

ROBERT normally avoided the poisoner; she was quite disconcerting. He saw her among the greenhouses from time to time, and wondered if she cared about the fact that the local staff were just as afraid to approach her. Surely an ordinary woman would want to be liked.

He stopped to examine the roses one afternoon, and was startled to find her just there, watching him.

“Careful,” she said. “You don’t wanna get hurt.”

He pretended not to hear her; the flowers were too enchanting. Her warning was irrelevant anyway, and would stay that way as long as he could remain in Japan. It was the sweet, delicate petals that deserved his attention, not the dark and twisted stems.