

The Bodyguard

by tei hakuto

Lord Orion Shagswell, famous Playwitch writer and seducer extraordinaire, has a mysterious and dangerous stalker. What happens when a Libertine meets a Japanese warrior?

Pick of the Lot

Chapter 1 of 7

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Irika Yamamoto Apparated into her department's office in the Ministry of Magic and was immediately bombarded with the noise. The Department of Magical Law Enforcement was always noisy: the halls and offices were frequently filled with Aurors and their captured wizards, booking them and sending them to Azkaban. She was used to the ruckus as she herself had booked several Dark Wizards and criminals before. In fact, it was a comforting sound to her ears. She ignored most of them, though, as she walked to the room designated for her and the others like her.

Yamamoto was a Hit Wizard, and being only twenty years old, the youngest in this exclusive group. A former Auror, her superior found in her the tenacity and capability of being a Hit Wizard. She had the special knack of keeping her cool in emergencies and sudden pressures, though it can unnerve some people, as her cool can be misinterpreted as unemotional.

Aside from have an uncanny level of composure, she also had a special gift: she had the ability to detect items and places with Dark Magic. She was pivotal in several raids of Dark Wizards' homes and hiding places the last few years after Voldemort's demise. It was such a remarkable feat, seeing that aside from her young age, she also had that look of innocence so that most people would not suspect her of being part of the wizarding police force.

Her look of innocence had a touch of curiosity, though, as she neared their office. She had been summoned for an emergency meeting, and although she was not currently handling any mission, she was inquisitive as to why they would be having this gathering.

She opened the door and saw that others had already arrived. There were already around ten of them, and they greeted her as she came in.

"Yamamoto," Eric Longshore called out. He pulled back a chair for her even as he leaned back on his own. "It's been quite a while since I've seen you!"

She nodded as she sat down and looked at the others. "Any idea what this meeting is about?" she asked in a soft voice.

"No details, only that all available Hits are to report back ASAP," a female Hit remarked, idly cutting an apple with a small dagger. She chewed on a slice even as her eyes crinkled in thought. "Although, if it's so urgent, I wonder why the head's not here yet."

On cue, Mikael Gumboil, the chief of the Hit Wizards, entered the room. "Sorry! Sorry, all," he said quickly, coming to the front of the table as he shuffled papers in his hand. He scanned the occupied chairs, and frowned. "Only ten? Well then, it can't be helped," he murmured. He looked at them intently.

"Thank you all for coming on such short notice. I'll get to the point immediately. As you may be aware, the *Playwitch* magazine is due for a Europe-wide tour in the wizarding world to celebrate their anniversary in the coming month. Their editor, Samara Miterhouse, requested of me, in the strictest confidence, that Lord Orion Shagswell be provided with a bodyguard in the soonest possible time."

He paused for a few moments to let the news sink in. He wasn't sure about the looks on his Hits' faces though. Some were shocked, some had trouble keeping their grins in, others were just plain blank-faced.

"*WHAT?*"

"Now, now. Let me finish first..." he began, raising his hands slightly, but he was cut off by several loud protests.

"Why the bloody hell would we do babysitting to a Casanova?" one of them cried out, his face crinkled in disgust.

"At least you acknowledge him as one," Longshore teased, winking at Yamamoto, who just smiled slightly.

"Can we have a bit of order, please?" Gumboil said, exasperated. He was getting tired already. He, too, didn't want to hand this useless assignment to his people, but there was no choice. He had actually anticipated this protest.

Yamamoto politely raised her hand. "Shouldn't this be the work for the Aurors?" she suggested.

He sighed, thankful that someone was taking this more calmly. "I would have *loved* to throw this back to their faces," he said ruefully, "but the Minister backed this request up before I could even squeak."

They all groaned. It was a frequent problem in a bureaucracy: everything was categorized and boxed in, and if a task was not totally defined, it was given to whichever group the Minister chose. It was not a pleasant experience when that happened. Now, they were stuck with this mission.

"Why would we even go and protect that man?" one Asian woman said. Her eyes were deep in thought. "Isn't he a Master Sorcerer? There's a reason he's called a Lord, you know. That title isn't frequently given out to every Tom, Dick and Harry."

"Yes, surely he's capable of taking care of himself," another quipped.

"Well, yes. But it looks like he's having a stalker," Gumboil said as he looked at one of his papers. He then levitated some more in front of each Hit. "These are some of the letters he has been receiving, the last one was just sent to his office at *Playwitch* only two days ago."

"It seems to be an obsessive fan," Yamamoto remarked, reading quickly.

"Then again," Longshore said, "how obsessive can you get if it writes, 'No one can have you but myself'? or, 'I'll kill whoever gets near you because you're only for me'?" He whistled low and clucked his tongue. "What's he got that I don't?"

"This, for one," Yamamoto said softly, reading the last letter. It did look quite threatening if you set aside the overly mushy adulation and even sexually explicit language.

"This is only for the duration of the tour," their chief explained further. "Whoever receives this mission is tasked to be his companion twenty-four-seven. Though this is put on a yellow alert, there's a possibility that it might only be a hoax. Miterhouse doesn't want to take that chance, though."

He then pulled out a small canvas bag and levitated several marbles. All were white except for one black. "We'll draw lots. Whoever receives the black marble gets the mission. No cheating people; the marbles are charmed." He dropped the marbles into the bag, and it floated in front of each Hit, who then stuck his or her hand in and took one. Finally, all were able to pick up a stone.

He looked around, making sure that all was in place. "All right, then. Everyone arms out, and at the count of three, we open our palms." As soon as he called out three, they opened their hands, and looked at each other.

"Oh, shit," Longshore hissed.

A Witch in *Playwitch*

Chapter 2 of 7

Irika visits the *Playwitch* office and meets the man she will protect. What would she think of him? What does *she* think of *her*?

"I'm from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement."

"Oh, yes, please. Do come in."

Yamamoto walked in and the secretary closed the door behind her. As she was led to the editor's office, she quietly glanced around and took in her surroundings. On the outside, the building looked like any other building. The inside was a little more different; it looked more like a Muggle office than a wizarding office. It was perhaps because of the fact that they were using computers and printers and some of the staff who wore ordinary Muggle clothes that helped give out that impression. Although, the people were still waving wands as they printed and laid out the upcoming issue.

"Please, wait here," the woman pointed to a leather couch that was across the secretary's table at the other end of the room. "I'll get Miss Samara."

Yamamoto silently sat down and waited, and she noticed the décor around the room. On one wall were frames of the previous covers of the magazine and at least two other vacant frames, clearly for the next issues. She crossed her arms and leaned back, relaxing a bit. She felt a little bit out of place since she wore her Hit Wizard attire: a long dark brown dragon-hide trench coat with matching boots, a black shirt and pants that were more masculine than snug-fitting, and a katana blade that was strapped behind her. Her hair was tied up in a harsh ponytail, which gave emphasis on her almond-shaped eyes, and her long hair flowed straight down at her back.

She recalled the meeting where they drew lots on who will take the mission. Everyone was shocked when they realized it was her as she opened her hand and the black marble rested on her palm. Her only reaction was a slightly raised eyebrow and a passive face.

"You've got to be kidding!" Longshore cried out. "You can't have Irika go there! Shagswell's just going to, well..." his voice trailed off, unable to continue.

"Shag her?" one of them quipped. Some of them groaned at the pun.

"The black marble is a charmed binding agreement, Longshore," Gumboil apologized. "She has to go. I'm sorry it had to be you, Irika."

"It's all right, sir," she replied softly. "I'll take care; I promise."

Even after the meeting was all over, several of them went to her to voice their concerns. "I wouldn't have minded it if it were me," one woman said. "But you'll be siding up with him. I don't know him that much, but I've heard he has quite the appetite. He might not be able to keep his hands to himself, so be careful."

"Surely he will be a gentleman," Yamamoto replied, "and I have gone through worse things than this. Do not worry! It's not like I'm going to a demon's lair."

"If he does anything, just tell me. I'll cop him good," Longshore said with a grin.

"Miss Yamamoto?" the secretary called out, breaking her reverie. She smiled at the Asian witch. "She will see you now."

She quickly stood up and walked past the secretary, who held the door open for her. At once a woman she reputed to be the *Playwitch* editor greeted her with an outstretched hand.

"Samara Miterhause," she said with a smile. Yamamoto took her hand and gave a firm, short shake. "You must be the witch to be Orion's bodyguard. Please, have a seat."

"Thank you," she said as she sat down on the divan proffered to her. She watched the editor silently as she bustled about. Her table was a bit filled up; there were several piles of paper stacked neatly to one side and at least two mugs on one corner. There were even several photos floating near the chair.

"Would you like some tea, Miss Yamamoto? Coffee?" she offered her as she picked up a tray and placed it on a nearby coffee table. "Black coffee is fine, thank you," Yamamoto replied.

Miterhause poured her a steaming cup and handed it to the Hit Witch. "Orion will be arriving shortly; he just had something to do earlier. I'd like him to meet you too. He'll be glad that his bodyguard is a woman."

Yamamoto took a small sip, but when she heard the last comment an eyebrow went up in amusement. "He won't take a male bodyguard?" she asked mildly.

"Oh! He wouldn't even hear of the whole idea at first," Miterhause exclaimed. "But we've been receiving those horrid letters every week that I cannot ignore it any longer. I mean, of course Orion has fan mail – he has more letters than all of us combined. But you have a fanatic, and *then* you have a fanatic."

"Do you have any suspicions as to who it is?" Yamamoto asked, her demeanor now serious. "When did this all start anyway?"

Miterhause tapped her lips with a finger. "When? Well, I would say a couple of months ago after our announcement for our Europe tour. We then received this particular letter. It's not signed and there's no returning address. Every letter has to go through screening, and at first it was like all every other fan letter Orion gets: full of adoring praises and declarations of love. But as the weeks passed, it began to get stranger. Whoever sent those letters started getting disillusioned and violent with their declarations. And it was around two days ago when the last letter finally threatened to kill him during the tour. And what's even stranger is that we can't even track the owl delivering the letter. We've tried tracing it, but the owl flies into the Forbidden Forest. Or it becomes so confused it just comes back to the office. So it's either that the fan is a hag, or someone manages to slip into the forest to have the letter delivered."

Yamamoto was silent during all this time; her brows furrowed as she absorbed the information given to her. "It's quite elaborate, for someone to risk themselves to go into the Dark Forest just to transport the letter. It's clear that the threat may be real if this stalker goes through all these lengths to conceal themselves. How long will this tour last?"

"Only for a month. We'll be travelling through Scotland, Belgium, Norway, France and Italy. It's a quick tour actually, and the entire itinerary for that is already laid out. What I'm concerned about is that this person can strike at any time. We'll be having press conferences and autograph signing the whole time, so he'll be very vulnerable during those times."

"Vulnerable? My dear, how little you think of me!"

The women turned to see Shagswell leaning against the doorway to her office, grinning. His demeanor was relaxed and his eyes almost twinkled, but Yamamoto frowned when she saw him.

She didn't even sense him enter, much less hear him. It was disconcerting. To be able to sneak up on them without detection proved to her that this Shagswell was more than just a famous name and a handsome face. Though Miterhause's story was cause enough for concern, seeing the actual man and getting a glimpse of what he was capable of gave thought that this mission was something more than she bargained for.

Lord Orion Shagswell pushed away from the doorframe and walked closer to them, his eyes intently studied Yamamoto.

First Contact

Chapter 3 of 7

Irika and Shagswell start their "relationship". Do you like red?

Yamamoto was silent as Shagswell came closer. He was tall and broad-shouldered; his whole body could have been chiseled in marble. Or rather, that *he* was probably a model for all those male marble statues, even the dark purple robes he wore could not disguise the quiet power his body exuded. His salt-and-pepper hair was slicked back, and Yamamoto could tell that his locks were way past his shoulders. His beard was close-cropped and neatly trimmed, framing a smile that did not quite reach up to his ears as he approached them.

"Orion! Finally you're here," Miterhause sighed in relief. She gestured to Yamamoto, who stood up. "She will be your bodyguard, Orion. Now, don't you start arguing with me again."

Yamamoto bowed towards him. "Irika Yamamoto," she introduced herself. "I am pleased to meet you, Lord Shagswell." But before she could finish her sentence and even stand straight again, she felt her hand gently taken. She saw him kissing the back of her hand.

"Oh, but the pleasure is all mine, Miss Irika," he purred. But as soon as he pulled his lips away from her skin, she quickly withdrew her hand. It was a curious surprise to see her face impassive just as before. *Such a challenge*, he thought. He then grinned at her.

"Now, I guess I should change a bit in the logistics," Miterhouse said in a business-like voice, but she was giving dagger looks at the man. *He is making this difficult*, she thought in exasperation. She didn't need him trying to seduce another woman again. And Irika being a Hit Wizard and so young too! "I'd have to book an extra room for you, Irika. I'll have it done in the afternoon."

"Don't trouble yourself Samara." Shagswell grinned at his editor. "Miss Yamamoto can stay in the rooms//I be getting. It'll be at no extra cost for the magazine, and no extra work for you!" He could almost laugh, amused by her reaction. From the way she was glaring at him, he could tell she was beginning to get wound up. He can read her well. And why not? They've been working together for quite a long time already.

"I *insist*. It's the least I can do for her services right now," Miterhouse replied, smiling at Shagswell through clenched teeth. "I'm happy to do this for her."

Yamamoto looked at the two and thought that they were at the verge of openly arguing at each other. Shagswell looked amused, while Miterhouse' cheeks were flushed with irritation. "It's all right," she suddenly said. "I will be content in my own room, but perhaps with a connecting door so that I may be of aide to Lord Shagswell when needed." There, she made a compromise. She just hoped they'd accept it.

Shagswell sighed with a grin, and shrugged. He was beaten for now. "Of course, Irika," Miterhouse said in relief. "Well, I guess the two of you should get to know each other better. Orion, if you will show her to your office?" As Yamamoto stood up and turned slightly, Miterhouse quickly leaned over and pinched Shagswell's arm.

You better watch it, she mouthed.

Shagswell took on a look of total innocence. *Me?* he seemed to say. He winked at her and followed Yamamoto. He opened the door for Yamamoto, and with a final smile at Miterhouse, left the office.

"So, Miss Yamamoto. May I just call you Irika?" Shagswell said as they walked to his office. "You are a Hit Wizard, yes? I admit I know little of your group."

"There are still some people who do," she agreed. "We are slightly different from the Aurors. They specifically go after Dark Wizards, but we chase those who are actually wanted by the law, Dark Wizard or not. And yes, you may call me that."

He regarded her with a look of respect. "Dear me, then how did a young lass like you manage to get into such a line of work? Wouldn't keeping a guard over me be a bit boring for you?" She looked up at him, and idly realized she was almost a head shorter than he was. "From hard work and skills, sir," she answered modestly. "And I believe that you yourself did not want anyone looking over your shoulder during the tour."

He gave a rueful grin. "Didn't I, though? It was Samara's idea, not mine. She's sometimes too much of the mother hen. Of course, I would do anything to make her happy. Although, I do enjoy tweaking her nerves now and then." He opened the door to his office and ushered her in.

And more I believe, Yamamoto thought when she entered his office. She looked around, a little surprised at what she saw. It was definitely not your usual office. His furniture had simple lines, but they were of a dark, heavy oak, and clearly had a masculine touch. One wall had a bookcase filled with thick hardbound books, while the corner across it had a small bar. Its black marble countertop had around three bottles of red wine, charmed to be always chilled and ready to serve.

Shagswell noticed her taking in the room's décor and smiled. "I like my place to be a little comfortable," he explained to her. He stretched out his hand, and a couple of wineglasses and one of the bottles floated towards him. He poured one glass for himself and another for Yamamoto. "Do you like red?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, sir. I do not take alcohol while on duty," she said simply. Shagswell nodded, "Ever the police officer. Some sweets, then, perhaps?" A box appeared at their side, and it opened to reveal several rows of bite-sized chocolates. "Please, have one," he offered.

He saw her hesitate and chuckled. "Irika, I'm not trying to poison you, nor make you unconscious. I'd just like to get you comfortable."

"I am comfortable," she replied, her face as impassive as ever. She looked at the box again, and decided to pick one. She nibbled a small piece from it. "Please, sit down," he told her and offered her the couch. She sat down at the edge of it, while he sat beside her and leaned back. He saw how she sat, and sighed.

"Irika," he said patiently, "I know that my line of work, specifically my column, would certainly give me a special type of... reputation. I assure you that I would not do any untoward advances at you. Not unless you give me permission to." He gave a slight grin on that last comment.

He saw her blink in confusion, which was a feat since her face was still calm. He wanted to chuckle, but how could he when this young lady right beside him looked so uneasy being with him? "Relax, Irika," he said, laughter in his voice.

"I *am* relaxed," Yamamoto quipped. She looked around his room, trying to get a glimpse of who this man was through his décor. "I would like to get your opinion regarding this threat to your life." There, at least she changed the subject.

He sighed while he swirled the wine in his glass, and idly admired its color. "Frankly, I'm intrigued," he said. "This is actually the first time I've received a death threat because of my work in *Playwitch*. It was usually for... personal reasons that this happen."

Yamamoto stood up, and began to slowly pace the room as she thought aloud. "So, you *do* have enemies?"

"Yes, but, of course, I've dealt with them accordingly before," he said with a faint smile. "I don't believe I have someone to deal with currently."

"Any jealous rivals? Jilted lovers?"

"I am an honest man, Irika," Shagswell said. "I always aim to be as straightforward in business or otherwise. I don't give reason to anyone to go after me."

"Until now," she retorted lightly, one eyebrow slightly raised as she kept on deducing. "Very well, we would have to assume that this person is someone you do not personally know. Will this be the first time you'll be having a Europe-wide tour?"

Shagswell dutifully answered the questions poised to him. He was quite impressed with her. She was clearly quite young, too young in fact to be a Hit Wizard, but showed unusual maturity and professionalism needed for the job. She was very serious about this assignment of hers, and despite his personal misgivings about having a bodyguard, he admitted he was thankful that it was she to do the job and not someone else.

She wasn't bad to look at either. His eyes drank in her sight as she walked in tight circles in front of him. Despite the tough, masculine clothes she wore, she moved with unconscious grace. He could tell and appreciated very much, that she had a fit, slim body toned through numerous physical and magical training. He wondered if he would be allowed to reach out, and gently rub with his thumb, the crinkle in her brow as she spoke out her thoughts thoroughly.

"What do you think, Lord Shagswell?" Irika said, breaking his reverie.

"Hm? Oh, yes. Absolutely," he quickly said, mentally berating himself. Damn it, he allowed his mind to wander. He sheepishly looked away when Yamamoto looked at him,

a silent question in her eyes.

She then continued. "I guess I should ask the detailed itinerary of your tour from Miss Miterhouse," she pondered. "It would give me a clearer picture on how to place myself without disturbing you much."

Shagswell watched her for a few more moments, then stood up. "Irika," he said smoothly, "I am at your disposal to whatever you need to keep me safe during the tour." He smiled at her gently, "But the tour won't start until two weeks after. Might I invite you for a light dinner tonight?" He smiled even more when he noticed her looking a bit suspicious. "Again, my dear. I don't do anything that would make my guests uncomfortable. This is just my way of thanking you. And I would hope that we would get to be friends after this."

Yamamoto thought fast. He seemed nice and considerate. And despite his flirtatious manner, she could tell that he was quite the gentleman. He was also a bit confusing for her, but a gentleman all the same. She bowed to him slightly.

"Yes, I would be honored to dine with you tonight, Lord Shagswell."

Prepping for the Tour

Chapter 4 of 7

Things are getting ready for the first leg of the tour. A confrontation that leads to argumentation that leads to an invitation. Whew!

Irika Yamamoto watched silently as Miterhouse directed her staff and finalized the last details of the tour. It was four o'clock in the morning, and they were about to leave for the first leg of the tour. Their first destination was one of the medieval castles in Glasgow, Scotland. The castle's owner, also a wizard, was one of Miterhouse's business partners and used the castle as a quaint little hotel for both Muggles and wizarding folk alike. He was thrilled to get a business opportunity like this tour, and the fact that he'd have an increase in guests, particularly women, wasn't too bad either.

"Chaotic, isn't it?" Shagswell's voice came from behind her. She turned to see him grinning lightly as he stepped in beside her. They, along with the other editors and staff, were to gather this morning for the Portkey travel. They would arrive straight to the castle's reception courtyard especially created for wizards and witches. The next morning would be a quick preparation before the actual dinner and events proper would begin.

"I think she's doing quite well," she remarked softly. She idly thumbed the hilt of her sword, which was strapped to her side.

"Your sword is always with you, Irika?" he lightly noted, seeing how she carefully adjusted the scabbard on her hips.

"Zansa is my companion," she explained, which showed that naming her blade held high importance for her. "Even if I have a wand, he is to be with me always. He is a family heirloom after all."

"Ah," he nodded in understanding.

"All right, everyone! Gather around!" Miterhouse cried out as she gestured the staff to come closer. They began to surround a rather old marble fountain. Several of them eyed it suspiciously.

"It seems to be a rather large Portkey, Samara," Shagswell remarked while he scratched his head.

"It's not going to land on top of our heads when we get there," the editor assured them, slightly exasperated. "This is actually from the castle's grounds; the owner gladly lent it to me. So this is just really returning to its original spot. Is everyone ready then?" She waited until all were holding onto the Portkey and activated it at once.

Yamamoto immediately felt the almost nauseating feeling in her head and stomach and braced her body against the sensation. She felt more than heard a whooshing sound and knew that they were now over the castle itself and floating in the air. At once she pulled out a snowy white feather, which instantly grew larger until she could sit on it, and slowly glided down where the others were descending to as well.

Shagswell was behind her, amazed that such an item could be used. It looked better on her too, as the others moved more like they were cycling as they floated down. It made him feel a bit embarrassed with his legs paddling about.

"That's so amazing!" Miterhouse exclaimed as she watched Yamamoto hop down from her feather. It shrunk immediately and floated back to her hand. "I've never realized that a feather could be used like that."

"Only for short distances," Yamamoto replied with a small smile. "And never in strong winds. I could send you one if you'd like."

"Oh, thank you! I'd like that very much," the editor said happily; then the two of them watched as the others followed down. "All right, everyone! Let's get checked-in."

The registration at the front desk was of no incident; although, there were three witches who recognized the *Playwitch* group as they entered the lobby. They gasped loudly and almost ran in front of Shagswell. "Oh, Lord Shagswell!" one of them exclaimed, as her eyes shined with glee. "We're your absolute fans! We're so lucky to meet you in person! Can we get your autograph, please?"

They started to press closer to him, but suddenly there was a very stern Yamamoto standing in front of them. "Not so close, please," she warned them softly. The woman who first spoke up was about to retort in protest when Shagswell placed a hand on Yamamoto's shoulder.

"Thank you, Miss Yamamoto," he said formally and gave her shoulder a light yet firm squeeze. He then bestowed the women a dazzling smile. "I would love to, my dears. Although, I do need some room for me to see your lovely faces. It just wouldn't do if I can't see them, would it? Now, what are your names again?"

Yamamoto stepped aside as Shagswell talked with them for a while and gave them his signature as a quill and several pieces of parchment quickly appeared in his hand. She did watch them closely, though, just in case. Thankfully they really were just fans, as they giggled and chatted with him, and she sensed no danger from them.

When they left, Shagswell turned to Yamamoto and smiled, yet she felt that there was something else with him. She decided not to ask him about it right now as the editor called out to them as the group walked to the antique elevators.

"Thankfully all our rooms are beside each other," Miterhouse remarked as the charmed elevator opened to their floor. "At least we'll be together in some way. Will you be

all right, Irika?"

"Yes, thank you," she replied, and they dispersed to their own rooms. They needed to rest and refresh themselves before the dinner started, which would be in a few hours. "I will be fine."

"If there's anything, just Floo me," Miterhouse said. She gave Shagswell a sidelong glance before she leaned closer and whispered in Yamamoto's ear. "He likes to play tricks sometimes, and such a teaser. I know that he will not do anything uncouth, but he does like to kid around every now and then."

"Thank you," Yamamoto said. She reached her room and the door, which recognized the personal locking spell the front desk gave her and opened immediately. With a final nod to the editor, she went in and closed the door.

She took a deep breath and went still for a few minutes as she adjusted herself to the room. Admittedly, she found the place absolutely breathless. In the center was the four-poster bed with a sheer cream curtain drawn down. The floor was lushly carpeted in a dark rose color, and the walls decorated in a lighter hue. A huge mahogany wardrobe was placed in one wall with a dresser across it. Walking to one small door, she found out that it was the bathroom, while the third door was clearly the connecting door to Shagswell's room. This was certainly more opulent than her own simple apartment.

The connecting door knocked softly, and when she opened it, she saw Shagswell. He had already removed his outer robe, which showed his simple dark gray long-sleeved shirt, fit snugly to his trim body. "May I come in?" he asked. Yamamoto stepped aside to let him pass.

He slowly walked in, and his face was deep in thought as though he was deciding a way to speak out. He then turned to her and took a deep breath. "Irika, I thank you for what you did awhile ago," he began, "but I do believe you need not be so stern with them. Surely you would not be like that during the actual tour events."

Yamamoto narrowed her eyes, but her voice was calm and soft. "It is my job to be always aware for you and your safety. I cannot chance anything that is potentially dangerous. I understand you want to mingle with your... fans, but I will not allow them to press so closely to you when it is possible for someone to just plunge a knife into your body." She slightly arched an eyebrow at him. "I could place a certain distance from you, but not more than an arm's length, if my close presence makes you uncomfortable."

Shagswell shook his head quickly. "No! No! I didn't mean it that way." He sighed. "I'm sorry, my dear. I guess that I'm really not used to having someone watch over me all the time. Let's do this: why don't we think of a plan on how to do this... bodyguarding. That way, you can do your job, and I can attend to the tour without hassle. Agreed?"

"Very well," she said, nodding slightly. "I would suggest having Miss Miterhouse with us, just so she will know what we are going to do."

Shagswell then smiled, rubbing his hands together. "Good! I could treat you out to lunch then!"

"Huh?" she said, a little bit surprised. The man was confusing. One moment he was serious, she almost thought that they'd be having a real argument, but suddenly he's inviting for lunch?

"Food! Surely, Irika, you might be hungry already? Don't worry, I'll take care of everything. I'll tell Samara in a little while. I'll knock on your door after, shall we say, ten minutes?" It was so fast that she could only nod. He patted her cheek. "Brilliant then! I'll see you in a while." With that he went to the door and winked at her as he closed it.

Yamamoto stood there for a few more moments, dumbfounded. *What just happened?*, she thought. She sighed in resignation and shook her head as she turned to take out her luggage and enlarge them. Very well, ten minutes it was.

The Game Plan

Chapter 5 of 7

It's the night before the tour proper, and they think of a way to keep Shagswell safe at all times. Are you sure you don't like red?

"I told you he was sneaky."

Miterhouse whispered to Yamamoto as Shagswell chatted with the waitress. They sat in a cozy corner in the castle's large dining area, where instead of the traditional long table, several smaller tables were placed around the room. The setting was perfect for smaller groups of people.

"He pulled a fast one on you, didn't he?" she said with a gentle smile. She nodded knowingly when Yamamoto agreed. "He's like that sometimes. You wouldn't know whether he would be serious at one point then suddenly fooling around in another. No real harm done, dear, you'll get used to him. He's being doing that to me for a long time now."

Yamamoto nodded again, taking comfort in the editor's words. It was not much of an issue really, but she was actually ready for a long argument when the man conceded so quickly. She thought it would have gone on longer. She forced herself to relax. This was a meal after all, and a free one at that.

"Thank you," Shagswell murmured to the waitress as she took their orders and walked away. He then turned to the women in front of him, smiling widely. "So, ladies! How are we to go about this?"

"As long as you let her do her work, Orion," Miterhouse said, wagging a finger at him. "She's going to have to be present in all of the activities for the next three days here. I don't want you pouting and complaining. And don't give me that look too!" she said when Shagswell gave her the same innocent look as he did before.

"I'm not complaining, Samara," he replied, taking a sip from his glass. "It's just that I'm concerned that I would look unapproachable."

"Not really, Lord Shagswell," Yamamoto said. "I've also asked Miss Miterhouse about having extra security in here as well. I do believe that fans will allow a bit of inconvenience if it means they would get to see you. They will understand." They paused when the waitress came back with a floating tray behind her. Their food was then placed down in front of them.

"Exactly," Miterhouse said and started to cut into her tenderloin steak. "So what if there's one woman constantly hovering around you, Orion? I thought you like those things."

"This is different, Samara. My life is on the line," Shagswell said, spearing his fork into his salad. He turned to Yamamoto, who was delicately eating some grilled fish. "How is your food, Irika?"

"It's delicious, thank you," she replied, looking at her dish. Her grilled fillet of salmon with lemon cream sauce was really good. It was a far cry from her usual fare of rice balls and sautéed vegetables. She never knew that fish could be seasoned in this manner.

They finally agreed on the plan as the meal progressed. Yamamoto will be around Shagswell at all times, but she will not be wearing her uniform in order to blend in with the rest of the crowd. This will give her a bit of anonymity as well as a chance to sweep through the crowd, looking for who was a likely suspect.

"What will happen if you *do* finally manage to capture the culprit?" Miterhouse asked curiously. They were now on dessert, and they ordered a cheese platter and some fruit.

"They will be questioned, then subsequently charged of course," the young woman replied. "Attempted murder if we catch them while on the act, though, I don't want things to go that far. I'd have to investigate again on the letters Lord Shagswell received. If we can manage to trace it to them and prove it that it really is them then we can do other steps on it."

"But if they see me with you always, don't you think they'll just wait until the tour ends and then take that opportunity to kill me instead? You might never get off this assignment, my dear," Shagswell said to Yamamoto, and his eyes twinkled a bit. The thought of having her always with him didn't sound bad at all.

"So you are suggesting to put yourself up for bait?" Miterhouse said, giving him a slightly incredulous look. "I don't want you playing hero, Orion. You've done enough of that already."

Enough of what, Yamamoto wondered. She forced herself on the topic at hand. "You have a point, Lord Shagswell," she said. "But remember we're dealing with a fanatic here. Part of a stalker's profile is their persistence. I could put a wall around you, and they'll find a way to break through it nonetheless. No, I don't think my presence will be much of a deterrent. You are too much of a focus for whoever threatened you that everything else is either secondary or non-existent at all."

Shagswell sighed. "All right, I give up. We'll do it your way," he said, and raised up his hands in mock surrender.

Miterhouse clapped happily. "Finally! You saw the light. I offer a toast then: to the success of the tour and Orion's safety."

"Hear, hear," Shagswell fervently agreed as their glasses clinked together. He then noticed that Yamamoto used her water glass and that her wineglass was empty. "Irika, I thought you had your wine."

"I don't drink alcohol while on duty," the young woman simply replied, drinking her water. Miterhouse giggled while Shagswell sighed again in exasperation.

That night after dinner, it was quiet, and Yamamoto took the opportunity to relax. After her bath, she idly sharpened her sword, running a whetstone along the sharp blade. The light grating sound was crooning music to her ears, and her mind was calm as she did her work.

There was a knock on the connecting door, and she blinked a few times before sheathing her sword and approaching it. She saw Shagswell, already in his sleeping robes, his head cocked to one side. "First question," he quickly said before she could speak. "Are you off duty?"

"Well, yes," she answered slowly, not knowing why he would ask that.

He then gave her a bright smile. "Good then! So *now* would you please have a glass of wine with me?"

"Oh," she said, pausing for a while. Then she shrugged. "Very well, sir."

"Finally!" he said. He then swung his arm from behind him and handed her a wineglass already half-full with red. "I thought you'd refuse again; my arm was getting tired."

She sighed, but took the glass and gave a small sip. "Thank you," she said, feeling the sharp liquid slid down her throat.

"You're welcome," Shagswell replied, smiling. *Very welcome*, he thought as he gazed at her. She wore a light blue kimono that served as her sleeping robe. Her hair also was let down, softly framing her face. It made her look softer and all the more lovely.

He was glad he persevered. Even during the dinner she would not take wine, and for some reason that made him want to see her have one even just a little bit. She was too formal sometimes and he really wanted to put her at ease with him. He leaned against the doorframe, enjoying the sight of her while she drank. "So, nervous about tomorrow?"

She shook her head, her long hair swung slightly behind her as she moved. "I am ready," she replied. "I believe we covered everything that needs to be covered. We'll have to see tomorrow then."

He shook his head, giving her a bemused smile. "You are quite the remarkable woman," he said. "I've never seen someone so composed and sure of herself."

She inclined her head to one side, acknowledging his compliment. "I have to be, or I make a mistake. I have your life to protect, and I cannot ignore that duty. I would not have the courage to face myself in the morning if I knew I did less than what I can do."

"Spoken like a trooper, like they say," he said. He was about to say more when his door knocked. He furrowed his brows. "I wonder who that is," he murmured.

He padded to the door and peeked through the eyehole. "Ah, it's you!" he said, and opened it to reveal Miterhouse' secretary.

"Good evening, Lord Shagswell," she said, who blushed when she saw him. She gave him several sheets of parchment. "Here are the papers you requested from Miss Miterhouse."

"Thank you, Lavinia," he said, taking them. "Would you like anything to drink?"

"Oh! No, thank you. I need to be up early tomorrow."

"Pity. Well, goodnight then, my dear."

"Good night, sir," the girl said. When she saw Yamamoto at the connecting door, she blinked in surprise, but then apparently remembered why the Hit Wizard was there. She inclined her head to her as well, then left.

"Here they are," he said as he went back to Yamamoto, shuffling through the parchments. "All the letters my most 'ardent' admirer sent me. I'm quite surprised you'll be having an evening read with this. It's not exactly a bedtime story."

Yamamoto gave a faint smile. "I'm not looking for one. I might find a clue in these. Don't worry, I don't dream."

"You have some Dreamless Sleeping Draught?"

"No, I just don't dream," she said. She took the letters from him and began to skim through them.

Shagswell slightly frowned. "I'm not sure I follow."

Yamamoto looked up from her reading. "I don't dream. I've been trained to suppress my dreams. Or rather, to not remember them if I do have one."

He was flabbergasted. He stared at her. "*Trained?* You've been trained?"

"Yes, since I was a child. My family has trained me for magical combat, aside from my brothers. Dreams are very distracting for us."

He was speechless. She looked very serious, and realized that what she said was true. He couldn't believe that any one would try to stop dreaming! He quickly forced a calm nod. "Is that so? Very well, I guess I shouldn't keep you. Good night then, Irika."

She smiled as he took the now empty wineglass from her. "Good night, Lord Shagswell. See you tomorrow. Thank you again for the wine."

"My absolute pleasure," he said, giving her a charming smile. As soon as he closed the door, though, he frowned. That casual remark on her not being able to dream was a little disturbing, and he worried for her. Who was this young lady?

First Day Tour

Chapter 6 of 7

It's the first day of the tour, and Irika starts her duty. A gatecrasher, an observation, and a realization.

Yamamoto did not realize just how popular Lord Shagswell was until the first day of the tour. She was quite amazed at the number of people that turned out, most especially the women. Of course each section in the magazine and some of the writers had their following, but it was Shagswell that had the most numbers.

Shagswell was like a Muggle movie star as he waved to his fans, walking to the tent that was assigned to him. And he kept on waving even as he walked across the wide field that was behind the castle, where the tour was being held. There were not just a few screams and cries as they called out his name. Thankfully, all of the guests and patrons of the castle hotel were of the wizarding world, so there was no danger of Muggles discovering the event. Still, some precautions were used with Disillusionment Charms and similar spells.

She was behind him the whole time, her eyes and ears fully alert. Her skin seemed to prickle as she tried to sense any Dark magic being used, even the simplest of hexes. She was calm as she walked behind him, frequently scanning the crowd, with her eyes softly glowing as she activated her ability. It was organized chaos, as the women slowly lined up in front of the table given to Shagswell to have his autograph signing.

"Anything wrong?" Shagswell whispered to her as he reached his seat and sat down.

She shook her head. "I don't feel anything. Just smile and sign; I'll take care of it." She could see some of the security mingling about in the crowd and gave a mental nod of satisfaction. At least she would not be alone here. She imagined she would have to yank Shagswell to the ground and place a Stunning Spell on whoever would try to lunge at him while the others would quickly surround the person.

She carefully watched the women queuing up for his signature and admittedly was amused with their reactions. Some were awed and stupefied at meeting him, others were nervous and giggly. And not a few of them had crimson faces when they finally met the man. Yet throughout the whole affair, Shagswell kept his cool. Every time he would smile, the ladies would gush and titter over him, almost speechless. *This is something*, she thought, *Lockhart doesn't even come close to this man*

At the corner of her eye, she noticed Miterhouse's assistant busily going around, doing errands and whatever the editor requested. The girl had tenacity, though, she could see that she was already a bit harried. When she looked their way, Yamamoto gave her an encouraging smile, and the girl waved back and sped off again. She was about to turn her attention back to the line when there was a sudden flash of light, followed by a smell of ozone. Someone was taking pictures of Shagswell.

"What in the--?" Shagswell almost cursed, shaking the afterimage away from his eyes. Yamamoto meanwhile blinked rapidly and looked where it came from and saw a garishly dressed blond woman widely grinning at what she saw.

"This is fantastic!" she cried, clapping her hands excitedly. "Absolutely delish! Definitely front page material."

Shagswell almost frowned when he saw her. "Miss Skeeter," he said in a polite voice, nodding at her. Yamamoto could see that he was none too fond of the newcomer. She intently looked at the lady named Skeeter. She definitely looked like stalker material, but she couldn't be so sure. She slowly moved closer, careful not to put any attention on her.

"Lord Shagswell! How good to see you! It's been such a long time," she looked around, almost leering at the queue. "Well! Such a gathering here. Are you going to have your pick tonight then?"

Before Shagswell could retort, though, a very irritated Miterhouse appeared behind Skeeter. "Rita," she said in a controlled voice. "Fancy meeting you here."

"Samara," Skeeter crooned, turning around and smiling at her without missing a beat. She playfully pinched the editor's cheek. "I commend you for your tour's first day. And the fact that *Playwitch* is catering to only a niche market after all."

Miterhouse returned a smile that could melt steel. "Why thank you, Rita," she purred. One eyebrow went up as she regarded her coolly. "The people here certainly are greater than *your* numbers during the *Daily Prophet's* own tour last year, isn't it?"

Skeeter's eyes narrowed in near anger, her nose flaring. Then she quickly calmed herself, smiling sarcastically. "I wouldn't know. I had an assignment during those days. Come on, Hubert!" she screeched to her photographer, as she suddenly turned and stomped away, almost dragging her assistant away from the tent.

Miterhouse covered her mouth, keeping the giggles in. She winked at Shagswell, who gave her the thumbs-up, and then walked to another tent. "Thank Merlin she's gone," Shagswell sighed, continuing to give his autograph. Yamamoto merely nodded, thinking nothing more of the woman. At least she's not a suspect, for now.

Aside from that, there was no further incident for the remainder of the night. Soon it was midnight, signaling the end of the tour's first day. When all the guests and attendants left and the field cleaned up and prepared for the next day, Miterhouse gathered everyone together. "This is great!" she cried, smiling widely. "First day and we've exceeded our forecast! We're on a roll, people!"

Everyone cheered at that; even Yamamoto gave a few claps. After a few more reminders and instructions, they all called it a night. Shagswell and Yamamoto walked with the others back to their rooms. Yamamoto placed a finger on her lips when she saw Shagswell's questioning look. She'd be telling him what she thought about today, but not with the other staff around. When they reached their room they heard Miterhouse's voice. "Orion, wait!" she called out. She quickly went near them and placed a hand on his arm while looking at Yamamoto. "Well?" she asked curiously.

Yamamoto tilted her head to the side. "In here," she said softly, entering her room with them following behind. She locked and warded the door. She then leaned against the dresser, crossing her arms as she recalled the last few hours. "I didn't sense nor see anything out of the ordinary," she reported. "Although, that doesn't mean our special guest wasn't there. They could have just been observing us for the time being. I do have to admit I almost suspected this Skeeter woman."

"Wouldn't it be a pleasure if she was?" Orion said, rolling his eyes at the mention of her name. "She put me in a bad light when she wrote an article about me. I almost thought I'd lose a lot of my readers when that was published."

"I regret ever asking her," Miterhouse added, sighing loudly. She then gave a naughty grin. "Did you see her face, though? I thought she'd blow her overly bleached head off. Couldn't you take her, Irika? Say it's just for 'questioning', then book her the moment she opens her filthy mouth!"

Yamamoto gave a faint smile, shaking her head. "Crashing into your event is not evidence, Miss Miterhouse. I'll keep an eye on her, though, in case she does return. In the meanwhile, I guess we have to conclude that everything is fine, for now."

"And three more weeks to go," Miterhouse sighed theatrically. Then she smiled and patted Shagswell's cheek. "I'm glad nothing happened. I'll see you tomorrow then." He took her hand and kissed it. "Until tomorrow, Samara," he said.

"I, too, will retire for this evening," Yamamoto said with a quick bow. "Good night, Lord Shagswell."

He looked at her, a faint smile on his lips. "Wouldn't you care for some small chat, first, my dear? I'm sure we'll have something to talk about in common."

"Thank you, but no," she replied with a little tilt of her head. "There are still the letters that I need to study. I'm hoping I'd be able to create a profile out of it."

Shagswell looked at her for a few quiet moments. "Don't you ever relax, Irika?" he said softly. "Surely you need not to be so...earnest about this."

"I am a Hit Witch, Lord Shagswell," she replied. "I *have* to be earnest in every assignment, or else I may overlook something that could jeopardize the safety of the assignment and whoever I'm tasked to protect. Besides, to do less is a bit of an insult to you, don't you think? It's *your* life I'm protecting, after all."

He gave a chuckle then sighed. "Your words touch me, my sweet. Very well, I'll see you on the morrow. Good night, Irika." With a naughty grin, he quickly yet gently took her hand and placed a kiss. He just as quickly let go before she could react. "Sweet dreams," he purred. As he closed the door to his own room, he was amused by the look of surprise on her face. "You're truly an enigma," he murmured softly.

Premonition

Chapter 7 of 7

Letters, a surprise, and an unexpected guest.

It didn't make any sense.

It was a beautiful morning, but she was in her room reading the letters. They were now in Belgium, resting a bit before the next day of the tour. Yamamoto was sorely tempted to create origami out of the damned parchments. She had a general profile of this stalker, but trying to find clues as to where and how they would strike was another thing entirely. They were now halfway through the tour, but so far this person hadn't made their presence felt yet, not even a shadow. Miterhouse was getting highly anxious, but Shagswell was a bit humorous about it. "Maybe they couldn't get tickets for the tour's duration," he joked one time.

She read one of the letters again, still disturbed from the words written on the parchment.

Darling,

You thought that I could keep away from you, but, my dear, I cannot. I will not. I know you would not keep away from me as well; that's how strong our love is for each other. I shudder to think that other women would pine for you when I am the one who truly loves you. I am the only one who has the right to love you. It would be painful to think that you would disagree, wouldn't it? No, you won't. You are my heart, my life. Betrayal is not part of your make-up, nor is mine.

She rubbed her eyes, tired from reading. She could not go on anymore. The next few words showed an insanity that was chilling. Whoever wrote the letters spoke in a calm manner and almost casually. The writer forced assumptions, giving them as fact. The letters after this just degenerated into outright threats.

No one deserves you than me, and only me. Your death by my hand will be proof of it. My love will be the only thing you will remember.

Love, indeed. The person was clearly insane. Yet, she could not determine if this person really was a woman. Could it be a man, bent on revenge? Despite Shagswell's assurances that he knows no one who would hold a grudge against him, what if there was still the possibility that someone out there saw him as a rival, or a downright usurper of a woman's affections?

All will know that I am the one who finally caught you...

My beauty surpasses those twits you will see at the tour...

All I ask is for you to be with me...

No, it couldn't be a man based from these words. Delusional and narcissistic, with obsessive qualities; that is what she saw in the letters. No wonder the editor was alarmed.

Also, the person was smart enough, as well, to hide whatever that would physically describe them, not even the color of their eyes. She frowned, finding that odd. She would think that an overzealous fan would describe their best feature, in order to impress their idol, but she found none here, but only mentioned about their "beauty". What did it mean?

"Kuzoul!" she swore softly and rubbed the fatigue from her eyes. She was about to throw the parchments into the air in a fit of irritated whimsy when there was a knock on the door.

She quickly placed the parchments back in her file and went up to get the door. She saw the editor's assistant when she opened it. "Yes?" she asked gently.

"Miss Miterhouse would like you to see the set-up," she said. She blushed, looking down and wringing her hands. "Um, I also wanted to tell Lord Shagswell but, but..."

"You're too shy?" she finished for her. This time the event would be held in Belgium's biggest Quidditch pitch. They would have to Apparate towards there. When the girl nodded, she smiled. "Alright, we'll be down. I'll call on him. Thank you." With a final nod to her, Yamamoto went to the connecting door and knocked.

"Lord Shagswell?" she called out. Hearing no answer, she tried the knob and found it unlocked. Slightly wary now, she opened the door. "Lord Shagswell?" she called again. The room was empty when she went in, but she could hear water splashing from the bath chamber and surmised he was bathing. She went to it and knocked loudly on the door.

"Yes?" came the muffled reply.

She took a deep breath, relieved that he was really taking a bath. "Ms. Miterhouse wants us to see the set-up for tomorrow's event," she said loudly.

"What? I can't hear you."

"Miterhouse wants us to Apparate to the Quidditch pitch!" she almost shouted. Was it because of his shower that he could not hear her?

"What?"

Yamamoto took a deep breath, forcing herself to relax. She decided to open the door and go inside a bit. She felt the warm mist kiss her face when she entered, but she still kept near the door. "Lord Shagswell," she said as loudly as she could without actually shouting. "Miterhouse wants us to see the set-up."

"Samara wants us to what, again?" he replied, the water still splashing around him.

She wanted to scream to the high heavens, but instead took two steps further inside. She tried to see anything in the generated steam from the bath, hoping that the shower curtain was blocking him, but from the thickness of the steam, she thought not. Unfortunately.

Then she heard the water stop. She sighed, relieved that he could finally hear her. She quickly spoke up before he turned it on again. "Miterhouse wants us to see the set-up down---AH!"

Shagswell suddenly appeared from behind the screen, naked and dripping wet. His silvery hair was streaming down his back, with some strands over his chest. She quickly turned around and closed her eyes, but not before she saw the broad chest and the fine hairs that draped across its expanse, and his trim V-shaped torso. There was not an ounce of fat to be seen, as much as she could unfortunately see.

"Why, Irika," his voice rumbled softly. She thought she heard a note of laughter in it. "I never knew you were that curious."

"I was NOT," she emphatically said, her hands clenched into fists. "You could not hear me so I was forced to come inside. Miterhouse wants us at the Quidditch pitch. I will wait for you outside." With that, she abruptly left the bathroom and out of the whole hotel room entirely. She did not hear the chuckle when she almost slammed the door behind her.

A few minutes later, Shagswell exited his room, already dry and dressed up. He regarded Yamamoto who was leaning against the wall with her arms crossed over her chest. "Forgive me, Irika," he said with a smile. "I really did not understand what you said. I was just teasing you awhile ago."

With her poker face back in place, she nodded. "It's alright," she said. She stood straight and walked beside him as they went outside the hotel to Apparate.

"Any luck with the letters?" he asked

"Not yet," was the reply. "I know I'm missing something, but it still eludes me. I need to further study the letters later tonight."

"Would you like some help?" he offered. He knew that almost every night she would return to her room to pore over the letters, trying to look for a clue. He figured that she would need some privacy to do her work and did not disturb her during those times.

She looked at him for a few moments then nodded. "Yes, thank you. I would guess that you'd give me a new angle into finding who's after you. You are the target after all."

Shagswell laughed at that. "Good point! Very well, we'll brainstorm tonight!" As they reached the Apparition Point, they then Apparated over to the Quidditch arena.

"Oh, Orion, Irika! Come! You'll be stationed around here," Miterhouse called when they arrived at the Quidditch arena. She quickly jogged over to them and pulled them to one spot. "Your tent will be here, and the line will start over there."

Yamamoto looked around, studying the surroundings. It was a typical stadium structure: a huge depression in the ground surrounded by high benches for the spectators. It was similar to the stadium used during the Quidditch World Cup, but since the local team used this for practice, it was much smaller. Yet it still gave Yamamoto some concern.

"Do we have security for this? It seems like a large place."

"Oh, yes, the local wizarding police have been informed, and they'll lend us some of their personnel," Miterhouse replied. She was interrupted when her assistant called her.