

The Tonbo Sukeban

The word 'sukeban' is Japanese, meaning 'delinquent girl,' and was used to refer to a subculture of girl gangs in 1970's Japan, formed due to yakuza, or Japanese gangs, refusing to accept female members. They were characterized by their modified high school uniforms of long skirts and cropped shirts, and participated in shoplifting, violence, and other criminal activities.

Miyako knows that having everyone present for the induction of a new member is tradition, but she can't help wondering if it's really necessary. Maybe it's an intimidation tactic. If it is, it certainly seems to be working on this slip of a girl who stands before the whole of Tonbo Delinquent Girls' Club.

Her hair is short and choppy around her ears, a bland black, but the roundness of her face and eyes remind Miyako of Bambi. The cold spring rain soaks the cement she stands on, leaking through the basement windows, and the short sleeves of her school uniform reveal the gooseflesh on her arms. Her hands are fisted, body trembling in small bursts, whether from nerves or the chill, Miyako is unsure. Either way, this new girl seems extraordinarily... ordinary. Maybe there's something hiding underneath her pixie bangs, but Miyako wouldn't bet on it.

Legs dangling over the edge of the old pool table she sits on, she eyes the new girl. All in all, if she counts the dogs, their gang has eleven members; without the dogs, nine. Soon to be ten, she supposes.

The Sukeban, Izumi, flicks the butt of her cigarette to the ground, quickly crushing the orange embers under the solid heel of her mary-janes with a loud *snap*, and everyone's attention is on her.

“Girls,” she begins, elbow resting on the shoulder of the new girl, “this is Aoi Yoshida. She wants to become a Tonbo, and I said she could, on the condition she brings us a good enough gift. Let’s see what she brought us, huh?”

The Sukeban’s grin is sharp, dangerous as she drapes herself over Aoi’s shoulders and not for the first time, Miyako wonders if the lipstick the older girl wears is actually blood from her ex-boyfriends. She wouldn’t be surprised if that were the case. Eventually, however, her curiosity about Aoi’s ‘present’ beats her suspicion of the eighteen year-old Sukeban.

Aoi kneels, short skirt sliding up her thighs as she digs into her bag for *something*, and Miyako makes a note that Aoi’ll need to get a longer one that goes down to her shins, like the rest of the Tonbo. With the way Izumi is smiling down at her, something of a crazed excitement in her eyes, she knows Aoi will become a Tonbo today. The Sukeban is already too interested in her to let her go, to have her be snatched up by some other girls or worse, the Yakuza. So, Miyako guesses the question is, why does the Sukeban think she’s so interesting?

Eventually, she pulls up a plastic shopping bag and scatters its contents across the cold concrete. There are all sorts of goodies in there, all of the girls leaning in closer to see what the wisp brought, but Miyako’s attention is truly caught by the sound of metal (good metal, not the shit she and the other girls have in their knives) clang against the floor. Because that is absolutely absurd, but somehow-

“Is that a tanto?” Miyako asks. She isn’t sure why she did, it obviously is one, with an ancient red leather grip, the blade narrow and a bit too long to be a knife, but too short to be a sword. It looks a bit dull, and there are greasy remnants of fingerprints across the metal, like this new girl just grabbed the weapon on impulse, not knowing what it really was.

Aoi just shrugs, an unsure look crossing her face, and she shifts on her feet like a wobbling rock, taking a deep breath before she speaks up.

“Maybe?” she responds. “I- my dad was working at an, uh, an auction, I think, and he was gonna sell it but I- I took it.”

Miyako has so many questions, and stalks forward off the pool table with the intent to get the wisp’s focus for answers when Sayuri beats her to the punch.

“And these?” Sayuri asks, holding up- sticks?

Aoi turns to face the girl so fast her neck cracks audibly, feet clumsy as she swivels in her squat, and Miyako can just imagine the grimace Youko is making behind her at the noise. Sayuri’s gaze is blazing, something so hot it freezes, like stars bursting into space, something that is terrifying even to the Sukeban at times. Aoi, however, does not flinch. The Wisp seems to have found her ground.

“I challenged a ta-tattoo artist to a game of cards. I was- I was a better cheater than him, so I got his tebori,” she says, and Miyako can see it.

Someone with maybe not enough talent despite his traditional training in tattooing, who needs the money, who is willing to scam it out of a little girl, who doesn’t realize the little girl has a brain three times quicker and hands four times more slippery than he does, who loses his one source of income on a gamble. Who loses his life to a girl who, more than anything, loves to win.

“I’ve never been much of an artist, or fighter,” Aoi starts, “so these are all yours, if you want them.”

Her hands fiddle with each other in her lap, clearly a nervous tic. They’ll need to train her out of that habit, can’t have her giving away vulnerability like that. Miyako finally resumes her

steps towards Aoi to take the tanto from the ground, inspecting her dark reflection in the blade, and remembers then, that this is an induction. The Sukeban is watching her, Aoi, and Sayuri with obvious curiosity, something thrumming beneath her skin, something exciting and dangerous and new. The Sukeban is waiting.

“I say she join,” Sayuri speaks up, tebori clutched reverently in her hands, eyes focused on the small sticks, enchanted with the tattoos she could make with them. Miyako knows Sayuri doesn’t give a rat’s ass about Aoi, but for the tebori, Sayuri is ready to bet on her. Not really a surprise from the acidic girl.

Then, the decision rests on Miyako’s shoulders. She can feel the eyes of the Tonbo on her, sizing her up much like the Wisp, and Miyako knows her answer. Has known her answer since the Sukeban shepherded Aoi down the stairs. It’s not like she ever had a choice to begin with- Miyako does what the Sukeban wants, what is best for their gang. And this girl, she feels like a good decision.

“She joins,” Miyako decides. Izumi smiles down at her, all teeth and thunder, and Miyako can see in her peripheral Aoi turning once again.

Kyo is standing in the corner of Miyako’s kitchen, holding the still-growling Adzuki by his collar while she pants from the effort of having to wrestle him back from Aoi, Kaede doing her best to help hold back the 60 kilogram dog. Sayuri is swearing up a muttered storm, the half-completed dragonfly tattoo that she’s been making on Izumi’s back is now bleeding from the screwed up poke she was doing when Aoi bumped Adzuki and Adzuki tore open Aoi’s arm, and Miyako can see the way Izumi is clenching her jaw so she *also* doesn’t start yelling. The gang all

knows Izumi is in charge, the only ones who might fight her for the title of Sukeban aren't here, but it's nice of her to put up a front, she supposes. Whatever floats Izumi's boat.

Miyako ignores them, because despite everything she wants to be doing right now, like messing around with her cool new sword until she can actually use it in a fight, despite wanting to be literally anywhere that isn't her shitty house, she told the Sukeban she would watch the newbie, so Aoi is, unfortunately, Miyako's responsibility.

"Aoi," she says quietly, getting the crying girl's attention. "Follow me, let's take care of that, yeah?"

Aoi bites her lip and looks to the ground, but concedes. At her nod, Miyako grabs her uninjured arm, tugging her towards the bathroom. She thinks there are some clean bandages under there.

The bathroom is small, with a cubic shower to the left of the door, the sink and cabinet to the right, and the toilet in the back. Cold tile greets her toes, another reason she *hates* this house, but she continues anyways, briefly letting go of Aoi to pull down the lid of the toilet for her to sit on. Miyako squats to pull out bandages, a cotton swab, a wash cloth, a plastic bowl she keeps in the bathroom for exactly this purpose, and Oronine H antibacterial cream from the cupboard. She pauses for a second to look at Aoi's injury again, then closes the cabinet.

"Hold your arm out over the shower, okay? So the blood goes down the drain and not on the floor," Miyako tells Aoi, working on filling up the bowl with warm water. When it's full, she puts it on the ground next to the shower and sits at Aoi's feet, washcloth soaking in the water.

"This, is gonna hurt, okay? But on the bright side, at least you don't need stitches."

When Miyako gets the go ahead in the form of a hiccuped 'What?', she starts to wipe around the sluggishly bleeding bite. Miyako really can't help her wince at the sight of it. Part of

the skin has been ripped off her arm, muscle barely visible underneath the clotting blood, but as far as she can see, there's no rip in the muscle, so at least there's that. She isn't sure when, but Aoi grabbed her hand at some point and is using it like a stress ball.

The washcloth is rough, old and worn from years of use, but Miyako is as gentle with it as she can be. With the blood surrounding the bite gone, it doesn't look quite so bad, maybe three centimeters across at its widest. When she moves on to clean the muscle before the blood can clot and trap an infection in the wound, Aoi's grip tightens painfully, but Miyako ignores it the best she can, just acknowledging Aoi's pain with the occasional squeeze.

"Adzuki really got ya, huh Aoi?"

Slowly, like her head is full of cotton and just as light, Aoi nods, expression blank as her sobs seem to stop.

"Yeah," she replies.

Miyako frowns at the girl's tears, cautiously lifting her hands to Aoi's face, gently holding her cheeks and wiping away her tears with her thumbs.

"Hey, it's gonna be okay, alright? It's gonna hurt for a minute, and ache for a good while after that, but I'm going to clean it up and put a bandage on it so it doesn't get worse. You following?"

Aoi nods again.

"Alright."

Miyako finally deems it washed enough, and grabs the antibacterial cream. Lightly she rubs it over and into the wound, hushing Aoi at each whimper she lets out, whispering promises that the pain will be over soon. She grabs the cotton swab off of the counter, and presses it down onto the injury. The Wisp started crying again at some point.

“Wisp, you can’t let the others see you cry like this. They’ll take advantage of it, ya know. You’re already new, at the lowest rung of the ladder- if they see you like this, they’ll kick you out like a baby bird and leave ya to die. Get it?”

When Aoi doesn’t respond to her, she doesn’t push the issue just yet. There’s still plenty of daylight to learn. She does, however, actually need the Wisp’s attention for this part.

“Aoi,” Miyako begins, turning back to look at the girl in the face for the first time since she began cleaning. Her eyes are still wet, her cheeks have a red flush from crying, and Miyako can’t look away. .

She’s beautiful, Miyako thinks, seeing her eyes crystallize in the flickering bathroom light, skin pale but full of life, lips pink like Amaterasu’s robes. *She’s like a ruby*.

“Yes?”

Miyako is drawn back to reality by Aoi’s voice, and quickly recalls what she was going to say.

“I need you to hold this down for me for a minute, so I can wrap the bandages to hold it in place.”

Aoi lets go of Miyako’s hand to do so, and Miyako tries to feel nothing about the loss of contact. She wraps the bandage quickly and quietly so she can get out of the bathroom as fast as possible. Miyako’s just squeamish, that’s all. Lots of blood, and muscle is kinda gross to look at. She guesses.

“There, all done,” Miyako tells Aoi. She dumps the now bloodied water down the drain, tossing the Oronine and bowl back into the cupboard. She stands and stretches, feeling her knees pop as she gets up so fast she’s a bit dizzy. “Now let’s get out of here so I can make some dinner. What do you think of some rice and mackerel?”

“...That sounds good,” Aoi replies. Miyako refuses to look at her as they leave.

Hikari Conbini is a shitty little convenience store, with flickering lights and a tile ceiling that leaks water when it rains, making the cement basement headquarters of Tonbo Delinquent Girls’ Club unfortunately damp. Lightly rusted bars crest the window like the waves of Southern Chigasaki Beach, the glass just as grey as the water, dirt and pavement rolling down from the street into the ground-set window box. A stout T.V. with paint (and blood) stained wood panelling is buzzing at a low volume, Ooka Echizen just loud enough to be heard over the customers thundering above in Old Lady Chinatsu’s shop. The basement smells like tobacco and books left to rot in a swimming pool, the only thing she could honestly say smells good down here is the drift of hot pork buns from above. Movie posters are scattered across the wall, Miyako’s favorite being the one for Sex and Fury.

Ike Reiko is posing with in a cream kimono on a green background, one sleeve slipped so far down her shoulder practically her entire tit is out, and she leans on her sword driven into the ground. Her hair, dark silk piled high on her head, has two metal barettes emerging from her bun. Meanwhile, Christina Lindberg, stark naked, arches her back with obvious pleasure behind her. Her lips are barely parted, pretty and cherry pink, dusty grey eyeshadow poignant against her pale cheeks, brushed by long, dark lashes. What Miyako would give to meet them, to be like them, to feel their fingers in her blonde hair, to soar in their warmth-

A hot sting draws her attention away from her favorite poster (no, she will not think about why it’s her favorite), and she hisses, reflexively darting her hand away from the pain to glare at the source.

Youko's thin eyebrows are raised, the cigarette she burned Miyako with (fucking *ow*) is drifting smoke into her maple red perm. Her feet kicked up on the the green of the pool table, loose, sweaty socks twitching a millisecond after her toes move, and way too fucking close to the bare skin of Miyako's waist. In comparison to Miyako's sturdy seat on the table, Youko is leaning back in her wooden chair, only the back two legs of it on the cold floor. God damn it, she was too busy looking at the poster and daydreaming, and now the new patch she *was* attempting to embroider for Aoi is littered with holes and messy, nonsensical stitches. Hell, she thinks she may have invented the newest, ugliest stitch in existence while think about Reiko and Christina.

"Were you even listening to me, Miyako? Or were you too busy being a fucking Lily Girl, oggling Ocho," Youko accuses, eyes narrowing at the girl in question, who really wishes she could stab Youko with her sewing needle without it dulling the point.

"I'm not a Lily Girl, Bitch" Miyako rebuffs, the response dull and fast, the words practiced and at home on her tongue. Not having a boyfriend doesn't make her a, a- well, it doesn't matter, because she isn't one. "Just thinkin' about what I'm doing for dinner. Probably snag a few meat buns and another package of matcha on my way out."

Youko hums, doubt burning in her brown eyes, the way magma shifts beneath the skin of the Earth, but decides to let sleeping dogs lie. She pulls her cigarette to her lips, embers glowing bright as she inhales the smoke, a deep breath before she exhales, hand not extending to offer Miyako a drag. It's been months since Youko has properly apologized for any of the shit she says, let alone a peace offering in a shared smoke. Shit like this.

"Don't grab too many, you'll need to re-size your uniform again."

Through the grey haze dominating the room, she eyeballs the broken neon sign set next to the stairs, the metal railing lined with stolen plushes and Christmas lights, the pearlescent

dragonfly graffitied on the wall almost seems to be fluttering its wings in lightspeed smears. She vaguely wonders how pissed the Sukeban would be if they were down a member. It's not like Youko's ever been particularly useful. More like a warm body for intimidation purposes. Like a pincushion for enemy weapons.

Pouting her red lips (specifically the dark, vibrant red she saw that pretty girl wearing in that Shiseido commercial, the one with 'Wavering Gaze' playing in the background), she looks down to her fucked up dragonfly. She's gonna have to either backtrack and reverse all the shitty stitches she made (awful), or she's going to have to ditch this section of cloth and thread and start from scratch (also awful, but slightly more awful than backtracking). Even worse, she's gonna do it while Youko bitches at her. Sighing, she cracks her knuckles and reaches into the table's pocket nearest to her, fishing out a thimble. At least it's not a bullion knot.

Miyako hardly hears the man's refusal before she's pulling the razor blade from the waist of her skirt, swiping at his wrist. He jerks back from the knife, letting go of Aoi's wrist quickly, giving her the chance to get between this shitbag and her friend. His eyes are wide, afraid, and as she raises the point to his throat, sees him freeze as he realizes she's dangerous, she wants to grin.

"She said 'No,'" Miyako tells him, her voice low, a dog growling a warning to *back off*. He looks ready to run, but then he remembers she's *just a girl*, and he's a grown man, why should he listen to her?

"Watch it, you bitch!" he yells, arm winding back to throw a punch at her face. She knows how much it'll hurt if it lands, so she really hopes this work. Flipping the knife to a backhand grip, she moves it in front of her face inches before his fist, and watches with grim

satisfaction as his knuckles crash into the metal, the blade slicing the skin between his fingers and his palm. He bleeds, he cries, he runs.

Aoi spends the night at Miyako's house, and although Aoi's smiles are a bit subdued, she puts it to the pedophile. They still manage to have a fun night, Miyako thinks.

The Sukeban is, quite frankly, being a stubborn bitch.

Don't get her wrong, Miyako likes Izumi, loves her even despite the whole aura of 'I will dissect you with my eyes and kill you with my lips,' but the leader of the Tonbo is refusing to listen to both her muscle, Miyako, and her second in command, Sayuri, nevermind the multiple warnings she's received from Kaede and Kyo. She just- it's like putting cotton balls in her ears wasn't enough so the Sukeban buried herself alive.

"Sukeban," Sayuri groans, "at this point we need to do something. When it was just Youko talking shit, whatever, she always does that, but seeing that Kyo heard her talking about taking you down to Hikaru and Nariko-"

"What would they even do, 'Yuri? What do they think they'll get away with?"

"Well, in Hikaru's words," Miyako said, "they want to 'see if your blood is as cold as your personality.'"

"How original of them. I'll be sure to tell them thanks for the compliment tomorrow."

"God damn it, Izumi!" Sayuri slams her hand into the small metal table they're sitting at, briefly drawing the attention of other customers of the cafe, but once they see Miyako's bleach-blond hair, Izumi's piercings, Sayuri's tattoos, and all of their long skirts, they decide to ignore the noise. Miyako thinks that's smart of them even if she really wants to try out the tanto hiding in her skirt.

“I know you think you’re on top of the world, and nobody smart would bother fucking with you because you’re, like, an evil genius, but Youko, despite being clever, is not that smart, and she’s getting her own moron mini-army in Hikaru, Nariko, and Ami. If you do nothing, and keep pretending things are fine, those four are going to kick your ass and then Tonbo Delinquent Girls’ Club will be run so far into the ground we’ll reach your fucking skeleton. Do you understand that, Izumi?”

The Sukeban just raises her eyebrow, like she’s asking ‘So what?’ Miyako knows it’s pissing her off, so she can’t imagine how much Sayuri feels like punching Izumi’s pretty pink lip gloss off her face after giving that whole speech to get nothing but an eyebrow. They glare at each other silently. Very uncomfortably. When Miyako sees Izumi’s hand start to dip to the waistline of her skirt, where the blonde knows the Sukeban keeps her razor blade, she decides it’s probably time to step in. Metaphorically, of course, she doesn’t want to get out of her chair and leave her delicious green tea or her sweet red bean buns.

“Alright,” Miyako sighs, “Let’s take it back a step. Sukeban. Izumi. You’re right to be confident in yourself, in your position. None of the Tonbo want to take you down. We trust your leadership. We trust you.”

Miyako pauses to see how the Sukeban is taking this (and to take another bite of her buns, god damn is it delicious). It seems to be well. Both her hands are at rest on the table, not reaching for her knife so that’s a good sign. And there seems to be a glimmer of pride in her eyes that wasn’t there when Sayuri was talking, so that’s good too. She’s been placated, at least.

That probably won’t last for long.

“However,” the blonde continues, and yup, there goes Izumi tightening her hands into fists, “Youko isn’t a Tonbo. I know you had hopes for her when you snagged her, but she isn’t

real gold, and you've been played for a fool. She had potential, potential you saw in me, saw in Sayuri. But, to be frank, she's too stupidly confident to realize she's about as useful as a stop sign in a dead end. That confidence makes her irresponsible, and bad at taking orders. She thinks she's too important to listen to others, and thinks that you-

Miyako pauses to wave her finger in the direction of an increasingly angry Izumi, noticing that Izumi actually has crumbs stuck on the corner of her mouth that she hasn't noticed in her rage.

"-are incompetent, because she can't stand that others might be considered more important than her. She can't stand not being the center of attention. Why do you think she actually participates in clubs at school, opposed to just leaving like the rest of us?"

"She's not wrong, Sukeban," Sayuri says, finally deciding to return to the conversation so Miyako can go back to being the quiet one and drinking her tea. "Unfortunately, her confidence makes her charismatic to people who don't really know her or anything at all, actually, which is why she's got Ami, Hikaru, and Nariko as groupies."

Sayuri slows herself down, like she's bracing herself to make impact with a concrete wall flying at 100 kilometers per hour, which is fair enough considering how Izumi has taken this news. She breathes in, holds for 5 seconds, breathes out, and decides to talk while Miyako takes another sip of her tea.

"None of the four girls have gotten their tattoos, either."

The world seems to freeze for a minute, as both Miyako and Izumi take in what that means. Miyako is suddenly grounded, the cool grasp of spring wind suddenly freezes her, her tea too earthy for her to handle, like she's been shackled in asphalt. It's one thing to say her theories, to put out what ideas are most likely, to assume that Youko is an underhanded moron. It's another

to hear that after having months of possibility, none of the four girls have spoken to Sayuri about getting tattooed. About officially becoming a Tonbo, bound by skin and blood.

The dragonfly on her upper right arm, hiding under her long sleeves, burns like frostbite.

(Aoi doesn't have a tattoo. But that's just because she's new, and a bit of wimp in terms of pain. Even though she joined months ago, she told Miyako she didn't feel like a real Tonbo yet. That's understandable, Miyako thinks. Aoi is a sweet girl, and sometimes, late at night, when her thoughts inevitably wander to the Wisp, Miyako doesn't understand why Aoi joined their gang. She doesn't seem to have the anger the rest of them do. But then again, just like the rest of them, Aoi doesn't really seem to have any prospects outside of the gang either.)

"Whatever," Izumi says, all derision and anger and denial. "You're making this shit up. They wouldn't betray- they wouldn't. Call me when you *actually* have something to talk about, instead of just creating trouble because you can't handle quiet."

Izumi's earrings bounce and click as she stomps away. Miyako turns to Sayuri, seeing that the brunette looks frustrated beyond all hell. The blonde sighs in defeat, but picks up and offers one of her manju to Sayuri, wishing she was cooking breakfast at noon with Aoi.

They eat in distressed silence.

Miyako is a war hound, may as well have been bred for her sharp teeth and disjointed morals, and the only thing she really has going for her is her loyalty to Tonbo Delinquent Girls' Club, something that a few of the members have a tendency to forget.

It was very stupid of Youko to think that Miyako would do nothing, too... *interested* in Aoi to notice or act upon Youko's usurping. Unfortunately, it was also very stupid of Miyako to think that Youko would just 'conveniently' be alone walking back home.

So now she's leaning against a creased aluminum wall, ass cold on pockmarked cement, eyes closed and doing her best to avoid whimpering like a little bitch. The knife in her shoulder fucking *hurts*, and she really hates how warm the blood on her face is against the harsh shredding of the rain. She's got quite a few more cuts littered across her body, because even though she is by far the best fighter of the Tonbo, she is only one girl, and was honestly lucky to get away from Youko's group of traitors. When (if) she goes to the shrine this weekend, she's going to curse Ami's name and ask Amaterasu to burn Nariko alive, the bitch.

Something lightly touches her arm, and the blonde blindly lashes out with her own knife, opening her eyes briefly only to immediately black out from the pain of her jostled shoulder.

"Miyako? Hey, Miyako! Come on, come on, wake up," a familiar voice mutters nervously in her face, their breath smells like Aoi's favorite mango candies. She wishes Aoi was here.

"Miyako!" The voice is louder now. Miyako's vision finally focuses enough to make out the vague shape of a girl with a shaggy bowl cut, a long skirt and a fleshy, red dragonfly tattoo just above her left hip leaning towards her. Oh, the girl finally got her tattoo, that's good. Sayuri won't be suspicious of her anymore, probably. Miyako told her Aoi was a good girl.

Wait.

Aoi is here? Oh fuck, Miyako must be dying. The odds of being found by anyone who doesn't want to kill her are pretty low right now, she thinks, let alone by her own Wisp.

"Hey, hey, you aren't dying, alright, you just got beat up pretty good. What happened? Why did I ask that, I know what happened, fucking Youko, I never should have listened to her in the first place, that stupid fucking Bitch! Why didn't you tell me, I would've helped you--"

Miyako's throat is very dry right now, and she thinks speaking might hurt, but Aoi's a sweetheart for thinking to help her. Miyako hasn't been helped by anyone in a good while.

“S okay, Aoi. You-you're not v'ry good in a figh' a'yways.”

Aoi doesn't move for a moment, doesn't breathe, but when she exhales, her words are as blue as her, as the sky and the sea at war with each other somewhere in the bay. Her voice trembles like lightning striking the sea.

“I still could have- I could have helped. I could've watched your back or taken a knife for you so you could keep fighting, I should have been there Miyako-”

Slowly, like if she moves too fast she'll break, Miyako rests her bloody, gritty hand against the soft girl's cheek, and tries her best for a smile.

“Didn't- did'n' wan' you hurt.”

They're silent again but for the downpour shattering the asphalt Miyako sits on while Aoi kneels in front of her, eyes burning with tears. They never did break her crying habit. Aoi pulls Miyako's hand from her cheek, holding it tight like that night at Miyako's house months ago. Everything hurts and the world is a lot darker than it was, like, five minutes ago, so she wouldn't be surprised if she's hallucinating things, but she thinks-

She thinks Aoi kisses her.

“You- you're gonna be okay. The Tonbo'll make sure of it. I'll-”

A deep breath, and the shifting of pebbles while Aoi must be calling on her steel spine. Miyako's proud of her for surviving this long. For growing this strong.

“I'll make sure of it.”