KUMORI The chatter of the crowd. The noise of the shutters. The echo of the microphone.

There was the scent of high-octane energy spilling from the convention center.

'Cr\*nchyr\*ll Expo'. This was the source of it all. Mingled within the crowd had been con-goers and cosplayers alike; there had been a bombardment of both gaming and anime stalls lined up against each other.

Within the center of the convention hall laid a center stage, where an assortment of hosts and guests filtered in throughout the day. Many different faces and crowds came in and out, the themes of their conversation unique in their own way.

Kumori had been hidden amongst the crowd, donning his usual "don't-recognize-me" outfit; nondescript black cap and black face mask, yet he couldn't hide the clean fit of a button-up longsleeve and black jeans. A complimented look, it was close enough that someone could mistaken him as a cosplayer for a slice-of-life character, yet they would be mistaken.

The sky-blue tresses that peeked under the rim of the cap swept across his face, those aquamarine pools staring out as he held a pair of paper bags in each hand. He had been walking about, taking in the sights of the stalls and such; every now and then, he'd find a cosplayer that looked incredible and when he did, he'd ask for a photo opportunity.

In that moment, he had spotted a cosplayer that had striking blue hair. Natural? Like his? Maybe. His attention had been grasped either way, and he idled around until they were free before asking the curious question. "I like your cosplay!" His voice, nonchalant, had been muffled by the mask. "Mind if I take a pic?" The excited gaze he gave had been a starter; a pathway to let his curiosity get satiated.

LAELEE Con season, the most common time commitment to running prints and selling yourself as a professional. Not everyone sees this option, more creepy than anything else and maybe that's why she's become so skeptical of those who approach. Yet still forced to provide a sunny outlooking greeting to welcome new faces to ask for her time. Donning something simple but cute, Laelee wore a typical maid outfit that you'd see in any standing anime with a pair of cat ears and a fake tail.

It's not some big shot character, but she's grown enough to amass a huge following and become well known for her gaming status on T\*itch for anyone to instantly recognize. Which is why there's no distinct surprise of approach for a picture from another young man who she, for the moment, does not immediately scent as familiar. The second she looks up he's immediately given a look of unique eyes that shine the color of midday skies and fade down into a vivid sunset.

"Oh, sure just one moment myaster.~" A play on words as she dips from behind the booth in question before striking a cute little pose for the cameraman. Hands held up like paws would for a feline to fit the whole look.

KUMORI Those pools of blue would soon transform into a pair of upward crescents, his hands shuffling to move both bags into one to free another. "Cool, cool." Quiet had been his response, hiding the surprise at the accent; although he's taken a few pictures already of and with some cosplayers, there had been few who mirrored the talking style of their character in general. With a short rifling through his pockets, he retrieved his phone, the clear case melting into his hand as he wrapped his fingers around.

 A quick adjustment before the camera app opened up -- and there. A little snap of the shutter before he nodded to himself. "And if it isn't too much, can we take a selfie?" His next request as smooth as his last, he stared up from his screen to watch her reaction. Although he wasn't too sure of who she was cosplaying, he was quite curious -- maybe it was just his lack of anime watching in the first place, who knows.

LAELEE watched him with a curious gaze, maybe taking the moment or two to go over and smooth down the uniform, fix the ear placement, make her hair more straight. Just little pampering motions to really get the full effect of her self-made character. Still though, the look... it's like she has seen him somewhere before. Especially now that the mask is off and it's going to eat at her until remembering! But that question can come later. In the moment he slides back up next to her, she's picture ready and waiting for the telltale of a flicker to otherwise set back into a normal expression.

Once Kumori has the selfie desired, Laelee moves back behind the booth to calculate the cost effective shot for ten dollars as agreed upon. Holding on the card swiper or take cash if that's the choice of payment. It's not until he asks a question that's often given regarding appearance. "Yes, it's natural. A bit strange I know. It used to me a dark shade closer to black, but as I got older it lightened up significantly." A twirl of the currently placed twin tails for a moment with the question posed having needed a little distraction. "Who are you?" It's straightforward with no irony at all. Like she expects him to be someone of note nagging at her brain.

KUMORI His eyes lit up slightly as she spoke; it was natural like his? That gaze settled down once he glanced back towards the card reader -- of course, he can't forget the main reason he was going around the convention in the first place. "I see, I see." Curt, his reaction was very much suppressed as he tapped his phone against the machine; a quiet 'ding' pierced through their conversation for a brief moment until her question came bulldozing in his attention.

"M-Me?" He was surprised -- a brief moment of exposure surely hadn't shown her who he was! His hand would reflexively raise to pull up that imaginary face mask, only to belatedly realise that he took it off for the selfie. Surpisingly, she was the first to recognize him, and hopefully the only one to do so too; yet the action had been noticed by the people in queue behind him.

A small murmuring as they all begun to stare at the male, almost quizzically dissecting his appearance as he shook his head. "I'm no one, absolutely no one." He wasn't sure how to react, after all, he wasn't supposed to be at the convention in the first place. His words were quiet, a murmur even as he shook his head once more. With a quick duck, he had returned back to the beige bags before putting the cap and mask back on with experienced motions.

Although he was hesitant to actually answer, he had returned back to the cosplayer with a small card in hand. Those sky-blues behind this shades had formed half-crescents; an expression of actual friendliness. He didn't want to seem rude, plus he wasn't the kind to truly hide himself from the crowds -- yet it was only during the times he had been comfortable to do so.

In his hand held a white business card; written centered had been the words 'Kumori' in hiragana. On the other side held his public socials, alongside a scribble of a private Instagram handle in blue ink. "Here. If you want to know." A quiet murmur, yet he had lacked a proper explanation for the girl before him; the only follow up having been a short bow and high-tailing out of there in which the person next in line waved for her attention; this time, genuine fans of the streamer.

LAELEE Examining his face more clearly now, almost without any uncertain scrutiny Laelee pulled back after a moment. Realizing to be almost intrustive; invading his personal space. As skittish the poor guy seemed to get upon mentioning it, the thready loft brow perfectly arched before she shrugged it off. There's no reason to push, especially if identities were rather kept quiet. She got it, famous life is hard for anyone in the spotlight. Having been ready to fully dismiss him so that he was able to escape unscathed, the surprise at being handed a card was obviously present in the stare she gave it.

Lightly turning over held between manicured nails of blue tones. "I see..." She doesn't elaborate further, but neatly tucks it into her side pocket to further investigate later.Before able to make any further comments, the guy seemingly ducked away without another word once replacing hat and mask. With the precision of an expert, the bluenette knew he was someone even if unable to put a finger on it at the moment. Nevertheless she had other fans to attend, which lasted several hours.

The sushi place outside of the convention center was highlighted by accents of nerdy cosplay enthusiast ranging from average to obsessed. Thankfully, similar to Kumori, the mastery of disguise is no stranger (going as far to wear a pink wig and green contacts) to hide her identity. Reading glasses sad neatly tipped on the bridge of nose while she alternated between shoveling a piece of the roll in her mouth, ravenous from forgetting lunch, to scrolling phone with jingling chimes from her hanging accessories.

Upon first inspection of the Instagram scrawled out in writing that was offered, Laelee took note of the guy and while not instantly recognized ... Seemingly, familiar enough to dig deeper.

KUMORI Depending on which one she chose first, Kumori’s Instagram wasn’t too special; there had been pictures of cats, of food, of sights he’s explored and the like. To the point one would wonder if he had any pictures of himself on the page. Although there had been the verified tag on the top of the page, the Instagram page [@kumokumo] held very little of himself for display, with the captions being quite ‘normal’ for what a celebrity’s social could be. His display picture was of the bottom-half of his face alongside a black and white cardigan with the brand he modeled embroidered on the fabric. If anything, the few hundred thousand followers could be considered surprising for the content that gets shown.

The difference would be the personal handle [@stratus\_] that had been scribbled below on the business card. Although private, once she had requested to join, it wasn’t longer than ten seconds before she had been accepted. There, Laelee would see the numerous selfies of the model himself, revealing that the boy she had met had been an up-and-coming actor of sorts, the different posts and selfies that he uploads showing the backstage and different celebrities that he’s met along the way. From pictures of his modeling shoots to some of the advertisements he had taken part of, the background of the mystery male would slowly get revealed through his timeline. Even more so, there had been a few scantily taken pictures of himself in casual wear, highlighting one of the few reasons he had been steadily passing through his work as a model.

Once she had scrolled for a few minutes, a quick ping reminiscent of a private DM would follow on the top of her screen. The picture of [@stratus\_] would display alongside a message, before being followed by a few more in rapid sequence. It seemed like this boy was a fast typer.

**[ stratus\_ ]** : is this the cosplayer I gave the card to?

**[ stratus\_ ]** : sorry for running off so quickly :pensive:

**[ stratus\_ ]** : I wasn’t supposed to be seen there, my manager’s been on me lately for exposing myself

**[ stratus\_ ]** : are you still around? I’ll treat you to some boba as an apology

LAELEE Considered to think he might be an aesthetics type of poster. Which to his credit, do exist and are just as popular for their beauty in capturing the world around them. Still though, curiosity killed the cat as they say. Diving in this far might as well net something a little more to satisfy curiosities. As a model she recognizes the fit right away, squinting to recognize which brand name it might be and if she might know it. Though, what caught her eye after some (admittedly) nosy snooping- the given @ was not the one she'd been given originally on his card. Inputting that and waiting for the private marker to disappear for access.

Once the request was accepted, Laelee noted a bit of difference right off the bat. Personal selfies, more befitting of what would be expected on any Instagram account. She scrolled a bit and couldn't help smiling while taking another bite of a roll between her findings. So he was someone, that would explain the hunch of Kumori's rather quiet and kept appearance in public. Some celebrities didn't want all the attention, after all. An actor... Interesting. So not a model? Or maybe both. The same way she had boomed to fame as a cosplayer and vlogger of sorts. And like all models, a bit of risque shots involved. Explained more of the private tag. Nevertheless, she had her answer and was satisfied enough before .. a message? Peering the inbox notification from the guy in question, only makes sense given she had taken the call to drop a follow. Manicured nails tapping at the screen to send a few replies.

[**laeleepop]** : it is, and i'm laelee. i forget if i introduced myself proper or not.

**[laeleepop]** : hey, i get it. being public can be tough in the spotlight and all.

**[laeleepop]** : around the corner of the convention center at the sushi place. wanna meet up?

KUMORI Kumori had been standing in front of another stall; this one had been showcasing amateur fan art of the current mainstream animation and series. His hands had been fiddling with the screen of his phone while he waited in line, the customer in front of him taking an absurdly long time to choose. Aquamarines would shift their gaze up, staring at the back of this customer before leaning his head to the side. He peeked, to observe, yet he couldn’t help but be taken aback at the contents of what this person was purchasing. With a little shift, he looked back up at the stall – it seemed that he was at the wrong one, seeing as the majority of the content had not been what he was looking for in the first place: slightly explicit drawings of certain characters, amongst other things.

**[ stratus\_ ]** : you know what. sure I’ll come over there to meet

**[ stratus\_ ]** : i just saw something that made me realize I should finish my shopping now

**[ stratus\_ ]** : stay still, i’ll be there in five mins or so

With that message sent, Kumori slipped away from the line, holding his three bags of souvenirs with his other hand before easing his way down the artist alley. There had been a few sights he caught a glimpse of that drew his attention, yet he decided against delaying any more time. A little hum as he adjusted his shades, he pocketed his phone before jogging his way over to the designated meetup. There, he stopped nearby, pulling out his phone to send a message before looking about; wobbling on the balls of his feet, he managed to spot someone that looked a little familiar. A little moment to stare, as if to confirm, before he strutted his way over to Laelee. “…Lae..lee?” He wasn’t too sure, yet he was still in his same attire as the one she saw two hours or so ago.

With the hands holding the bags behind his back, his body did a little lean forward as he matched his head height with hers. The cap barely hid those snow-like tresses, allowing them to sweep across his face. His gaze, those pools of shimmering oceans peeking beyond his shades, stared curiously at her expression as he flashed her a little smile. “I assume you looked at my socials. Did I end up ringing any bells?” A small chuckle slipped as he threw his question across; she seemed like she found him somewhat familiar, either through his advertisements or his modeling shoots for certain famous brands.

LAELEE tapped her nails against the table, checking phone every so often for a reply. It'd been at least twenty minutes since the last one; and she assumed he might have gotten caught up in something else. Which is fine, it's not like there were any concrete plans to begin with and she's about to call for the check and head out when- the vrrrrrrrr caught attention. Then another one. Flipping it to tap the screen open and review the messages in question. Confirmation, and from the looks of it a little scarring. To be expected at a con, honestly. She quickly sends back her own confirmation dm and then did as told. Sitting pretty to wait for his arrival.

It seems to take no longer than ten minutes for such, as the familiar attire and secretive disguise catch her eye and it's then with clarity she realized her pink wig and green contacts might throw the poor guy off. ... Or not, because Kumori is striding over which means he recognized the outfit. "In the flesh, uh... Kinda, I'm incognito." She lowers her own frames with a wink. Offering the seat across from her with a smile. "It took me a few tries but once I was in the correct Instagram account yes."

"So you're kind of a big deal, but discreet." Hair frames her face with a forward lean, chin resting atop interlaced fingers. "You hardly seem the type to be seen at a convention, model and upcoming actor. Guilty pleasure, or something of an interest to get into?" Reaching to grab her sweet tea for a quick sip to finish it off. "Oh, actually let's walk and talk." Lifting from her seat to go and pay proper at the counter for her meal. "I really want that boba now that you brought it up. Come along!" Ushering, Laelee slipped out the front door and waited for Kumori to follow along.

KUMORI A small hum had followed her response. “Not too big.” He was… humble? Not even. He knew he was a hotshot but he definitely knew his place to a degree. With her abrupt change, he nodded, waiting for her to stand before walking beside her. The crowds outside had been small, mostly consisting of the amateur cosplayers who grew tired of walking in their costumes and the like. A few stray groups had also settled, each looking through their hauls for the day as they compared and contrasted their purchases. A cheerful and comforting vibe for those who enjoy a hobby such as this.

Reasoning behind being in a place as such? “Well, I’m human still. I like my ‘me time’ when it comes to seeing anime stuff.” Not specific anime stuff, but anime things in general. His lips curled into a smile. “I used to watch anime a lot when I was younger.” He’s saying this as if he wasn’t still a teenager. “It’s also why I’m pursuing a career in acting-” Although his scenes in a few live-actions had been minor, he was still proud of his progress. From model to actor, that was the path he was glad to take. As he spoke, a chime on the phone rang through. It was the sound of Mayurii’s “Tutturuu” from Steins;Gate. “--Ah. Give me a second.”

With an apologetic expression, he went to look at his phone for a bit. There was a mixture of confliction and exasperation as he read the message. A small sigh escaped thin lips before he nodded. “Manager messaged, but it’s alright, let’s get to it then.” There, he urged her forward, directing their journey to the boba store situated on the other side of the convention center.

It was a quiet period, where the crew on shift had been whittled down to two only. He paused, staring at the menu board up top. There had been a list of fifty different flavors; a lot more than he expected. “Hm..” A small murmur as he mumbled to himself for a bit. “What boba do you generally go for? I’ll get that too.” He wasn’t sure with such a huge selection of what to get, so he’ll throw a cheapshot for now; get the same as her.

LAELEE L

KUMORI K

LAELEE L