

NINTH  
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九段駅

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The Faceless Body  
Malka Older



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# Who's Who

**Miyako Koreda**, Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department detective

**Emma Higashi**, US peacekeeper detailed Tokyo police; former sniper

**Charles Yardley**, the US chief liaison to the Japanese government

**Hideo Nishimura**, superintendent of Tokyo police criminal investigations division; Miyako's boss

**Santiago Vargas**, US major who heads the peacekeepers

**Kensuke Maeda**, detective in Tokyo police organized crime division

**Ninth Step Station**  
**Season 1, Episode 1**

**The Faceless Body**  
**Malka Older**

The streets were rain-slicked and icy, but in Marunouchi, safely in the US zone of Tokyo, that was no deterrent. In the dark after-work hours, its tiny bars, ramen counters, karaoke boxes, and hostess spots were crammed with salarymen spending an extra few hours laughing at their superiors' jokes or drinking off the stress of their jobs. A few spilled into the chilly streets, arguing drunkenly under one of the streetlights that still illuminated or checking for updates on their sleeves. Garish signs gleamed from every building, one over the other in tapestries of contrasting calligraphy. There were pockets of darkness, victims of the spike in energy prices or the drop in population. But on the whole, calamity and war increased the market for oblivion-tinged entertainment.

Even the bounty of the US zone was not endless. The metro—those lines that still ran in this divided city—closed at midnight and gasoline shortages had made taxis almost extinct, cutting short a ritual that, pre-war, would have gone on into the early hours of the morning. From eleven thirty until midnight, men and the occasional severely suited woman poured out of the cramped establishments. They flooded roads, bought last-minute snacks, pushed intentionally or unintentionally against each other like molecules in boiling water. They filtered in unsteady gushes under the archway announcing the west entrance of the shopping district, cracked in the 2031 Nankai earthquake and still unrestored a year and a half later. They stumbled across the street to the Kanda metro station, where the late-night rush hour bottlenecked into a tightly packed fumble toward the turnstiles.

Easy, in that crowd of black suits and narrow ties, to feel anonymous. Easy, once one had noticed the target slurping cheap ramen at a street-level establishment, to hover outside until he left. Not terribly difficult to keep him in sight through the crowd. All too easy, in the dense crush of the metro station, to unsheathe a knife close to the hip, where it would be invisible to the security cameras. Easy to jab it once, twice, three times into a dark raincoat-clad back.

The stabbed man stumbled, was held up briefly by the press of the crowd, then slipped down to his hands and knees. There was a moment of disturbance in the flow as people stepped around his huddled form; then he slid completely to the ground. The energy-saving lights were dim; the people were drunk; the last train was leaving soon. No one noticed that they were

stepping on a corpse.

## Act I

Miyako Koreda tapped her sleeve against the panel by the door of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department headquarters in Kudanshita, clocking in. After the old headquarters in Kasumigaseki were bombed in the final days of China's brief, partially successful attempt to add the capital to its territory, this office building off Yasukuni Dori had been pressed into service as a temporary headquarters. It was a good location, hard up against the narrowest stretch of the ASEAN buffer zone, with good transportation options to most of the American-administered eastern half of the capital, and close to the Yasukuni Shrine, which everyone expected to be a flash point one day or the next. But although someone had been thoughtful about which interior walls to knock down, Miyako still expected the old office every time she walked through the door, and the layout felt odd.

"Ohayo gozaimasu," Miyako called into the scattered desks of the fourth-floor Criminal Investigations Bureau.

"Ohayo!" the greetings chorused back.

"Ohayo, Koreda-san," said a heavysset man in his fifties, passing the door on his way back to the desks.

"Yamada-san," Miyako replied, following him in. "What are you working on?"

"The Shiodome arson case," he answered. "You?"

"Paperwork for that theft in Odaiba."

"Got someone?"

Miyako nodded. "Looks like we might be able to pin a few other thefts on him too."

Miyako slung her dark wool coat onto the hook by her desk and went to the tea station. The leaves in the pot were soggy, and she dumped them into the sink, rinsed the strainer, and sifted in a new, fragrant layer from the tin. While she waited for the water to heat, Miyako browsed the snack offerings in lieu of breakfast. She selected a small sweet-potato-stuffed cake—rare now that Kyushu was held by China; she wondered who had bought that—and a

handful of sour plum–flavored hard candies. In her right ear, the news broadcast burbled its comforting hum.

She sat down at her desk, lukewarm cup in hand, and started to fill in the paperwork on the Odaiba arrest, speaking the answers into the voice recognition on her sleeve. Something in the newscast caught her attention on a subliminal level, and Miyako turned the volume up slightly and jumped back ten seconds.

. . . *the ASEAN representative in Tokyo made a statement condemning recent Chinese rhetoric.* Miyako waited, eyebrows hoisted like the cables on a suspension bridge, but the story ended with that. There wasn't even a response from China. The news announcer chattered on, and Miyako lowered the volume again to the point where the words were barely intelligible and all she was aware of was the constant, unpanicked tone.

Nobody had started a war.

Then again, nobody had started a war.

Before she could get back to her paperwork, her sleeve sent a tingle along her forearm. That manufactured sensation triggered, as always, an echoing fizz in her gut, the combination of nerves and anticipation that came with every new case. Miyako slid her finger along the edge of her sleeve to bring up the details, and her pulse jumped again as she saw the crimson color-coding: a murder. Violent crime had ticked up since the war, but murders were still rare. Nobody was happy when it happened, but Miyako couldn't deny the excitement of solving one.

Standing to pull on her coat, she flipped quickly through the template sent by the responding officer: body found in Kanda Station; multiple stab wounds; no identification. She paused. This might be interesting.

Then again, it might mean hours stuck with the remnants of the city's facial and fingerprint database, in tatters since the earthquake.

In any case, this murder wasn't going to solve itself. Miyako was on her way to the door when her sleeve vibrated with a different type of alarm. Annoyed, she glanced at her forearm again. *Report to my office immediately,* read the message.

The Superintendent of Criminal Investigations, Hideo Nishimura, was tall and even-featured and had probably been handsome in his youth, but the years at the desk showed in his growing corpulence and a certain slowness in breaking inertia. When Miyako walked into his office thirty seconds after

receiving his message, however, he was already standing, his coat on.

“Sir?” Miyako asked, hesitating by the door. “I was about to head to a crime scene . . .”

“That situation in Marunouchi,” Nishimura said. “I know. They’re going to have to give you a few extra minutes. I need you to come with me to the Japanese sector first.”

“Of course,” Miyako answered unenthusiastically. The Japanese sector was mainly Kasumigaseki—that and the imperial palace, closed since the royal family had moved to the relative security of Sapporo—and Kasumigaseki was all ministries and government offices and the Diet. Little good ever came out of going there.

Nishimura waggled his eyebrows at her. “You’re going to be part of a special new pilot program.”

Waiting for the trap to spring, Miyako said nothing.

“The US embassy has asked us to allow one of their peacekeepers to join our investigative team. I’m partnering them with you.”

Whatever Miyako had expected, it wasn’t that. She remembered when the peacekeepers had arrived, as part of the unrolling of the US’s “friendly” occupation of the parts of Tokyo not taken by China. It had seemed hopeful then, like the world was going to take China’s egregious aggression seriously. But of course by that time there was already peace, the peace of China having gotten what they wanted for the moment, and Miyako hadn’t heard anything about the unit since.

“Come on,” Nishimura said, taking his narrow-brim hat from the hook on his door. “We’ve got to get over there so you and your new partner can head to the crime scene.”

“Sir,” Miyako started, but decided not to continue until they had traversed the squad room. The stairwell was empty. “Sir, a peacekeeper? Don’t they have better things to do?”

“We’ve had nine months of peace, Koreda,” Nishimura said, plodding down the stairs ahead of her. “Perhaps they’ve gotten bored.”

“This person won’t know anything about police work!”

“Apparently the person they are sending has done some investigative work in the course of peacekeeping actions.”

“It’s not the same!” Miyako said. She didn’t bother mentioning her main objections: that she liked to work alone, and that she definitely did *not* like

working with loud, uninformed outsiders. Nishimura already knew the first and would assume the second. “And they won’t know Tokyo. Does this person even speak Japanese?”

“It’s because they don’t know Tokyo that they want to pair with us. Besides, they know we’re understaffed since the attacks and they’re trying to help.”

Miyako made a nonverbal noise of disagreement.

Nishimura sighed. “Okay, they’re probably not trying to help out of the goodness of their hearts, but I don’t have much choice on this one, Koreda, so let’s make the best of it, shall we?” They reached the ground floor, but Nishimura hesitated before pushing the heavy door out into the lobby. “I was going to stick this on Fukuda, but today when they finalized it, they told me that they’re sending a woman. I know how sensitive Americans can be about seku-hara; I thought I’d better partner her with a woman.”

Miyako refrained from commenting.

The US embassy was almost directly south of the Kudan , on the opposite side of the imperial palace park. Miyako’s decades in Tokyo meant she automatically calculated a subway route on the Shinjuku and Namboku lines; her resistance to the current situation meant that it was only afterward that she remembered the Namboku line was almost entirely in the Chinese sector and no longer ran. Maybe Nishimura was better adapted, because he went directly to the Hanzomon platform without so much as a flinch.

The frigid air hit them again as they stepped out of the subway in Kasumigaseki between the large, guarded buildings of the national government ministries, now ruling a fraction of the country and bickering over what to do about the rest.

It was still early for government employees, and the sidewalk was almost empty. In the middle of the block, Nishimura stopped. “This is a ride along, an experiment in information sharing. We are not ceding them control. She follows you, not the other way around.” He nodded to himself. “It’s important to keep them happy. We can improve the relationship.”

Miyako nodded too. He was being as clear as he could about what he expected of her; whether she agreed was entirely beside the point. What bothered her was that it sounded like whether he agreed was just as irrelevant.

Once they had passed through the security-theater gauntlet required to

enter the US embassy, they were immediately ushered to their appointment. The discreet plaque beside the office door read: *Chief Liaison Officer to the Japanese Government, Charles Yardley III*. The man who stood from behind the desk was younger than Miyako would have expected, and trim, with carefully rippled chestnut hair and an expensive suit. He bowed instead of shaking hands, as did his Japanese secretary, who had been seated in one of the chairs facing his desk. Miyako tapped her sleeve unobtrusively to turn her news feed down to the lower edge of audibility.

“Thank you so much for making this work on such short notice,” Yardley said in impressively smooth Japanese. “I know we’ve been talking about it for a while, but the final authorization just came through and we wanted to put it into action as quickly as possible.” He cleared his throat gently. “I’m sure you’ll be wanting to, ah, get to know each other, but we were also hoping that you might direct some of your attention to an incident that occurred early this morning.”

The secretary wasn’t taking notes, but perhaps she had a recorder installed. Miyako observed her closely and caught something flash in her eye. Video, then. She repressed a shudder. She wasn’t anti-bodymodding, but the idea of someone plugging circuitry into their eyeball gave her the creeps.

“We have reports that a truck transporting a shipping container that had just been unloaded was hijacked shortly after it went through port security,” Yardley went on. “We believe it was taken into the Chinese zone, but since the hijacking itself occurred in the US sector, we were hoping you could help us gain some clarity over exactly what happened.”

Nishimura murmured something polite about being sure that they could provide some information about the situation.

“Excellent,” Yardley said. “Well then . . .”

The secretary spoke up. “Perhaps it would be better if you introduced us at this point.”

Her Japanese was clear but accented, and it was then that Miyako realized with a shock that she was not the secretary.

“Oh, of course,” Yardley responded smoothly. “Lieutenant Emma Higashi of the US Army, seconded to the Brunei Accords Peacekeeping Force and, now, to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department.”

## Act II

The meeting, Emma thought, had gone off with all the discomfort of a first date based on inflated profiles and a wonky algorithm. Even with her limited exposure to real Japanese culture, she could tell that the superintendent and the detective were not happy. Of course, why would they be? Being forced to take on someone completely new and unfamiliar with their city, and all based on the leverage of a foreign power.

Maybe it would smooth things out if she let on to her new colleague—Koreda-san—that she wasn't happy about it either. Or maybe that would be seen as an insult? As the three of them left the office, Emma feeling like a kindergartner being led away to her first day of school, Charles caught her eye with a meaningful glare. All of Charles's glares were meaningful, but Emma knew what he was trying to get across with this one. He had hammered on it in their pre-meeting before the Japanese arrived.

"We need to know what happened to that shipment! And I don't know how we're going to track it without their help."

"I could easily find it with drone reconnaissance," Emma had started, but Charles waved her off impatiently.

"Not without alerting them to its importance and who exactly is looking for it!"

"What *is* its importance?" Emma had asked.

Charles ignored the question. "This idea of embedding someone with the Metropolitan Police has been in the works for a while, so don't think it's only about this hijacking. That just sped up the timetable a little. But the main point is *cooperation*." He said it as though he were unfurling a proclamation. "We have no idea what's going on in this city. We would need twenty, fifty times the personnel Washington is willing to commit—or fifty times the drones—to even begin to understand." He leaned over the desk at her. "The city is poised in a *détente* right now, but don't be fooled. Everyone is working to get ahead for when this situation falls apart. We need the locals. We need to work closely with them, to understand them, to be sure they're on our side."

*And what side are they going to be on?* Emma wondered. *They're not*

*going to be helping the Chinese.*

“You are the critical first step in this process,” Charles went on. “A bridge. Or, better, a conduit. We’re counting on you, Lieutenant.”

Emma straightened and nodded. Charles probably would have liked a salute, but she didn’t give it to him because he was a civilian and also fuck him for his stratagems and convoluted diplomacy. If they needed better relationships with the locals, why didn’t they just have a weekly meeting or something? Forcing a stranger into their squad room certainly wasn’t going to help. And Emma was a good peacekeeper; stupid to transfer her, even if she had to admit that lately the peacekeeping gig had been a little slow. Too much peace instead of too little. Not hard to keep at all.

In the elevator with the superintendent and the detective, Emma hesitated and then spoke up, the carefully composed Japanese sentence awkward and oversized against her palate. “We can get directly to the garage from the lowest level,” she said, indicating the button below the one they had pushed. The two Japanese exchanged glances, and Emma wondered if she had gotten the honorifics wrong. “If . . . if you didn’t know.”

It was the superintendent who finally spoke up. “We didn’t bring a car. You and Koreda will be taking the subway directly to a crime scene. They are waiting for you.”

*Why didn’t he say san after Koreda? Was he being rude to his own detective? Or was he being rude to Emma—was it retaliation for some unintentional rudeness in her own statement? Emma was so caught up in linguistics that she was late getting to the end of the sentence. Did he mean a crime scene or the crime scene?* The elevator doors opened on the ground floor.

“Ah, that, that—” Unable to remember the Japanese word Charles had used, Emma fell back on English. “That hijacking?” She switched back to Japanese. “Is that where we’re going?”

It was the detective who answered, and she answered in English. “No. This is a murder.”

• • •

Emma had never investigated a murder. On one of her first peacekeeping missions she had been embedded with the military police, but it was mostly

AWOLs, inebriation, and the occasional incident of domestic violence or a drunken brawl. She was probably on ethically shaky ground here, but this did make the whole police thing seem more appealing.

“Where did you learn your English?” she asked while they waited for the train. *Surely a car would have been faster?*

“I lived in Maine for a year, in college.” Koreda didn’t smile, didn’t look at her.

“Oh,” Emma said. She had never been to Maine. The train didn’t come. Koreda continued not to ask where Emma had learned her Japanese. *A bridge, a conduit—sure.*

The train, when it finally arrived, was overcrowded with a soundtrack of winter coughs, but at least they didn’t have to stay on it long. They got off at an elevated station and took the stairs down, but Koreda turned aside before the ticket guard and ducked under the police tape cordoning off a corner of the station, muttering a lengthy formula that Emma recognized as an elaborate apology for arriving late. She didn’t introduce Emma, who glanced around the small circle anyway, offering a contained smile wherever she made eye contact. There was a slim, uniformed cop who looked entirely too young; two young men and a slightly older woman wearing cough guards and paper smocks, who had to be crime scene techs; and a middle-aged man with a salt-and-pepper mustache, wearing a suit.

The woman gave the young cop a look, and his Adam’s apple bobbed. “Good morning. The body was noticed by the janitor at around seven fifteen.” Emma followed the combined glances and couldn’t keep from starting when the dim angle where the wall met the floor resolved itself into a body, curled toward the wall in half-fetal. “The janitor alerted Asai-san, the station manager”—he nodded at mustache man, who bowed slightly—“who immediately sent for me.”

“And your opinion is that the body has been here since last night?” Koreda asked, addressing her query to the techs.

“At least six hours, maybe more,” the woman answered. Emma could see how the body could go unnoticed. The lighting here was faint. The man was wearing a dark suit and his black hair was just long enough to cover his collar. “Three stab wounds.” The woman stepped forward to point with a laser emitting from her sleeve. “Here, here, and here.”

“And there is some difficulty with the identification?” Koreda asked.

Emma caught an exchange of uneasy glances, then the female tech stepped forward and, squatting down, took the corpse gently by the shoulder and rolled it away from the wall.

The face was gone.

Emma realized she had stepped back involuntarily. She looked away from the featureless pulp and concentrated on breathing so that she wouldn't throw up. Koreda's voice sounded far away. "Part of the assault?"

"Difficult to say, of course, but it seems unlikely," the tech responded.

"Is it only the face?"

The tech pressed gently on the chest with a gloved hand. "Seems not. If we can remove the body . . . ?"

"You're finished with the scene? Yes, go ahead."

The female tech nodded at her colleagues, and they started snapping together a portable stretcher. Emma was still trying to make sure she wasn't going to throw up. *Ugh*. She had seen plenty of injuries before, a few corpses, but most of them were more or less intact.

"No sleeve or wallet, I take it?" Koreda asked.

"No, nothing," the uniformed cop answered. "Nothing in his pockets."

Koreda nodded and stepped away. Emma sidled up to stand next to her. She was sure she was about to make a fool of herself, but she couldn't stand there and accept that she was useless. She had to at least try to take part.

"Koreda-san, can't you use the fingerprints for identification?"

Koreda looked directly at her for the first time since the embassy. "We lost our fingerprint database when the earthquake knocked out servers and systems. We've been building it back up, but right now it's only people who have committed crimes since then. And some civil servants, who have been forced to resubmit," she added, rolling her eyes. "Here, you can see." She pulled up the sleeve of her sweater and tapped on the flexible screen wrapped around her left forearm. "The, ah, beat cop? He checked the fingerprints when he arrived, but there was no match."

"Could you bump me that?" Emma asked, proffering her own forearm and letting some of her annoyance show.

But Koreda looked genuinely taken aback. "Oh! Of course. I'm so sorry. I should have shared that immediately." She selected the file and tapped her forearm against Emma's. "And you can call me Miyako."

Emma nodded. "Emma," she said, although it hadn't occurred to her that

Koreda—Miyako—would call her anything else. “So,” she said, trying not to get too excited about that tiny step toward collegiality. “What now?”

Miyako frowned. “I’m running a check to see if there are any missing persons that match the apparent characteristics, but if this did happen last night, he’s unlikely to have been reported yet.” She paused, watching the techs hoist the body tenderly onto the stretcher. “Let me take a look at the scene, and then I think we’re going to spend some time with the security footage, see if we can find anything to narrow it down.” She tapped her foot. “If the sleeve was stolen and is used, the perpetrator might activate some anomaly triggers, but that’s going to be a little tricky to track down without knowing the identity or even the brand.”

Emma had gotten stuck on the exclusivity of *Let me take a look at the scene* and immediately started examining it herself. “Is it always this dark in here?” she asked.

Miyako nodded. “Electricity rationing.” She walked to where the body had been, squatted to examine the wall and floor, then walked slowly back to the tape. “No sign of blood, but then, it rained last night.”

“No *visible* sign of blood,” Emma corrected, scanning the floor with her eye adjusted. “There—and there. And there. Just traces, but recent.” She raised her head, letting her eye implant click back to invisibility. “The rest of it must have been trampled away. Trampled . . .” Involuntarily, she glanced back at the corner where the corpse had been curled, hiding its horribly pulped face.

Without breaking eye contact with Emma, Miyako tapped her sleeve. “You need to recheck the station for blood traces,” she said into it, and then nodded to Emma. “Come on. We can look at the security footage somewhere more comfortable.”

Flooded with triumph, Emma almost forgot that she had another agenda. “Uh, what about the hijacking?”

Miyako nodded without looking back. “We need to go back to Kudan headquarters to look into that, too.” As Emma caught up with her on the stairs up to the platform, Miyako tapped forearms again. “I pulled the file while we were heading over here. It looks like the hijackers used katana.”

Emma battled a sense of surrealism. “What does that mean?”

Miyako glanced at her. “Katana? They are the traditional swords—”

“No,” Emma said, “I mean, what does that *mean*?”

“Oh.” Miyako smiled, briefly, no teeth. In the context of her range of expressions so far, it felt like a belly laugh. “It means we need to visit the Organized Crime Bureau.”

• • •

On the train back to Kudanshita Station, Miyako checked her work 手mail and was relieved to see a general message from Nishimura explaining the agreement with the Americans. She really didn’t feel like discussing it, and when they had climbed the four flights, she skirted the squad room, ignoring the curious expressions craned over partitions, and led Emma to the level one interrogation room. Outfitted with couches and a coffee table, it served as an impromptu meeting space almost as often as it was used for interrogations.

“I’ll introduce you around the squad later,” Miyako muttered, gesturing Emma toward one of the sofas. Maybe if she put it off long enough, she would never have to make those introductions. “I’m going to get some tea. Would you like some?”

“Sure, but shouldn’t we—”

“I’ll be right back,” Miyako promised, and shut the door behind her. It was an immediate relief to let herself stop thinking in English for a few minutes. Unfortunately she didn’t get to be alone to enjoy it.

“Is that the American?” asked Fukuda, joining her as she was waiting for the water to heat.

Miyako nodded.

“She looks Japanese,” he went on. They were used to her taciturn ways here. “And she’s very pretty. What is she like?”

Miyako snorted, remembering Nishimura’s comment about sexual harassment. “She’s fine. She—she has a cyborg eye.” Hopefully that would disgust him, and if not, at least it was a relatively public characteristic to share.

Fukuda recoiled, but Yamada stuck his head around his partition. “Really? What can it do?”

“I didn’t read the specs,” Miyako said, pouring. “You’ll have to ask her.”

“Does she speak Japanese?” Fukuda asked, but Miyako was already walking away.

“Okay,” she said, closing the door to the interrogation room behind her.

There was some pleasure to using English again too. Miyako hoped her slang wasn't too outdated. She put the two cups down carefully, loosed a handful of hard candies on the table between them, and slid herself onto the couch.

"Let's do a quick scan through the videos." Emma wrapped her hands around the cup immediately, and Miyako registered that she was still wearing her coat. The energy-saving measures did keep the station chilly.

"Shouldn't we review the hijacking case?" Emma asked.

Miyako sighed, and pushed up her sweater sleeve to open her 手mail. "I'll send a message to my colleague in the Organized Crime Bureau, and see when he can meet us, okay?" That done, she tapped in the commands that gave her access to the Kanda Station security cameras and sent them to room's wall-sized screen. A twelve-way split of the station's lower level appeared.

"This is now?" Emma asked.

Miyako nodded. "Let's go back to, say . . . eleven o'clock last night. An hour before closing."

In an instant, the picture of the station became more crowded, the traffic almost entirely unidirectional—entering from the street rather than arriving from the train level—and almost entirely uniformed in the staid suit of the salaryman.

"Wow," Emma commented. Suddenly the battered face seemed much more plausible.

"It's a nightlife area," Miyako explained. "Lots of people go there after work, and then need to get on the metro before the last train at around midnight." She isolated and enhanced the corner where the body was found. "Nothing there, right?"

Emma squinted at it. "I don't think so. The lighting is really bad."

Miyako let the video play forward at 2x speed. The crowd in the station thickened, and thickened more, and by eleven thirty was almost solid, a continuously flowing carpet of faces. Miyako expected Emma to say something stupid like *We're never going to find it this way*, but she was quiet, and when Miyako glanced over, her face was tight with concentration. Miyako wondered if that eye could do anything with video. Probably not. It wasn't as if she could add, say, heat-sensing if the cameras didn't already pick it up.

At the midnight mark, the crowd thinned dramatically, and by twelve

fifteen the station was empty. Miyako highlighted the corner again, and they both frowned at it. “Yes,” Emma said finally. She jumped up and touched the screen. “Look here.”

Miyako focused in, and nodded: the sliver of a shirt cuff, white in the dimness. She flipped back quickly to 11:14, the last time they could see that corner without it being blocked by bodies. “Okay. We at least have a time frame for the body arriving there.” She glanced at her sleeve. “And Maeda-san in Organized Crime can see us. Let’s go talk to him and then we can come back to this.”

• • •

The Organized Crime Bureau was one floor down. They took the stairs, which had clearly been designed for use only in emergencies. Which made Emma wonder, was this still an emergency? Could an emergency last nine months? Or fifteen, if you counted from the earthquake that had started everything by giving the North Koreans the opening to attack?

Miyako led her unerringly through the maze of half-partition cubicles decorated with intriguing headshots and organizational diagrams and sketches of tattoos. When she reached the one that was their destination, she rapped on the flimsy wall with her knuckles and walked in without waiting.

“Koreda-san,” the man standing from behind his desk said in jocular Japanese. “It’s been a long time.” Emma estimated him to be about her age and handsome, his hair gleaming faintly with a fashionably subtle iridescent sheen.

“Long time,” Miyako agreed without showing any enthusiasm. She switched to English. “This is Emma Higashi, a liaison officer from the US peacekeeping force. Emma, this is Maeda-san.”

*Interesting way to characterize the situation,* Emma thought as she leaned forward to take the man’s offered hand. “Japanese is all right if you prefer,” she said awkwardly in that language.

“Oh no, please, I really need to practice my English,” Maeda said. His accent was even more accurate than Miyako’s, and Emma wondered if all the years she had spent studying Japanese were ever going to come in handy. “And please, call me Kensuke.” He flopped back into his chair, gangly but so comfortable in his body that it came off as graceful. “What can I do for you?”

Miyako settled into a chair. “The US Embassy has asked us to look into a hijacking that took place this morning near the US port facilities.” She tapped her sleeve, sending the file to the screen on the wall, but Kensuke was already nodding.

“Yes, yes, I’m on this one. I was out at the site earlier . . .” He twitched his own sleeve, which was unrolled on his desk, and sent up a map that dove into detail of the intersection in Hamamatsu where the attack had occurred. “Here’s the reconstruction based on our interviews.”

Security camera footage showed a tractor-trailer pulling off the highway and into the intersection. Six motorcycles immediately flanked it, while a large alternative-fuel vehicle known as an urban crawler pulled out in front of the intersection, blocking the tractor-trailer in. The driver spun the wheel, trying to turn around, but one of the motorcyclists leapt onto the door and—the camera zoomed in as far as it could and then the reconstruction took over, showing an animation of one of the motorcyclists slamming a short dagger into the truck door. There was a small explosion and the door swung open. Three other figures clambered around the cab of the truck. One of them stood on the hood, swinging his katana around. The animation zoomed close to show the edge of a tattoo visible along the side of his neck, then pulled back again. The driver stumbled or was thrown from the cab. The urban crawler had by that time pulled away; one of the motorcyclists was behind the wheel of the truck and everyone took off.

“That’s an impressive visualization of something that happened this morning,” Emma said, glancing at Kensuke.

“It’s from the programmer pool,” Miyako said flatly.

Kensuke grinned at Emma. “I’ll be sure to pass along the compliment to them. So,” he went on, waving at the screen, “that’s what we’ve got. We can follow the truck on security cameras through the ASEAN zone and up to the point of crossing into the Chinese zone, at the Azabujuban crossing.”

“No trouble from the Chinese at the checkpoint, I imagine,” Emma said.

“Breezed right through,” Kensuke agreed. “As if they knew it was coming.”

Emma raised her eyebrows at him. “Really? You think this was agreed beforehand?” She had been assuming they were dealing with a group of criminals who’d been opportunistic about applying the city’s divisions to their purposes.

Kensuke shrugged. “Hard to say. But the truck did not even pause going through.” He tapped his sleeve, skipping ahead to the video of the checkpoint. The truck slid under the line of interspersed allied and Chinese drones and disappeared around a corner. If there were any cameras to follow it beyond there, they broadcast only to the Chinese authorities.

“So what about the organized crime angle?” Emma asked, remembering why they were talking to Kensuke in the first place.

“Right,” he said, pulling his long body up straighter in his chair. “So we have a few indications here. Katana are not a common, easily accessible weapon, not exactly subtle to walk around with, so whenever we see them in play, our first thought is organized crime. The motorcycles, too, are typical. The tattoo is . . . a bit of a cliché, to be honest, a lot of people have them now, but an analysis based on the description by the driver suggests it might have been done by a specific tattoo artist that we’re aware of.”

“So?” Miyako asked.

“All taken together, for me . . .” Kensuke swung in his chair, drawing it out. “My gut says the Nakajima-kai. But it’s not conclusive. We’re still looking at trace evidence from the vehicles used, trying to piece together facial recognition . . .”

Emma looked at Miyako.

“Nakajima-kai is, probably, the largest of the organized crime groups remaining in Tokyo—certainly one of the two largest.”

Kensuke nodded. “They are definitely the most sophisticated. They diversified about a decade ago, and now they are involved in everything from finance and technology to imports and alcohol.”

“Imports,” Emma repeated.

“Yes, they know the port well. And they control, or controlled, the southern part of the city, while the northern half belongs to Yamashita-kai and, to a lesser degree, Tanaka-gumi.”

“North and south, while the great powers have divided the city east and west.” The Japanese were silent, and Emma wished she hadn’t been quite so glib about *great powers*. “Is Nakajima-kai operating in the Chinese sector?”

“We assume so—well, we know so. They are definitely trafficking goods back and forth, but we don’t know the extent of their activities on that side of the drone curtain.”

“Can we get a meeting with them?” Miyako asked.

“I can set something up.” Kensuke hesitated, looking between the two of them. “We usually do it on, ah, neutral territory.”

“Fine,” Miyako said, standing before Emma could finish thinking through her objections. “Let us know.”

• • •

Emma coughed as they climbed back up the chilly stairs to the Criminal Investigations Bureau. “So . . . what time do you usually eat lunch?”

Miyako glanced at her forearm. Already three p.m. It hadn’t even occurred to her to eat. She turned around and started back down the stairs. “How about if we get something to bring back and eat it while we watch the security footage from Kanda Station?”

The fastest place that wasn’t a convenience store was a Hokka Hokka Tei two blocks over. Emma took in the take-away-only counter, the picture menu of bentos. “So this is what authentic Japanese people eat,” she said.

Miyako eyed her, trying to figure out if she was serious, and decided she wasn’t. “You’re lucky I didn’t bring you to Carl’s Jr.” Emma snorted, and Miyako relaxed. “Try the sukiyaki.”

“This is your headquarters? The main police station in the city?” Emma asked as they walked back toward the station.

Miyako had to take a deep breath and tell herself that the American was just asking for information. She wasn’t sneering at the many deficiencies of the building. “Our headquarters was destroyed by the Chinese during the attack,” she said. “This”—they were close enough for her to wave at the blocky, unremarkable building—“used to be an office building, but the companies all closed down or moved out of Tokyo. It was the best site we could find quickly, near the center, not too far from . . .” Not too far from the palace, at the time, but then the imperial family had evacuated. Not too far from the Yasukuni Shrine, which had so much symbolic weight. Not too far from the Chinese zone, but not too close, either. “From everything. But we don’t really think of it as—” *Home*. “Headquarters. This is the Kudan area, so we usually just call it that.”

*Ninth Step*, Emma translated automatically.

They went back to the interrogation room and ate while they watched the forty-five minutes of footage, this time at normal speed. Then they watched it

again. Then again. Then again.

Miyako started focusing on different screens, watching one at a time. She began playing the most crowded moments in slow motion. Glancing over at Emma, she saw a flicker against her eye, and wondered if she was using some fancy technology for film analysis or if she was just surfing the internet.

She watched again, and again. And then stopped the video. “Look!”

Emma looked up suddenly enough that Miyako was sure she hadn’t been paying attention.

“There, the second from the right, second row. Watch.” Miyako rewound and played it again. “This one!”

“He disappears!” Emma exclaimed. “That’s him! It’s got to be!”

“Probably,” Miyako cautioned. “Now we just have to follow him backward until we can find . . . There!” She clipped the image of the face. “All right. I’ll send this into facial recognition.”

“That still works?”

“We’re not at a hundred percent yet, but that database has been much easier to build back up than fingerprints. Every time a company takes employee ID photos, every driver’s license or business permit.” Miyako leaned back, rolling her shoulders, and glanced at the time. “It’s after five. We can reconvene tomorrow, when we hopefully will have the identification, and work from there.”

“If you’re sure . . .” Emma was already getting up.

“Where do you stay?” Miyako asked, meaning *Do you need help getting there?*

“We have a barracks near Haneda.” Emma paused. “I think I can . . . get a taxi?”

Miyako was doubtful.

“Or I can take a train from Tokyo Station?”

“That should work,” Miyako said. “You can manage on your own?”

“No problem!” Emma said, tapping her forearm to indicate she could look up a map there.

*She can probably use her eye to connect right in her visual space; why doesn’t she point at that?* Miyako wondered. *Why does she wear a sleeve at all?* Because the eye made people uncomfortable? Or because she wanted them to forget about her extra abilities?

“If you’re sure,” Miyako said.

Emma was already out the door. “Absolutely! Thanks, Miyako. I’ll see you tomorrow!”

Miyako waited a minute, then another, then three more, to make sure Emma wasn’t going to rush back in asking for directions or (*please no*) to beg Miyako to accompany her all the way down to Haneda. When the American didn’t reappear, Miyako let herself start to relax into the quiet.

It took an effort, but she opened the door and stepped out into the main office. The shift had changed; the big room felt emptier, although she could hear two low voices conferring, the hum of a video at low volume, someone murmuring their notes into a transcriber. She should do that too, but first she walked to the tea station, made herself a full pot, and took it back to her desk with her cup and a square of sakura mochi from a box someone, probably Iwada, had brought in during the day. Miyako was always telling herself she should bring food for the squad and she always forgot.

She took a deep pull on the still-hot tea and a bite of the mochi. The cherry blossom flavor seemed almost obscenely hopeful in the midst of this cold, this fear, this relentless occupation by outside forces. Then she peeled her sleeve off her arm, spread it on her desk, and tapped the facial recognition program.

It was still processing. Something that would have taken a few seconds a year and a half ago now took minutes or hours. Too much capacity had been lost in the earthquake and then in the bombing raids, and connectivity was still too low for the efficient sharing of tasks.

Miyako opened her transcriber and started listing out her notes from the day. When she had finished, she sent the file to the transcription pool to be checked, and opened facial recognition again.

There he was. Sakamoto Shinobu.

Miyako studied the photo. It was a company ID from something called Hisakawa Industries. She left that for the moment. This was definitely the face of the man who had fallen in the crowd, but was it the face of the corpse? She widened her search using the name and birthdate. Sakamoto was twenty-five years old, 174 centimeters tall. Exactly the height of the body, and within the age parameters. Unmarried. So unless he lived with his parents, the first ones to notice him missing were likely to be his employers. She went back to Hisakawa Industries. It was a firm that produced molded

plastic parts for a range of industrial and commercial purposes. The production was largely in Thailand, and while the earthquake hadn't affected them too much, the war had limited port facilities and slowed trade. However, they were lucky in having substantial warehoused stock to the north of Tokyo, safely in Japanese-held territory, and the company seemed to have so far avoided large layoffs, although demand for their products was slowing and restructuring couldn't be far off. Sakamoto was in the General Administration section, which could mean anything, although probably not technical secrets, if this company even had any.

The company was large enough to have a government liaison bot, and Miyako pinged it with her Metropolitan Police authorization, asking what time Sakamoto had left work yesterday and whether he had arrived at work today. A minute later she had the answer: He left work at 7:48 p.m. yesterday, and had not clocked in today.

Convinced, even if it was not yet proven, Miyako gave Sakamoto Shinobu fifteen seconds of silence and then wrote back to the bot, asking it to provide her with the name of his supervisor and to set up a meeting for tomorrow.

Who would kill this guy? It was tempting to picture it as a random robbery in the anonymity of that flood of identically dressed people, but it didn't make any sense. Sure, the crowd was great cover for the killing, but getting the wallet and sleeve off couldn't have been easy. There would have been no reason to pick this kid for robbery: He didn't have any money. And what he did have he probably would have given up easily. No, this was a murder with an incidental theft, not the other way around. Someone hated or feared twenty-five-year-old Sakamoto Shinobu enough to kill him.

Miyako wrote back to the bot to add a query about anyone from his section who had left the building within five minutes of Sakamoto yesterday; maybe she could find someone who had been partying with him in Marunouchi. She spoke out an addendum to her notes, slapped on her sleeve, and left the office.

Instead of heading straight home, Miyako detoured east, following the curve of the road after Jimbocho and crossing the river at Manseibashi into Akihabara, the news humming low in her ear as she walked. She found the building she was looking for on a narrow street two blocks from the big shopping center, and took the stairs to the sixth floor. There was a rumor that

someone had once accessed the modder café by climbing up the outside of the building using only their mechanical arms, but Miyako had never seen video to prove it, and she had her doubts.

She stood close to the door for a few seconds to let her eyes adjust. It wasn't just the dimness; most of the people in the room were strangely shaped—extra limbs, bulky torsos where some kind of non-human functionality was built in, antennae in odd places—and it was easy to get spooked by something out of the corner of your eye. There were plenty of body mods, like Emma's—or like, for that matter, the muscle stimulators worked into the bouncer's skin—that weren't readily apparent, but this wasn't the scene for them.

Spotting her target, Miyako slid through the café and settled in beside him. “Shima.”

He turned and grinned. “Koreda-san! Nice to see you! How is everything?”

Shima—Miyako didn't know if it was part of his real name or a nickname he adopted for the cool factor of calling himself *island*—was one of the less flamboyantly modded people in the room. He had expanded the dishes of his ears, and his eyes glowed faintly in the dark, although she wasn't sure if that was related to a function or if he just liked the way it looked. He also had a large antenna that curved out of his head.

“Fine, Shima, fine. I was wondering if you could do me a favor.”

“Sure, but, um, how long is it going to take? I'm a busy guy . . .”

“For you, I'm sure it will be the work of moments,” Miyako said. She hoped it was true. She tried not to depend on unpaid help too often, but the data companies could be very resistant about tracking their devices, even if the owner was dead. “There's a sleeve I'm trying to find.”

Shima's tongue flicked out over his lips. He had modded that, too, although Miyako couldn't remember exactly how or to what ends. “Stolen?”

“In the commission of a homicide,” Miyako told him. She saw him tense: A murder got everyone's attention.

“Brand?”

“I don't know.”

“You do have the owner's name, though, right?”

Miyako passed him a piece of paper with *Sakamoto Shinobu* scribbled on it. Shima liked paper, probably because it was the only thing he couldn't hack

into. “It was stolen last night around 11:43 p.m. from Kanda Station. Anything about where it went after that would be useful for us.”

“That’s a very specific time,” Shima commented.

Miyako smiled at him and stood. “You’ll let me know what you find?”

“I’ll send it to you sometime tomorrow morning,” Shima said. “If I don’t have something by then, it’ll mean they junked it as soon as they took it off him.”

• • •

Emma left the Kudan police station walking fast. She could take the metro to Tokyo Station, but she was sick of waiting on platforms and pushing into crowded trains, sick of being still and inside. With active peacekeeping at an ebb, her commander, Santiago, had been pushing them all on fitness requirements, and this day of talk and observation had left Emma feeling stodgy. She would have jogged to Tokyo Station if she could have, but she had worn what she considered a diplomacy-ready suit and low-heeled pumps. Although given how many people she had towered over today, she might wear flats tomorrow.

By the time she got to the warren of Tokyo Station, Emma had worked off some of her excess energy and was ready to concentrate again. While Miyako had been watching those videos over and over—and, Emma had to admit, had eventually gotten a result—Emma had gone back to the hijacking. That was what she was supposed to be working on, even if it wasn’t a priority for the Metropolitan Police.

But why was she supposed to be working on it? Why did Charles care about the hijacking of some container *after* it had left the port? Yes, the attack had taken place in the American zone, but according to the agreement between the US and Japan, the Tokyo police were still responsible for all crime in the US-administered parts of the city.

Confident in the security of her eye’s uplink, she started in on it while sitting on the commuter train that would take her to the old airport. Haneda had been bombed during the initial Chinese attack, the one they claimed was in response to Japan’s targeted bombing of North Korea, which was in response to that country’s largely ineffective attacks on Akita and Niigata. Now, of course, there were all sorts of conspiracy theories—did China put

North Korea up to it?—but at the time they seemed like frightening but isolated aggressions. And then suddenly China had ground troops on Kyushu and had taken over half of Tokyo.

One of the runways had been repaired, so the peacekeepers were stationed near the airport, where they could be quickly extracted if necessary. They were bivouacked in a Hilton otherwise starved for guests: long empty corridors and bored staff, eerie enough that even the peacekeepers had long since stopped making redrum jokes. They had taken to leaving their doors open when they were home, for the company, but when Emma got back, the doors were closed. Out to dinner somewhere. She could have pinged Santiago and joined them, but the Hokka Hokka Tei sukiyaki was still sitting in her stomach, and she didn't feel like answering a lot of questions about her secondment. She went into her room, closed the door, and went back to delving into the history of the container that had been robbed at swordpoint earlier that day.

## Act III

Miyako had been at the office for an hour when Emma appeared beside her desk at five past eight.

“Ohayo gozaimas!” Emma said brightly. “Sorry, you didn't actually show me your desk yesterday, and it took me a few minutes to find it.”

Miyako pushed back from her desk and stood. “Ohayo.” She glanced around, unsurprised to see Fukuda and Nakamura hovering a few feet away. She turned back to Emma. “Shall we get started? I have some information.”

“Great! So do I. Oh, but first—is there somewhere I can put this?” Emma opened her satchel and pulled out a bag of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. “For the team.”

Miyako's mouth filled with saliva at the sight of the orange-and-yellow logo, and she had to swallow before answering. “Oh, thank you. The tea station is over here.” She led Emma to the sink and showed her the treats table next to it. “They are going to love those.”

“Have one!” Emma urged. “They're for you, too.”

Miyako hesitated, then pulled open the plastic. “In case they're shy,” she

said, and smiled. "I'll set an example for them. Would you like some tea?"

Once they had settled into the interrogation room, Miyako laid out everything she had learned about Sakamoto Shinobu. "We have an appointment with his supervisor at nine thirty, and we can meet some of his colleagues then as well, especially these three who left at the same time he did." She highlighted the names on the display her sleeve was sending to the wall screen. "Hopefully they were out with him near the station." Or, and it was so obvious she did not mention it, perhaps one of them was the killer: a drunken argument, an impulsive stabbing. "He lived alone, but we can go talk to his neighbors this afternoon if the morning meeting doesn't pan out. He lived in Funabashi, about forty-five minutes from the city."

"That's very impressive," Emma said, but she wasn't smiling anymore. Miyako wondered if she was angry that Miyako had kept working after she'd left. She had seemed eager enough to go, though.

"And Maeda-san just sent me a message. We have a meeting with the Nakajima-kai representative at two."

"About that . . ." Emma hesitated. "I'm not sure I should be at the meeting."

Miyako waited for her to explain, wondering if it was going to be some American squeamishness about organized crime.

"It might be better if they don't know we are interested in the container."

"You are interested in the container?"

Emma did not fluster. "I think we might be," she said. "I did some digging on it yesterday. I don't have anything definitive on it yet though . . ."

Miyako frowned. "If you are not going to be there, you will need to tell me what you found out, or the meeting is likely to be useless." Privately, Miyako wasn't crazy about spending time with the Nakajima-kai either.

"I cross-referenced the weight, origin, shipper and receiver, choice of port—as I said, not conclusive, but . . ."

She trailed off again and Miyako raised her eyebrows.

"I think it was a shipment of guns."

Miyako did not answer immediately. Before the war, the number of guns in the city had been tiny. There were a few more in the wake of the fighting, but still not many. Over the past few months, however, the police department had been registering an uptick, slow but noticeable.

"Why did you let them through the port?" she asked, and then heard how

accusatory it sounded.

Emma met her eyes. “I can only assume it was an error, and that is why the liaison officer is so eager to track the container.”

Miyako caught something in the way she said that title, but she was still thinking about the small arms problem. The unspoken assumption was that the Chinese were importing them to destabilize the city. But the Chinese held Yokohama Port; why would they ship guns through the American-held Tokyo harbor?

“Who sent them?”

Emma shrugged. “Shell companies within shell companies.” She watched Miyako’s face. “I assume there’s a resistance somewhere—maybe someone’s arming them?”

“You?” Miyako asked bluntly. She didn’t care for diplomatic games.

“Above my pay grade,” Emma answered.

• • •

The company where the dead man had worked occupied several floors of a shiny skyscraper in front of Tokyo Station. Only three of the ten elevators were working, but even Miyako didn’t seem inclined to climb seventeen flights of stairs, so they waited.

The dead man’s boss was a wispy dude, narrow and graying and affecting eyeglasses, when surely he could have had his vision corrected. “A terrible loss,” he kept saying in Japanese. “Such a shame.” Emma felt half a sentence behind everything that was happening, and missed a few points altogether, but she thought it was mostly superficial talk like that anyway. At one point Miyako gave her a significant look, and she prodded her confused brain to translate the last few sentences it had heard. She ended up having to use her eye uplink to check an online translator, but she got it, more or less: Sakamoto was responsible for dealing with customs on import and export issues. Emma had questions about that, but the conversation had already moved on, and she decided to assume Miyako had thought of all the same questions and asked them.

They had a moment alone in the glass-walled conference room after the boss left and before the coworkers showed up, and Emma used it to whisper, “The port?”

“Yes,” Miyako said. “But the supervisor doesn’t think it can have had anything to do with his murder. He always works with other colleagues, couldn’t have been smuggling or embezzling, had no access to trade secrets.” She paused. “At least, that’s what the boss thinks.”

*No reason to imagine it had anything to do with the missing container.* There must be thousands of people working at the port. And yet, the coincidence felt spooky.

Before Emma could say anything, the coworkers were entering: three similar young men, still a little gawky, one with a visible hangover. They made Emma feel sorry for the dead man for the first time; faceless, it had been hard to grasp how young he was.

The coworkers were both harder and easier to understand than the boss: They spoke quickly, words tumbling over each other, but they were also more direct, and more emotive, and Emma thought she caught most of it.

“We were together all night,” said the most voluble, Yamasaki. “Just drinking, you know, letting off some stress. We all left the bar together. But we are all on different train lines, so once we got to the station, we didn’t really pay attention.”

“Which train lines?” Miyako asked.

“Sakamoto was taking the Chuo-Sobu. Mizubara here is in Odaiba, while Kimura and I live in China.”

Emma looked up with interest; she knew that plenty of people lived in the Chinese zone and commuted across the drone curtain to their jobs in US-held areas—and vice versa—but she had never met any.

“Was Sakamoto very drunk?” Miyako asked.

The three men looked at each other.

“I’d say . . . he was drunk, but not . . .”

“Not so that I worried about him getting home,” Mizubara said with a smile that evaporated as he remembered that Sakamoto had never gotten home.

“Anyone have a grudge against him? Anything you know about?”

The three of them shook their heads.

“Girlfriend? Boyfriend?”

Yamasaki shrugged. “He never mentioned anyone.”

“Thank you so much for your time,” Miyako said. “Please stay in touch in case we need to talk to you again.”

Emma waited as she followed Miyako out through the lobby. She waited during the elevator ride and again until they were outside the building. “Why did you let them off so easily?” she asked. “Any one of them could have killed him.”

“We can get back to them if we need to,” Miyako started. “Besides—”  
“Even the ones who live in the Chinese zone?”

Miyako shook her head slightly, as if in annoyance, and went on. “I asked a, um, friend—or I guess you would say informant?—to try to trace Sakamoto’s sleeve. He just sent me a message. It took him longer to find it than he expected, because his initial attempt was to look for sleeve transmitters that hadn’t followed their usual route last night.”

“What?”

Miyako sighed. “I’m not sure I totally get it either, but I think he looked at the metadata of sleeve movement throughout the city over the past month or something and tried to pick out anomalies originating from Kanda just before midnight.”

“And there weren’t any?”

“Well, I guess there were a few. But when he looked into them, none were the right match. So he took a more direct approach, found Sakamoto’s social media profile, and hacked in somehow. And then he realized why the sleeve didn’t show an anomaly.”

“It went back to where he lived,” Emma said with a chill.

“Or at least close by. And it hasn’t moved since.”

“So let’s go! We can catch the murderer!”

Miyako glanced at her sleeve. “We have the meeting with the Nakajimakai.”

Emma gave her an incredulous look.

“It’s really not a good idea to ask them for a meeting and not show up,” Miyako said mildly.

“What are they going to do, put a horse’s head in your bed?”

“It’s more a matter of . . . the relationship. Next time they won’t give us the meeting at all, like that. Besides, weren’t you the one who wanted us to work on the hijacking?”

*Not me. My boss.* “Sure, but that was before we had a time-sensitive murder investigation to solve.” Emma thought momentarily about offering to make the arrest herself, since she wasn’t attending the meeting, but decided

that was not a good idea. Besides, she had a different request to make. “If this gangster meeting were taking place in the station, I’d be able to watch it through a one-way mirror or a closed-circuit camera or something, right?”

“But it’s not at the station,” Miyako answered, puzzled. “It is much more informal; there is a certain, ah, etiquette . . .”

“I know, I know,” Emma said. “But if it was, I could, right?”

“I suppose,” Miyako agreed.

“So what if I watch it using an uplink to my eye?”

• • •

Miyako had tabled the talk of *clandestine surveillance of the Nakajima-kai*, an activity she couldn’t think about except in freaked-out italics, for discussion with Kensuke. He was less opposed to it than she had hoped.

“That’s amazing technology,” he said, peering at the almost invisible contact lens Emma was holding. “And it transmits directly to your ocular implant?” He glanced up at Emma’s face. “What about audio?”

“There’s an automatic transcription function, goes to subtitles in my vision.” Emma said. “It’s imperfect, and has a short delay, but then my Japanese is imperfect too.” She shrugged. “At least this way you two will have a record of what is discussed, in case anything important comes up.”

*Nothing important is going to come up*, Miyako thought. The meeting was with the Nakajima-kai’s lawyer. They knew exactly how to work with the police. “They’re going to find it,” she said. “I’m sure they check for these things.”

“It’s proprietary military technology,” Emma said. She was speaking in a carefully neutral way, as if she didn’t want to disagree with Miyako. “It would be very difficult to pull out of ambient wavelengths.”

Meanwhile, Kensuke was giving her his full charm offensive. “I don’t think we need to worry. This is a very informal meeting; we do this all the time.” He paused. “It’s unlikely we’ll be able to recover the container, you know. But this might at least give us some confirmation as to whether it was the Nakajima-kai who took it.” He frowned. “I don’t like the idea of them having more guns, but there’s not much we can do about that particular shipment of them at this point. We’ve also been watching the border to see if we can catch any of the vehicles involved coming back across.”

*All the more reason not to try to record the meeting!* “They’ll search us,” Miyako said. “They might have a scanner or something . . .”

Kensuke shrugged. “If you don’t want to do it, I will.” He looked up at Emma again, a smile like a challenge on his lips.

Emma handed him the contact lens. Miyako looked away while he placed it against his eye. *Ugh.*

• • •

During the meeting, Emma waited in the car, the first police vehicle she had been in. Made by Toyota, it was one of those odd-looking three-seaters she had noticed on the streets since arriving: two seats in the front and one in the back, like a reversed tricycle, with a barrier between them that could be partially opened. Maybe designed for making arrests?

She could see what Kensuke saw as he entered the department store, took the stairs up to the café on the fourth floor, Miyako occasionally visible in his periphery. The maître d’ immediately led them to a table in a corner by the windows and disappeared. The slender young woman sitting at the table stood when they arrived, and the introductions went on for a while. Her name was Yuki Kato, and she was young but not too young and very polished: a tailored suit in powder blue, hair in a French twist with the same very faint iridescent sheen that Kensuke had in his. They would make a gorgeous couple, actually.

Finally, everyone managed to sit down. “I’m afraid I only have a short time available today,” Yuki said with a charming smile and lots of extra honorific frills and apologetic phrases.

“So sorry to take up your time,” Kensuke said, in the same mode. “But we wanted to discuss the hijacking of a truck yesterday. It was a very colorful crime, with certain indications that might make people think . . .”

Yuki was still smiling. “You have not caught the perpetrators?”

Kensuke bowed his head, giving Emma a sudden view of the tablecloth. “The truck was taken into the Chinese zone. As you have far better resources there than we do, we thought perhaps . . .”

*Nice,* Emma thought.

“I suppose the owner of the container asked you to investigate?” Yuki said.

In the car, Emma froze. Was she fishing for information about who had sent the guns? Did she know the US was involved somehow?

“Naturally, with such a disturbance on our streets, we need to address the matter,” Kensuke said reproachfully. Emma breathed again.

Yuki nodded. “That is for the best. The container in question is now in the possession of the Chinese government. As such, it is doubtful that the owner will ever see its contents.”

There was a silent moment, then Emma’s vision bobbed as Kensuke nodded. “And the perpetrators?”

“Must have been working for the Chinese government, is it not?” Yuki stood. “I’m sorry I couldn’t be of more assistance.”

• • •

Kensuke’s face as he climbed into the car was grim. “That was not what I expected her to say.” He raised his eyes to Emma’s. “I’m glad you didn’t go in.”

“Me too,” Emma said fervently. She held out her palm, and he delicately removed the contact and placed it there.

“I thought it would be bad if the Nakajima-kai had gotten the guns,” Miyako said from the control seat as the car pulled out into traffic. “But the idea of the Nakajima-kai working for the Chinese . . .”

“I can’t believe it,” Kensuke said with sudden vehemence. “I just can’t believe it.”

Miyako glanced back at him skeptically.

“I know,” Kensuke said defensively. “I know, they’re criminals. But they are Japanese! I can’t believe they would betray us.”

“There must be lots of opportunities for profit by working on both sides of the drone curtain,” Emma mused.

“We’re off to Funabashi,” Miyako told Kensuke. “Hopefully to pick up a murderer.”

“All right, I should get off here then,” he said, still sounding depressed. “Good luck.” He leaned forward and tugged at a lever below the level of the barrier. He struggled with it briefly—“This one always sticks!”—and then there was the whine of waking electronics and his section of the car separated. Kensuke gave Emma a wink and peeled away.

“It’s modular!” Emma exclaimed. She had heard of such cars but hadn’t connected them to the weird shape of this one.

“An attempt to adapt the motor vehicle to our energy-straitened times,” Miyako explained.

“Wow,” Emma said. She looked around, found the low barrier between her seat and Miyako’s. “This part too?”

“Oh yes. Each seat is a separate vehicle.”

Emma thought of something. “What if we arrest someone?”

“There’s an extra seat that can fold out of the back, and that doesn’t detach, obviously. It’s not very comfortable, but then . . .” Miyako shrugged.

• • •

Even going into the next prefecture, they never really left the urban sprawl, but Funabashi had a very different feel from Tokyo. There were a lot of single-family houses, and the apartment buildings were smaller. Sakamoto lived in one of those, a three-story rectangle not far from the train station. Miyako started pushing intercom buttons, but not many people were home at this time of day.

Across the street, preschool kids were squealing and swooping around a playground. Idly, Emma scanned with her eye’s receptor and let it fiddle with code until it hacked into all of the separate alternate reality programs they were running. One by one, cartoon monsters appeared in her vision, chasing their originating child or dodging away just in front of them to peals of giggles. A green webby one, a large furry pink one, a blue one with tentacles, each visible to only one child, and now to Emma. Emma shook her head. People really needed to take security more seriously on their children’s devices.

“Hello?” wobbled a voice from the intercom.

“Police,” Miyako said, holding her badge to the camera. “Please open the door.”

There was a long pause.

“Please open the door,” Miyako repeated.

More silence. Emma and Miyako exchanged a glance in perfect understanding.

When Miyako’s finger came off the button, Emma said, “I’m going to

circle around to look for another exit.”

Miyako nodded, looking up at the building. As Emma started for the corner, she heard the beep as Miyako pushed another button. She turned off the sidewalk onto the gravel lining the alley between the apartment building and the convenience store beside it. In the back there was a parking lot, and leading down to it an exterior concrete staircase. Emma posted up in the alcove under the last flight of steps and listened.

Nothing.

Her sleeve vibrated, and she pulled up her coat sleeve to see the screen.

*I'm in*, from Miyako.

Emma waited.

She heard footsteps, the sound dull on the heavy concrete. Hurried footsteps. She tapped *Someone coming* into the reply, then reached under her jacket for where her gun was holstered under her arm. When the person on the steps hit the ground, Emma swung out, gun pointed. “Freeze!” she yelled, and then repeated it in Japanese.

The man was frozen anyway. He was maybe forty, skinny, and his startled face looked like a sparrow’s. He had a brown leather tote bag over his shoulder. “Leaving for a trip?” Emma asked, hoping the Japanese didn’t sound too stilted.

The man didn’t answer. He was staring at the gun.

More footsteps, this time on the gravel, and Miyako burst around the corner. She stopped almost as suddenly as the suspect had. “You have a *gun*?” she said in English.

Emma suddenly felt silly. “Of course,” she said. “Do you want to interrogate this guy?”

“You can’t—that’s not how we do things here.”

“I’m a sniper. This is how I do things.”

“You’re working for the Tokyo Police now. Don’t shoot.”

Emma was starting to get annoyed. “How would you suggest arresting him, then?”

The suspect bolted.

“Stop!” Emma yelled, in English again, embarrassingly.

At the same time, Miyako dodged in front of her, one hand out as she grunted, urgently, “*Don’t* shoot.”

Emma started to say something, but before the man had cleared the

parking lot, Miyako was on him. She had him pinned to the ground so quickly that Emma couldn't parse what had happened. Miyako's legs had been *up* in the air somehow, and then she had whirled the suspect to the ground . . . Emma was going to have to play the recording back from her eye later, in slow motion. Good thing she had it set to record for the arrest. She approached slowly.

Miyako was cuffing him. "*That*," she said, "is how we detain suspects."

• • •

The Criminal Investigations superintendent, Nishimura, came out of his office to greet Miyako and Emma when they brought the suspect back to the station, and insisted they go out for a drink "to welcome our newest colleague" once the interrogation was over. Miyako nodded without saying anything and tugged the suspect off to a room. Emma decided to leave her to it. With her clumsy Japanese, she'd probably be a hindrance. Besides, the suspect had confessed almost immediately; Emma found she didn't care too much about why. Instead, she sat at Miyako's desk and started composing the memo to explain to Charles that the container he was so interested in had been stolen by the Chinese government.

At six, Nishimura came out of his office again and everyone stood up and got ready to go.

"Come on," the young guy, Fukuda, said. "It's your welcome party! You can't be late."

"But Miyako's not out yet," Emma said, standing up uncertainly.

"She's almost finished," the superintendent said, wrapping a scarf around his neck. "Just filling in some paperwork. She'll meet us there."

Instead of the dim cop dive bar Emma had expected, they repaired to a shoji-walled private table in a restaurant two blocks over.

"Thanks for the chocolates," one of the older cops said as they waited for two energetic servers to finish setting out the first round of small dishes. "I love those things, and you can't get them here."

"I'm so glad," Emma said. The servers were plopping giant beer bottles at intervals along the table, and setting out glasses. "I wasn't sure what the right thing would be." She had a sudden memory of wandering a CVS in Oakland before her deployment, how she had debated what to offer in a war-divided

city. The cop took one of the bottles and filled Emma's glass.

"Thank you," she said, and filled his. "Can I ask you something? Do you all . . . Miyako did some amazing move to subdue the suspect, and I . . ."

The cop laughed. "None of that jumping around for me. But Miyako's a champ." Emma's face must have shown her puzzlement, because he went on. "Judo. She was in the Olympics."

"Really?"

"Yeah, but don't ask her. She's shy about it."

They were on the third course and Emma had lost count of how many glasses of beer before the shoji slid open and Miyako slipped into the room, cheeks reddened from the cold.

"Done?" Nishimura asked.

Miyako nodded, muttered something with a half-smile in response to the calls from the other cops, and went to sit by the superintendent. Watching their serious faces as they talked, Emma wondered if they were discussing the possibility of the Nakajima-kai working for the Chinese. She didn't think Charles was going to be happy about that, either.

A few minutes later, Miyako got up again and came to sit next to Emma.

"He stayed confessed, right?" Emma asked.

Miyako hesitated a moment, then smiled as she worked out the odd grammar. "Yes," she said, reaching for a pair of chopsticks. "He stayed confessed."

"So why did he do it?" Emma found she did care.

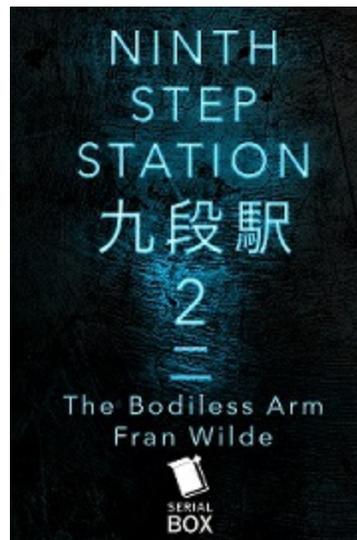
"He was a black marketeer," Miyako said around a mouthful of enoki wrapped in bacon. "A smuggler. He lost his job after the earthquake and then . . ." She spread her hands, leaving the precise downward slope of the man vague. "Sakamoto found out, saw him at the port one time when he was there for work, made the connection with his neighbor who had just bought a new car despite this terrible economy." She shrugged, chewing. "Sakamoto threatened him. This guy says he just happened to see him at Kanda that night and stabbed him in desperation, but the fact that he was carrying the knife . . . I think we'll get him for premeditation."

Emma couldn't help but imagine the desperation of the skinny sparrow of a man they had arrested, Sakamoto's righteous, probably patriotic anger. "I didn't think this would be connected to the war," she said, unable to put the rest of it into words.

“Everything is connected to it,” Miyako told her. “Everything.”

## Up Next

A severed arm leads Miyako and Emma into the world of extreme body modders, with a side dish of organized crime.



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# Writer Team

## Malka Older

Malka Older is a writer, aid worker, and PhD candidate. Her science fiction political thriller *Infomocracy*, was named one of the best books of 2016 by *Kirkus Reviews*, Book Riot, and the *Washington Post*. She is also the author of the sequels, *Null States* (2017) and *State Tectonics* (2018), as well as of short fiction appearing in *WIRED*, *Twelve Tomorrows*, *Reservoir Journal*, *Fireside Fiction*, Tor.com and others. Named Senior Fellow for Technology and Risk at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs for 2015, she has more than a decade of experience in humanitarian aid and development. Her doctoral work on the sociology of organizations at the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po) explores the dynamics of multi-level governance and disaster response using the cases of Hurricane Katrina and the Japan tsunami of 2011. Website: [malkaolder.wordpress.com](http://malkaolder.wordpress.com) or on Twitter at [@m\\_older](https://twitter.com/m_older).

## Fran Wilde

Fran Wilde's work includes the Andre Norton-, and Compton Crook Award-winning and Nebula-nominated novel *Updraft* (Tor, 2015) and its sequels, *Cloudbound* and *Horizon*, as well as the novella *The Jewel and Her Lapidary* (Tor.com 2016). Her short stories appear in *Asimov's*, Tor.com, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, and *Nature*. She writes for publications including *The Washington Post*, Tor.com, *Clarkesworld*, and *iO9.com*. You can find her at [franwilde.net](http://franwilde.net). She tweets as [@fran\\_wilde](https://twitter.com/fran_wilde).

## Jacqueline Koyanagi

Jacqueline Koyanagi writes science fiction and fantasy featuring queer women of color, folks with disabilities, neuroatypical characters, and diverse relationship styles. Her debut novel, *Ascension*, was released from

Masque/Prime books at the end of 2013, and landed on the 2014 James Tiptree Jr. Honor List. Her short fiction has appeared in anthologies by *Haikasoru* and *Candlemark & Gleam*. She is currently working on serial fiction for Serial Box, as well as a science fiction trilogy. You can find Jacqueline on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or her [website](#).

### **Curtis C. Chen**

Once a Silicon Valley software engineer, Curtis C. Chen now writes fiction and runs puzzle games near Portland, Oregon. His debut novel *Waypoint Kangaroo* (a 2017 Locus Awards and Endeavour Award Finalist) is a science fiction thriller about a superpowered spy facing his toughest mission yet: vacation. The sequel, *Kangaroo Too*, lands our hero on the Moon to confront long-buried secrets.