I assumed... you'd tell me... why."

With my fingers twitching, I tilted my head back with the ceiling having stolen my focus.

I didn't know why Taro prompted such wrath in me. He hadn't bought me from my parents or participated in any of what had followed. In fact, he held only tangential guilt for those events with his lack of control on his guilt leading to the loss of my childhood. It was shameful, perhaps, but not something that should make me want him dead.

Was my rage at him an irrational reaction? If it was, why did it matter? Why think about these things when I had little time here?

"I want you to tell me everything," I said.

"What do you-?" Taro started.

"You know what I mean."

After a pause, Taro rasped, "I... don't know if... I-"

"Try," I growled.

Swallowing, Taro let his head fall to the side. At a halting pace, he told me the story of my childhood, a secondhand story I'd already known, but as he approached the end, he included a never-before-heard addendum.

"I had no clue that something was wrong in my guild until I received your request for the transfer of your membership writ, but that certainly alerted me to it," he said. "A transfer request made by a nine-year-old and to the steamworks, or all guilds? It was unheard of.

"So, I investigated it, and in the process, found the people who'd bought you from your parents. After turning them in to the last emperor, I approved your request, but even with that, I *had* to make up for my negligence toward you and the other children. Somehow.

"I was working on getting you transferred to a less hazardous guild when the old emperor died, and you joined his replacement as his new bodyguard. You never needed my help.

"Still, I came to the new emperor so I could share my side of your story. That's how I came to be in his service, his secret card to play against the guilds.

"I'm so sorry, Amari Kasai. What happened to you has haunted me for years. I wish I could take it back, giving you the childhood that every girl and boy deserves, but I can't. I can only hope that I've helped you in some way. Maybe it hasn't been enough to match the damage that was done to you, but it was what little I could do.

"I... don't know if you're interested, but your parents are alive. You have siblings-"

Harshly, I snapped, "*I don't need to know.*"

With a sharply indrawn breath, I gathered myself before continuing.

"My family is 'ribi and Zhao, not the people who threw me away for a pittance."

Never before had I been so numb. I pressed my fingers along my arms, dully curious why it felt like I was doing it to dead skin. Something inside was roaring and weeping, but a sheet of ice-cold had turned that to fuzz, filling me to the brim, and with these problems afflicting me, it was as if I was

directing my body from a distance.

I decided to stand, and after a moment's delay, my legs were tucked under me while my arms pushed me off of the ground. I looked upon a man who'd wronged me and yet, hadn't, someone who'd striven to correct other people's wrongdoing, and with my mind turned to molasses, I couldn't decide what to do with him.

"Thank you," I eventually said with tingling lips. "You've been... helpful."

Peeling Brennan's device off of Taro's chest, I started up the stairs. I didn't know how long it would be before help would reach the chamber, but honestly? I couldn't bring myself to care. Taro would live, or he wouldn't. Thoughts about the guild chair had fled me with others replacing them.

A woman hungrily kissed me, and I swallowed bile as she praised my eyes, so like the emperor's, while tugging on my shirt.

A man lay satiated beside me, stroking my hair while complimenting my piercing gaze.

So many other instances ran through my mind with drugs fuzzing the details, but it had never been enough for me to completely retreat. Even with their help, I'd heard the moaning gasps that had revolved around the crimson color that earth and fire had blessed me with. Always, someone's fingers had brushed the corner of my eyes, eyes, fucking EYES!

How often had my keepers caught me when I'd been trying to gouge them out? How often had someone forced me to face forward when I'd turned away from them?

Sucking in a hissing gasp, I sank into a crouch, battering my head with balled fists.

Why had I thought this was a good idea? It hurt. Nothing wrong with my body but a ripping ache spread through me with the emergence of each repressed memory. Cracks radiated through me, meeting a violently turbulent energy inside, and for a moment or an eternity, I thought I'd shatter, leaving messy chunks splattered where I'd been standing.

It faded. Slowly. The well of my trauma eventually ran dry—for now—and when I could, I lifted my face off of my knees.

I was huddled on a roof. With no memory of making the climb to get here, I might have found the sudden view from this height startling if I hadn't been so wrung dry.

As I got to my feet, Zhao stopped beside me, magically appearing from wherever he'd been hiding.

"An operative team reached Taro an hour ago," he said. "When they dragged him out of the house, I couldn't tell if he was breathing, but they did take him with them. In case you wanted to know."

Why would I? Too busy with poking through what the flood of memories had left behind, I couldn't be bothered with the brothel guild's chairman.

What had happened to me? I felt...

Turning to me, Zhao asked, "Are you ready to go?"

And another memory, one that had never been repressed, rushed like a slap into my mind.

My foreman has called me off the line.

What have I done wrong this time? I know I've been distracted lately, something that's usually fatal for a steam rat, but they should have expected nothing less. The only person who'd given my life meaning is gone.

As I approach him, my foreman is speaking with a stranger, and this new man doesn't belong to the steamworks. He's too clean, too well-dressed, but once I've come close enough, I'm taken aback to hear him using the guttural slang that we steam rats use.

"-just uh smohl chat, yeah? Got ta coin ya want. Five minutes."

He flourishes his hands with something glinting between his fingers, and my foreman, who has a scowl etched in place, makes a swipe for it. The stranger pulls away before that hand comes anywhere close to what he's holding.

"Nuh-uh," he says. "Chat first. Then paid. Yeah?"

With his scowl deepening, my foreman nods, and glaring at me, he stomps away.

The rations token that the stranger was holding vanishes, and he turns to me with his arms folded behind his back, but I can read nothing from him. He's giving me the blankest presentation I've ever seen.

"I hear you know our new emperor," he says with his diction and inflection suddenly perfect.

Bristling, I growl, "Wot's it tu ya?"

The stranger huffs, lifting his eyes to the stone above.

"Stop with the trash talk, please," he says. "I know you can speak properly."

With previously buzzing nerves now jangling, I go still.

"What do you want?" I carefully ask.

He can't know where I came from, can he?

"Same as what I offered that other gentleman. A service—in this case, provided information—in exchange for coin," the stranger says. "You knew our emperor before earth and fire blessed him. Don't bother with denying this. I've heard about it from multiple sources. I want to know any dirty, little secrets you might have on him, anything I could hold over his head. In exchange, I'm offering

you a substantial sum in addition to your immediate transfer to a less... dangerous guild."

I don't look at the rations token he's surely flashing. I already have my answer.

"No."

"No? Are you sure?" the stranger asks. "That was quite a quick decision for something this important."

Showing him my teeth, I snarl, "How about no way, no how, not ever?"

Something twitches on the stranger's face, and I get half a second to wonder what it is before he springs at me with his fist flying.

Fortunately, I've learned a few things while working in the steamworks and from... before, namely how to avoid blows intended for me. I duck the stranger's punch, putting him between me and the nearby earth's blood channel, but he follows me more quickly than I expected.

Backpedaling, I cross my arms in front of my face, hoping to catch the next blow there, but he's no longer going for such an easy strike.

Air flees from me as his arms encircle my waist, and the next thing I know, I'm pinned to stone. Something horrid seizes control of my brain while a stranglehold on my throat makes my voice squeak.

"Let me go! Please. PLEASE! Get OFF of me!"

As I struggle for my freedom, the stranger pauses before bringing a blade's edge to rest on my neck, and another ripple crosses over his face.

"Give me what I want, and I will," he says. "Just tell me what I want to know."

Betray Nokoribi?

For a brief, wild moment, I consider it. The panic inside of me is quickly turning me into an unreasoning animal, but I cling to who I am enough to remember why my friend is all I care for in this world.

"N-no!" I say with my teeth chattering. "Threaten me all you want! Kill me if you must, but you can't. make. me. talk!"

I'm screaming by the time I'm done, but rather than raging at me, as I expected, the stranger smiles.

"Good," he says.

Flowing to his feet, he offers me his hand.

"I'm sorry, Amari Kasai. I had to know how deeply your loyalty runs," he says. "Deeper than mine, apparently."

Ignoring his hand, I rise to my elbows, glaring at him.

"What do you want?" I snap. "Who are you?"

Seeing that I won't accept his offered help up, the stranger straightens.

"I'm Imada Zhao, the bodyguard for our late emperor and temporary protector of our new one," he says, "and I'm here to offer you my position."

Keeping my eyes fixed on this enigma, I get to my feet.

"Why should I believe you?" I ask. "You could be an enemy, parading as an ally for all I know. Prove what you're saying."

With a slight smile, Zhao says, "That suspicion will serve you well. As for proof, our new emperor bid me to tell you, one more week'."

At that, my breath catches.

When I can, I whisper, "'ribi..."

He remembered me.

"Our new emperor also bid me to demonstrate what this offered role will entail," Zhao says. "If you'll follow me?"

He strides off, and I trot behind him, lost in the warmth of what he said. Even after becoming the emperor, even with how busy he must be, my best friend thought of me. I don't know what to do with this giddiness inside of me.

Zhao waves to my foreman, who's not far ahead.

"Ya got ma coin?" the man calls, ambling toward us.

"Indeed," Zhao says. "You should be honored. Even as busy as he's been, the emperor has taken the time to tell me all about you."

Slowing down, my foreman draws, "Wot...?"

"In fact, he's shared how you've been withholding ration tokens from your steam rats, among other abuses of power, all to meet your quota," Zhao continues. "All very illegal. All something your guild chairman should have handled himself, but not to worry. He'll soon be replaced."

As he was speaking, a chill has filled me, but my foreman only looks confused.

"Wot ya talking bout?" he says.

They meet with maybe a meter left between them, and Zhao leans forward.

"Your payment by royal decree," he says.

And he slits my foreman's throat, clean and precise, with no blood landing on him. As my foreman clutches his neck and collapses, Zhao spins to me. I watch him come, preparing to run if needed.

When he reaches me, Zhao says, "This is what the emperor has offered you: a life of callous death and prioritization of his life and strength above all things. If you have any wish for happiness, I'd advise for you to refuse."

I never had a choice.

"Does 'ribi need me?" I ask.

Again, the blank mask opposite me twitches.

"Unfortunately, yes," Zhao says.

"Then, I accept the offer," I say. "I assume you'll be shoving me everything I'll need to know before you inevitably disappear. So, do I call you Zhao?"

To my great surprise, I manage to coax a laugh from this inscrutable man.

"You may call me maiyaru, and I will call you ko, as is tradition," he says. "Now, I assume you don't have much from here that you'll want to keep. Are you ready to go?"

I glance at the corpse behind him along with the earth's blood channel that's always called my name. Am I ready to escape this place?

"Yes."

Zhao might have gray in his hair now, and I might know him better than I had that day, but he was still the same man.

Or that was what I was trying to tell myself. In reality, the old man beside me was very different from the person I'd known. When it came to preserving life, he didn't act quite as indifferently as he had during my training, and now, he gave kindness to the downtrodden, where once he'd spat on them. In small ways, he'd become as much of a mystery to me now as he had been back then.

And on a similar subject, where had Zhao gone after his retirement? To his home, where he'd been illegally growing food, obviously, but... why?

He, Nokoribi, and I had once made a force to be reckoned with, a family in all but name, but one day, he'd disappeared, and Nokoribi had always refused to explain it to me, no matter how much

I'd pestered him about it.

Since meeting with Zhao again, I'd held this question close to my heart, afraid of what the answer might be, but perhaps I should ask it now. I'd been so hollowed-out by repressed memories that only the rampant energy inside, a gift of my manifestations, was keeping me upright. Any answers that Zhao might give couldn't hurt me.

So...

"Why did you leave?" I asked. "We were happy, of a sort. Yes, court intrigue was a trial from time to time, but we dealt with it, as a fa-"

For a moment, I choked on that word before clearing my throat.

"As a family," I said. "So, why did you abandon us? Was it something that one of us did?"

Zhao, obviously having expected a simple yes or no to his question from earlier, coughed, staring at me with his mouth gaping.

"Nokoribi didn't tell you why?" he asked.

"No. If anything, he avoided answering me when I asked about it."

"Son of a-"

With his gaze turned to the sky, Zhao shook his head.

"He was supposed to tell you," he said. "I'm sorry, *ko*. I thought you knew."

With a shrug, I said, "It's fine. I've learned that 'ribi kept a lot from me, despite what I thought. Just tell me why now."

Shifting in place, Zhao crossed his arms.

"The simple reason? I'd gotten too old to serve as the head of Nokoribi's intelligence network. I wasn't fast or fit enough to be an operative anymore," he said. "The long answer? Nokoribi wanted a question answered, and he set his best resource on completing that task."

"And what question did 'ribi want answered so badly that he relied on you for it?" I asked.

Rolling his head toward me, Zhao asked, "Did Nokoribi ever talk about learning the truth with you?"

Thank earth and fire that all emotion had been squeezed from me, otherwise shock might have sent me crashing into the roof tiles below.

"Those were his last words to me," I whispered. "Find the truth, K."

That was a *bit* of a paraphrase, but Zhao didn't need to know that.

“Did you ever learn what he meant?” I continued.

“No,” Zhao said. “For years, I’ve experimented with what the essences of strength and weakness could be, but I’m no closer to a definition than I was at the beginning.”

Of course. Gaining a resolution for anything in my life had never been easy. Why should I expect this to be any different?

“That’s too bad,” I said before making a face. “You should go home, *maiyaru*. I’ll be here for a while, and Brennan will need help with Himi soon.”

Stiffening, Zhao said, “I can’t leave you alone, most blessed.”

“*Maiyaru*,” I interrupted with a sigh, “if I’m to be the next emperor, as you insist, then I’m the most capable one that Hiyuki’s seen in centuries, when it comes to defending myself at least. I can handle a few hours alone. Please. Give me this before tomorrow.”

Tomorrow, when the throne and everything associated with it would be thrust upon one of those contending for it.

Before this plea, Zhao wilted.

“Fine,” he said. “I expect you back at base before sundown, or I’ll go out looking for you.”

“I’ll be back long before then,” I promised.

Biting his lip, Zhao examined me for a long moment before releasing a breath.

“Be safe, *ko*,” he said.

Once he’d vanished, I sank to the roof tiles. Absently, I retrieved Brennan’s tube, intending to fix the restless energy inside of me before it took over, and as I did that, I let a numbing blanket recede, examining each state that its removal revealed.

I fit what I’d become into the frame that had been Amari Kasai.

This took me longer than I’d thought it would. I sat on a rooftop, high above Takanai, until the sun dipped below the horizon.

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