



CALMING DETECTIVE OSOMATSU, RETURNS

Written by Otsu Ichi

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[The summary for episode 8, A-part, "Calming Osomatsu."](#)

Police Inspector Choromatsu and Assistant Inspector Todomatsu investigate a murder at a mansion. With only a few clues and an incomprehensible dying message to work on, the case was about to close as unsolved indefinitely, when a single man appeared. His name: the Calming Detective Osomatsu-kun. While he has been in charge of over 2,000 cases to date, he hasn't solved a single one of them. However, what he did have was a wonderful talent: to "calm" the tense atmosphere of a crime scene. And thus, the Calming Detective's investigation begins...

CHAPTER 1

My employer, a man named Iyami, has an abnormally huge overbite. It probably could be considered a lethal weapon. For instance, whenever he tries to bring a wine glass to his mouth, his front teeth hit the glass and cause it to shatter. It is my job to clean up the fragments. Whenever he does that, I need to run with the broom and dustpan in hand. If I'm even the slightest bit slow, he insults me.

"Chew have hands that smell like fish," Iyami would say, and he would laugh at me. I think his "chew" is his unique mispronunciation of the word "you." It's true that my hands smell like fish. My family owns a fish store, so I've been handling fish ever since I was a child. I could never rinse the smell of it from my hands. "When chew touch things, they all smell like fish zansu. Chew are not fit to be a maid zansu."

Unfortunately, as Iyami is the master of the household, I am unable to defy him. The gardener, Karamatsu-kun, was also the same way. He took on the job of pruning the trees lined along the mansion, but because he wore pointy sunglasses and a leather jacket, he didn't look like any gardener that I'd ever seen. "Chew have a misplaced sense of fashion zansu. Wearing a tanktop with your own face printed on it goes beyond painful, it's revolting zansu." Karamatsu-kun would look annoyed at this, but he never talked back. When I asked him about it, he would shrug his shoulders and say, "Just let him say what he wants," and returned silently back to his work.

The chef, Chibita, was different. If there was something he didn't like, he would talk back and it would lead to a quarrel.

"Chew are fired zansu!"

"Fine by me, you goddamn idjit!"

However, he never actually ended up being fired. Other chefs got fed up with Iyami's attitude and would quit on the same day that they were employed, so Iyami had no choice in the end but have Chibita make his food. Chibita loved oden. His oden was delicious every time I ate it, but Iyami would say things like this and make him mad: "I'm tired of this zansu. Don't make oden for me meals anymore zansu."

The three of us, me, Karamatsu-kun, and Chibita, were furnished with our own rooms in the old mansion that Iyami owned, so we were live-ins at our workplace. It was the kind of old building that had ivy covering one part of the outer walls and wooden hallway floors that creaked noisily. A cat slipped into the mansion from somewhere and would run throughout the place or sneak into the decorative antique suit of armor. It often tried to enter the kitchens too, and whenever I saw it, I would chase it away. It would glare back at me as if reproachfully, and take on an intimidating posture while showing its red tongue. It was a black cat that appeared to me as if it were a demon.

When it grew late at night, I would sometimes hear a moaning sound. Everyone told me that it was the wind, but to me, it sounded like the voice of someone in a lot of pain. There were even times when I woke up feeling someone's eyes on me. Whenever I am alone in my room, I lock my door from the inside. The keys for all of the rooms within the mansion are put together on one key ring. I had already

taken out the key to my room from that key ring, so I should have been resting at ease, and yet, I was always afraid of the night. I couldn't shake off the dirty feeling that someone was entering my room at night.

On one cold winter day, trouble occurred. Karamatsu-kun was found dead in the servants' break room on the first floor. The gardening shears that he used for pruning were plunged deeply into his back. Both the door and the windows of the room were locked. In other words, he was found dead in a closed room. As we waited outside for the police to arrive, I watched as my white puffs of breath were carried away by the wind, brushing against the trees that Karamatsu-kun had tended, before rising up to the cold sky above.

"Now then, please tell me what happened at the time you found the body."

The name of the young police detective who questioned me was Todomatsu. The brand-new suit that he wore didn't have a single crease. He gave off an impression of neatness. I explained to him the situation at the time that Karamatsu-kun was discovered.

It was Chibita who realized that the door to the break room wouldn't open. It had been 1 P.M. at the time and he had gone looking for Karamatsu-kun because he didn't appear for lunch, even after lunchtime was over. Because the door to the break room was locked, he'd thought that Karamatsu-kun was taking a nap inside and he banged on the door and called to him, receiving no answer. Iyami and I heard Chibita's loud yells and came running to him.

"So the door was locked?"

"Yes. I went to get the key ring to try and open the door, but..."

The key ring was kept in the kitchens on the first floor. It was always to be found hanging on a nail that was embedded in the wall, but this time...

"The key ring was missing?"

"Yes. I couldn't find it anywhere."

With no other solution, we went around outside the mansion to peer into the room through the windows. The windows were covered by curtains, but there was a small see-through space between the lower part of the curtain and the window frame, so we were able to see that floor area of the room. What we saw was Karamatsu-kun lying on the ground covered in blood. Iyami gave a loud, shocked cry of "Sheehh!"

"Sheehh? What does that mean?"

"I don't know. Whenever Iyami-san is surprised, he always says that and makes a strange-looking pose."

"Well, never mind that. So, after you saw the victim, you all broke the window glass to enter the room and checked to see if he was dead. You should have called the cops before you broke the window and messed with the crime scene. There could have been clues to track down the murderer," Detective

Todomatsu said, turning to look at the window. The window lock was the old kind that closed with a twist lock. In order to unlock it, we had to break a part of the glass.

Another detective came over and placed his hand on Detective Todomatsu's shoulder.

"That's where you're wrong, Detective. At that time, none of them should have known whether he was dead or not. If he was alive, they would need to call an ambulance at once. Breaking the window to enter the room was not a mistake."

It was Police Inspector Choromatsu, who was directing the investigation. In contrast to the neat appearance of Detective Todomatsu, he wore a fedora and trench coat. He had the look of a classic, old-fashioned, veteran detective.

"By the way, when you entered the room, could it be possible that the murderer was hiding in here with the body?" Inspector Choromatsu asked, to which I shook my head no. There was no place in this room for a person to hide. It was a square, dreary-looking room that was five meters on all sides. The two detectives took on grim looks.

"Do you think the murderer took the key ring with them?"

"When was the key ring last seen?"

"At 11 P.M. last night, this maid, Totoko-san, had used it last."

The light bulb in the hallway had gone out, so I had to take out our stock of light bulbs as well as a stepladder from the storage room to replace it with a new one. I needed the key ring to unlock the storage room, and I had put it back after I was done. But now, that key ring was missing.

The reason for why the two detectives wanted to know more about the key ring was clear. If Karamatsu-kun had locked the door himself from the inside after he was stabbed, there should have been blood around the door area. However, his blood was only found around where he had fallen, in the middle of the room. He hadn't moved from that spot. In other words, the murderer had killed him and then locked the room with the key ring from the outside.

One hour after the investigation had begun, the key ring was finally found. It was found at the bottom of the pond.

"I found it!" someone from the forensics team came barging in to report. For some reason, his face was covered in blood, which surprised me, but his voice sounded energetic.

The name of the forensics investigator was Jyushimatsu. He had found the key ring by sheer coincidence. The garden contained a pond, and when he saw that its surface was frozen, he couldn't help but want to skate across it for fun. However, he slipped and struck the ice face-first. That was apparently how his face got so bloodied. His head broke through the ice from the force, and when he looked down, he saw the key ring at the bottom of the pond.

"Don't ice skate during an investigation!" Detective Todomatsu yelled angrily, but Police Inspector Choromatsu said, "You've made a great achievement!" and praised him.

"The key ring was at the bottom of the pond. That means the murderer must have killed the victim, locked the door, and threw the key ring into the pond," Detective Todomatsu surmised.

However, as investigation of the pond went underway, some new facts were revealed. The pond

surface had frozen solid between the hours of three to six in the morning. That was strange to me.

"But Karamatsu-kun was at breakfast today. All of us saw him."

Breakfast was at 7 A.M. If he had been killed after breakfast, and the murderer had used the key and threw it in the pond... The pond was already covered with ice by then, so finding the key ring at the bottom of the lake wouldn't make sense.

The time frame for when the pond froze was determined by two bits of information. The first was the testimony of two men with an unknown address. The two of them had wandered onto the mansion grounds by accident last night.

"We're traveling north on a journey dasu."

"We tripped and fell into the lake dayo~n."

Dripping wet all over and lost, the two travelers were taken into custody by the local police station. It had been three in the morning when the two had wandered onto the mansion grounds and fell into the pond. That meant the pond had not been icy at that time.

"It appears that the ice formed by around six," forensics investigator Jyushimatsu said while looking at the ice surface through a magnifying glass. Small bits of gold dust were stuck on the ice surface. It was known that at six this morning, the multimillionaire Mister Flag who lived in the neighborhood, had scattered gold dust from his airship as he flew while watching the morning sun rise. According to data announced from the weather bureau, the temperature had rapidly dropped in the morning. Ice had covered the pond before the dawn, forming completely at some point between 3 to 6 A.M. And yet, Karamatsu-kun was alive at 7 A.M. How could the key ring be found at the bottom of the pond?

Gathered around the dead body, we all scratched our heads in thought. Karamatsu-kun lay there with the shears sticking out of his back, still not carried away from the crime scene.

"The key ring has no replica zansu. There's only one zansu," Iyami said, and he pointed at me. "Chew were the last to use the key ring zansu. Chew are suspicious zansu!"

I was so bewildered that I could almost cry. The atmosphere of the room was tense with suspicion. It was just at that moment that there came a knock on the door, and a detective appeared.

CHAPTER 2

The person entered the room with a carefree attitude. He wore a deerstalker and inverness cape, looking like a detective straight out of a picture novel. When he saw Inspector Choromatsu, he spoke to him with an air of familiarity.

"Hey there, Choro-san! Is the investigation going well?"

"Osomatsu-kun. Sorry to call you here so suddenly."

The detective, more popularly known as the Calming Osomatsu. The inspector introduced him to all of us. He had been in charge of over 2,000 cases to date. Without uncovering a single trick or mystery, his job was to ease the constantly tense atmosphere of the crime scene. Also, he never solved any cases he was in charge of, not even once. A detective that doesn't solve cases? What the heck? My mind was boggled. In the room heavy with awkward silence, we grew cautious of this new intruder. Just then.

"Choro-san, you have a thread coming out from the sleeve of your coat."

As he was listening to a synopsis of the case, the detective suddenly spoke up. It was true: upon a closer look, the sleeve of the police inspector's trench coat had a long thread fraying from it. Once it was spotted, you couldn't help but want to deal with it.

"Pardon me," the police inspector said, and he pulled at the thread to take it off. But all it did was keep unfraying into a longer thread.

"Leave it to me."

The detective used shears to cut the thread off.

We stood there, dumbfounded. The detective used shears. That's right, he used shears. The shears he used looked very familiar. The edges of it were stained with blood. It was the gardening shears that had been plunged in Karamatsu-kun's back. Inspector Choromatsu realized what had happened and cried out mildly.

"Hey, don't do that, Osomatsu-kun! That's the murder weapon. When did you pull that out from the body?"

"Ah, I'm sorry, I didn't realize..."

Looking apologetic, the detective rubbed the back of his head and tossed the gardening shears aside. His expression and action had charm. Although we were taken aback, we couldn't help giggling.

"What the heck are you doing, damnit." Even Chibita snickered, holding back his laughter. The nervous atmosphere relaxed. The thick awkwardness slowly deflated in a good way. I see, this ability must be the reason for why he's called Calming Osomatsu.

Friendly chatter began to arise from those surrounding Karamatsu-kun's corpse. The charged anxious mood from before was like it had never existed. Chibita brought tea and cookies. If not for the dead body at our feet, it felt as if we were having a stand-up party. There was something more important than solving the murder, I realized. It was that everyone's smiles were back.

"This is a fine mansion," Detective Osomatsu praised, and even Iyami looked pleased. As we

gossiped, the detective looked around at the crime scene. The servants' break room was simple. Unlike the other rooms, this room had no expensive-looking wooden furnishings with amber glaze. The sofa and low table were both cheap ones. There was a bookshelf placed against the wall opposite of the window. The only illumination for the room was a small, naked bulb hanging from the center of the ceiling.

"It's rather warm in here, even though there's a hole in the window."

"We have a boiler room in the basement. That's directly beneath us. If we want to use hot water, we burn fuel there to warm it up, and the heat rises to this room."

As I was explaining, the detective chewed on a cookie. He tried to grab another cookie from the plate and dropped it. The cookie fell upright between the wooden slabs of the flooring. The wooden boards were warped enough to make such large cracks. As he bent down to pick up the cookie, the detective noticed something.

"Take a look at this, everyone."

His gaze was on Karamatsu-kun's feet.

"This is an interesting pattern. Where do you think he bought it from?"

Karamatsu was wearing socks with oden patterns on them. When it came to oden, Chibita was the man to speak to.

"That's my best attire. I gave them to him as a sign of our friendship. This guy was my drinking buddy, you know. Goddamn idjit, why did you have to die!"

Chibita started to cry, and I couldn't help myself from feeling sad as well. During our breaks, Karamatsu-kun and I would often chat. When I told him my dream about one day becoming an idol, I thought that he would laugh at me, but instead, he listened to me seriously.

"That's a great dream! Totoko-chan, you're sure to be an idol one day. People can become what they want to be. Don't give up on your dream."

He was a show-off who had his annoying moments, but he was a kindhearted person. While Chibita and I grew solemn, Iyami was the only one who continued to look cold. He had only interacted with Karamatsu by pushing him around to do work, so he had hardly any memories of socializing with him.

There were still pieces of the glass window, from where we broke in, stuck to the window frame. Small white grains flew slowly in from outside. Out there, it was beginning to snow. The mansion's garden had a bleak hue to it. Now that it was without a gardener, there may come a day when it would fall into a sad, desolated state.

Inspector Choromatsu and Detective Todomatsu threw ideas at each other on the case. The rest of us listened in on their conversation.

"The murderer killed the victim, locked the room, left it, and threw the key into the lake. Maybe the key was heated to an extreme temperature at that time? The heat from it melted the ice and so it sank to the bottom of the lake. Then the cold air around that hole made the ice quickly freeze up again."

"Would a key be able to contain enough heat to melt ice?"

"Then, the murderer physically made a hole in the ice and dropped the key through it. Then they

could have shaped a cork out of ice to cover up the hole."

"Besides that, there could be a waterway in the depths of the pond. The key could have traveled through it from a different place."

However, that last reasoning was repudiated by forensics investigator Jyushimatsu's hard work. He dove beneath the ice and inspected the pond end to end, but found no waterway draining into the pond. After forensics investigator Jyushimatsu gave his report, he left the room to change out of his dripping wet uniform.

The fact that the key ring was found at the bottom of the ice made everyone scratch their heads. The ice formed in the early morning, and the door was locked after that. How did the key ring sink to the bottom of the pond? I tried to think about the solution to this puzzle, but I couldn't come up with anything at all.

"What if the gardener was killed before the ice came?"

Someone said. I looked around the room to see who had spoken.

"Breakfast was at 7 in the morning. If the Karamatsu that was seen at that hour was, in fact, not Karamatsu but a different person, there won't be any contradictions. The murderer was someone who looked frighteningly similar to Karamatsu, killed him in the middle of the night, locked the room from the outside, and threw the key ring into the pond. Then the murderer wore sunglasses and a leather jacket, pretended that he was Karamatsu, and joined everyone at breakfast, acting as if nothing had happened."

It was a subdued voice that had no tone of ambition in it. Someone who looked like Karamatsu? Did someone like that really exist? If they did, they would have to be an identical brother, because it would be extremely obvious if it was a stranger, even if he wore sunglasses. I wasn't too sure if a brother that looked exactly like him could exist or not.

"Never mind, forget what I said. I was passing by when I heard your conversation, so I just added my two cents."

The speaker was outside the room, in the hallway. At his feet was a black cat that rubbed its entire body against his legs. It was the cat that often snuck into the mansion.

He wore such a weird outfit that none of us could speak. Covering his face was an iron mask. His clothes looked worn out, and in one hand he held a bloodied knife, while in his other hand, he held something that looked like intestines in a tight grip.

"See you," he said, turning to leave. The cat seemed to adore him, because it ran after him, following him. Blood fell from the intestines in his grip, leaving drops of red along the hallway.

Everyone in that room, including me, cried out in one voice.

"WHO ARE YOU?!"

But no, there was one person who did not say a word, and shook all over as his face turned a pallid gray. It was my employer, Iyami.

CHAPTER 3

Police Inspector Choromatsu and Detective Todomatsu chased after the masked man and brought him back. The mask, made of iron, had round holes for the eyes and a grid lattice around the mouth area. It was through these that we could see peeks of his face underneath. His eyes were half-lidded, as if he were sleepy. He sat down on the sofa and looked the rest of us over.

Detective Todomatsu cried out, "What are those intestines you're holding?! It's kind of scary?!"

The masked man answered with a tone that made it clear he found this whole affair bothersome. "What are they? Fish guts."

"FISH?! Don't look so misleading!"

"I was making a meal for this guy."

The black cat was licking the blood dripping from the fish guts with its scarlet tongue. The masked man turned his gaze at Iyami.

"Yo, Iyami. I got out. How many years has it been since we last talked in the basement?"

"I have no idea who chew are zansu."

But from his dismayed look, it was quite obvious that he did.

"Who in the world are you?" Inspector Choromatsu asked. The masked man continued to glare at Iyami as he explained.

"I was imprisoned in the basement, for seven years. I finally managed to get out just now."

According to him, this mansion had a secret underground passageway. The wall of the boiler room had a hidden door that connected to a passage leading to a jail cell. This was where the masked man had been imprisoned, sustaining himself with whatever Iyami brought him in the dark of night. There was, for the pure sake of decency, running water and a bathroom; there was electricity too, so he had a television and heating, as well as equipment installed for him to make simple cooked foods, but it was pitiful that he had been locked up there for seven years. I almost wanted to suspect that he was lying about it, but from Iyami's reaction, it was apparently all true.

"I provided chew with a comfortable living space zansu!"

Iyami must have judged that he couldn't excuse himself out of it, because he confirmed the reason for why he had locked up the masked man. This old mansion originally belonged to the masked man, passed down to him through inheritance. However, seven years ago, Iyami had tricked him and taken control, locking him in the basement. I, Chibita, and perhaps even Karamatsu-kun, had been employed here thinking that Iyami was the master of the household. We never guessed the truth.

"It was thanks to this guy bringing this that I could unlock the door to the cell."

The masked man gave the fish guts to the black cat and pulled out a key ring from his breast pocket. It was the key ring to this mansion. The key ring that had been found at the bottom of the pond, and was an article of evidence for the murder, had apparently been quietly snatched up by this black cat. That was the reason for why he got out of his cell at this timing.

Now that I thought about it, this cat often tried to enter into the kitchens. Maybe it had been

struggling to grab the key ring for him this whole time. After all, the key ring was always kept in the kitchens.

"I've got it zansu! It was chew who killed Karamatsu-kun zansu! It has to be! No matter how me thinks about it, chew are suspicious zansu!"

"I only managed to free myself just now. That's impossible, no matter how you think about it."

"That reasoning chew made is also wrong zansu! I went outside for a walk after breakfast, and I passed by this room zansu! There was nobody lying on the floor then zansu!"

"Don't make vague insinuations in your spiteful remarks."

The windows were covered by curtains. You could see the floor by peering through the space between the curtain and the window edge, but was simply passing by the room and glancing at it a clear call for claiming that no one had been lying on the floor? Putting that aside though, something else came to my mind and I spoke up from the sides.

"It was your voice that I heard in the middle of the night, was it?"

I sometimes heard an eerie moaning in the middle of the night. It had to have been from him, lamenting about being locked up.

The masked man looked at me and nodded.

"Yeah, probably. Late-night TV these days is pretty funny."

"That was laughter? In that case, I'm relieved. What about the eyes that I felt during the night? Was that you as well?"

"Eyes? What are you talking about?"

Just then, the door to the room opened. Forensics investigator Jyushimatsu had returned from changing out of his dripping wet uniform. He took one look at the masked man and lunged at him, crying out, "Killer apprehended!"

"Wai...! You got it wrong...!" The masked man tried to resist, but was held down by a pro-wrestling move. It was the cobra twist. Otherwise known as the Ribcracker.

It was the Calming Detective who brought calm back to the temporary uproar. He boldly stepped in between forensics investigator Jyushimatsu and the masked man.

"Calm down, Jyushimatsu-kun!" he said, trying to pull the two apart by sliding himself in between the two. There was a few seconds of jostling and everyone watched the scene to see how it would turn out, when we suddenly realized something. At some point, the masked man had been freed, and he was patting at his ribs. Taking his place in the stranglehold was Detective Osomatsu. When had they switched places? Even the detective himself was surprised, crying out, "WHY ME?!" It looked so funny that we were all completely soothed.

Forensics investigator Jyushimatsu released the detective and, once the identity of the masked man was explained to him, apologized for the pro-wrestling move. He faced Inspector Choromatsu and took out a key ring from his uniform pocket. The key ring was inside a plastic bag where evidence was kept to be preserved.

"Inspector Choromatsu, I went to the forensics team at headquarters to have them take a look at

this right away. They couldn't find any clues that could specify the murderer."

All of us fell silent as we listened to his report. From what he was saying, he had returned at full speed back to the police station not only to change into a dry uniform, but also to have the key ring analyzed in detail. In other words, it had never left his hands. How on earth could this be explained? When we turned to look back at the masked man, as expected, in his hands as well, was another key ring that looked exactly the same.

The truth, surprisingly, was very simple. A duplicate key does not exist. That was what Iyami had kept insisting. So, why had he lied? Reluctantly, Iyami began to tell the truth. He had made a duplicate key because sneaking into my room during the night to watch my sleeping face was one of his secret pleasures. He's a pervert. There's a pervert here. The eyes that I had felt when I woke up had been from Iyami. Also, it was not only the key to my room that he had made a duplicate of. He would also go into Karamatsu-kun's room and Chibita's room, stealing small things from there that would go by unnoticed. Because he didn't want anyone to know about that, he had kept swearing to the police that there was no copy of the key ring.

"You're a hopeless scumbag!" Detective Todomatsu angrily grabbed Iyami's collar.

But Iyami's attitude changed suddenly and he became impudent. "Don't get so angry just because I didn't talk about the duplicate key zansu."

"Now that I think about it..." Chibita said, "I had a fight outside with Iyami the other day. I forget what it was about, but it ended up in a scuffle."

Iyami had grabbed Chibita, saying, "Chew are dead meat zansu!" and Chibita had yelled back, "Goddamn idjit!" and the two of them had fallen into the pond. Chibita wondered if the duplicate key ring had slipped out of Iyami's pocket and sank to the bottom at that time.

"Now that chew mention it, I couldn't find me duplicate ever since that day zansu," Iyami agreed.

"Oh, that's it then. Problem solved," Detective Osomatsu said. This was true. There were two key rings, and one of them had been at the bottom of the pond all along. There was no mystery left here.

"The key ring that was found in the pond was there way before the time slot during which the victim was killed. This means that we don't need to be concerned about when the ice formed. The key ring that you possess is, without a doubt, the one that the murderer used to lock this door," Detective Osomatsu said, turning to look at the masked man.

The masked man held out the key ring to the cat and asked, "Tell me. Where did you find this?"

The cat continued to groom itself, unperturbed. But I knew.

I knew that the cat had probably found the key ring on top of the frozen pond and had taken it away. It wasn't a coincidence that it was a cat who had found the key ring after the murderer had tossed it away. The key ring must have smelled like fish. Everything that I touch ends up with the smell of fish on them. I was the murderer. It was I who had killed Karamatsu-kun.

CHAPTER 4

Unable to endure the guilt, I decided to tell everyone the truth.

"I did it."

It was dinnertime when the murderer was identified, so Chibita served everyone piping hot oden. It was delicious oden where even the white radish was soaked with flavor. As we surrounded Karamatsu-kun's corpse, we ate oden in a tranquil mood. Now that I had confessed to the crime and the case was solved, everyone's faces were bright. It had been my dream to become an idol, but that probably wasn't going to happen anymore. Although I was feeling sad about having to give up my dream, my spirits were saved by the warmth that the Calming Detective brought. Detective Osomatsu was saying, "Wouldn't it be a hoot if I did this and he woke up?" and he poured the hot oden soup over Karamatsu. "There's no way he'd wake up though, huh? He's dead, after all, that Karamatsu."

By the way, the circumstances for how I ended up killing Karamatsu-kun was... Purely accidental. After I had finished my morning duties and was unwinding in the break room, Karamatsu-kun appeared. We gossiped a little bit, and he said show-offy, painful things like he always did, so as a retort, I punched him in the stomach. It was a body blow. The shears he was carrying, which he used for pruning, fell from the force and got caught in the space between the warped wooden boards of the floor in a way that the blade pointed upwards. By bad luck, Karamatsu fell on top of it and the scissor blade plunged deeply into his back. He died. With disbelief, I laid his body on his side and tried to pull the scissors out, but changed my mind halfway. Even if it was accidental, if anyone found out that I had killed someone, I might not be able to become an idol. I wiped off my fingerprints on the shears, locked the room door with the key ring, and decided to pretend that I knew nothing.

"I threw the key ring towards the pond. I didn't know that it was frozen over, because I was far away when I'd pitched it. I had thought that it had sunk into the water."

The key ring that I had thrown had probably been left lying on top of the ice. The cat had picked it up with its mouth and brought it in. It was the other key ring beneath the frozen pond that complicated things.

"I'm sorry, everyone. This is my fault. Karamatsu-kun, I'm sorry..."

I bowed my head and apologized from the bottom of my heart. I truly felt sorry. I also felt bad for being the buzzkill in an otherwise harmonious atmosphere, but tears came to my eyes. I should have been honest from the start. I'm a fool. For my dream, which I didn't even know could come true or not, I had lied and tried to hide my crime. I was a great fool.

Iyami, with a sharp glare, pointed a finger at me.

"Even if chew apologize, the dead don't come back zansu! Chew murderer! Because of chew, the property value of this mansion has fallen zansu! What do chew have to say for yourself zansu?!"

He continued to rebuke me, calling me a monster. Various abusive language flew across his overbite. I, having done the most horrible of deeds in the world, was unable to retort.

At that moment, Detective Osomatsu snapped his fingers, as if a thought had just occurred to him.

"I know! I just had a great idea."

The atmosphere was beginning to turn bad again, so maybe he was trying to smooth it down with that special ability of his. He spoke.

"Since I feel bad for Totoko-chan, how about we come up with a different criminal?"

"Eh, wait, what do you mean by that zansu?"

"There was no duplicate key ring. Isn't that right?"

"There was zansu."

"No, there wasn't. You even said so yourself. Your testimony was recorded."

The detective turned back to look at Police Detective Todomatsu, who looked down at his memo pad and nodded.

"That's right. There is no duplicate key ring. That's what he kept insisting."

And then, with a blank face, Detective Todomatsu ripped out a different page in his memo pad and crumpled it in his fist. Maybe it was a record of when Iyami had taken back his statement and said that a duplicate key did exist. Iyami looked between the detective and the police in confusion.

"You have a point. I find it hard to believe that someone as cute as Totoko-chan could kill someone. The truth has to be something else. If there is no duplicate key, then the crime happened like this."

It was Police Inspector Choromatsu speaking.

"Last night at 9 P.M., after Totoko-chan used the key ring, a cat snuck into the kitchen and took it. However, the cat dropped the key ring into the pond at some point in the middle of the night. The pond surface froze over by dawn, so the key was kept at the bottom of the pond. This means that the victim was killed in a locked room. The victim locked the door himself from the inside, while the killer used that timing to kill the victim with a trick of some kind."

"How about this," Detective Osomatsu said. "The killer got a hold of the victim's shears beforehand and froze it so that only the pointy part of it stuck out from the ice. The killer made a hole in that block of ice and passed a wire through the hole to hang it up on the ceiling." All of us looked up at the ceiling of the servants' break room. A single lightbulb hung from its metal fixture at the center of it. "The killer hung the ice block there, in a way that it could swing like a pendulum."

"How did the killer put the trick into operation?" Inspector Choromatsu asked.

"There's a bookshelf opposite the windows, on the opposite wall. The killer placed the ice block on top, and strung the wire through the metal fixture of the ceiling. Then, the killer tied another wire to the ice and extended that wire out to the windows. When the victim entered the room and came to a perfect spot, the killer pulled the wire from outside and..."

We imagined how it would happen. The ice block, pulled by the wire, would fall from the bookshelf and swing like a pendulum to hit Karamatsu-kun from behind. The blade that stuck out from the ice would plunge into his back. "The wire that the killer used was the thin kind. That's how they were able to pull it from outside through the window crevices."

"What about the ice and the wire? Wouldn't they be left found at the crime scene?" Detective Todomatsu asked.

"If you turn on the boiler in the basement, this room gets very warm. The ice block would melt away. The killer can collect the wire by reeling it in through the window cracks. If you tie the wire for the ceiling and the wire to be pulled from outside together somewhere, the killer could be able to take back both. They could have also fiddled with it so that it can easily come off from the metal fixture on the ceiling. All that remains would be the victim with the shears plunged into him."

Chibita didn't look convinced.

"Then why did the murderer kill Karamatsu?!" he cried out. "A nice guy like him?! Goddamn idjit!"

"About that. The murderer could have been trying to kill someone else. The real reason that shears were used as the murder weapon in the first place could be because the killer had the ulterior motive of framing Karamatsu. In other words, the killer mistook the person they were going to use the trick on. To be blunt, Chibita-kun, it was you that the killer was after. I even have reason to believe that. It's the socks that the victim is wearing. The windows of this room are closed with curtains, but there is a small opening beneath the curtain where one can see a part of the floor. When the killer saw socks with oden pattern on them, they thought it was you and went ahead with the murder trick. The socks with oden pattern were your best attire, right?"

We fell silent as we imagined who the killer could be from his reasoning. Apparently we all came to the same conclusion, because everyone's eyes fell on Iyami. Iyami had gotten into a scuffle with Chibita and had screamed, "Chew are dead meat zansu!" There was no mistake that he had an urge to kill. He had even testified that he had gone for a walk outside after breakfast and had passed in front of this room. He could have waited outside the window for the right time to do the devil's work.

"Wait a second zansu! This makes no sense zansu! Totoko-chan confessed to it just now zansu! I want chew to take a closer look at that key ring zansu!" Iyami grabbed the key ring from the masked man and took a whiff. "See, I knew it!" It smells like fish zansu! That's proof that Totoko-chan used this zansu!"

But the masked man grabbed back the key ring.

"Of course it smells like fish."

The masked man firmly held the key ring with the same hand that had held the fish intestines. Seeing this, the agitated Iyami made a vague scream of "Sheehh!" and ran out of the room. The police ran after him.

Iyami pushed over the decorative armor in the hallway and ran. Inspector Choromatsu stumbled and fell, while Detective Todomatsu jumped over him to avoid falling himself. The offense and defense continued as they moved throughout the entire mansion. When Iyami appeared trapped in the kitchens, he fought back by throwing knives and cleavers. Iyami got away by riding the food transport service elevator up to the second floor, and everyone else followed him. Running up the staircase at the front hall, forensics investigator Jyushimatsu leapt towards Iyami at the dance hall on the second floor. However, at the very last moment, Iyami jumped onto the stairway banister and grabbed the chandelier to escape. Detective Osomatsu grabbed an antique vase nearby and threw it, but Iyami neatly dodged

it. By the way, the masked man didn't join in the uproar. He stayed in the break room, eating oden. Chibita stood by to give him more servings. After a shootout with antique rifles that were kept stored in the attic, Iyami ran up to the roof, where forensics investigator Jyushimatsu finally caught him.

"Killer apprehended!"

As he brought Iyami down with a pro-wrestling move, forensics investigator Jyushimatsu declared so with a loud cry.

The red revolving light lit up the snowflakes floating in the darkness. Iyami, in handcuffs, was shoved into the backseat of the patrol car that stood at the front yard of the mansion. Police Inspector Choromatsu and Police Detective Todomatsu climbed in to sit on either side of him. Forensics investigator Jyushimatsu sat at the driver's wheel. Just as Detective Osomatsu was about to climb into the passenger side, I called out to stop him.

"Thank you for solving the case."

However, he shook his head. "No, I haven't solved it."

He did have a point. This wasn't exactly what one would call solving a case.

"But there was something more important than that."

Saying this, he nodded and got into the car. The police car took off, its tires treading on the frozen roads. The red revolving light moved slowly away, leaving the mansion grounds as well as Karamatsukun's corpse back at the crime scene.

And that, was the entire circumstances of the case.

With my employer Iyami arrested, Chibita and I lost our jobs at that mansion. Chibita opened up an oden stand, while I began to venture into my dream of being an idol.

Every time I had a handshake event, the number of my fans decreased because of reasons like "The smell of fish gets on their hands," or something like that. But I'm all right. People can become what they want to be. I live with Karamatsukun's words at heart.

When the seasons turn to winter, I remember the murder. I don't know what happened to that old mansion since. Maybe its original owner, the masked man, lives there now. From what I've been hearing through the grapevine, a bunch of cats have settled there now, making that mansion their home.

END

WRITER PROFILE

Otsu Ichi

Born in Fukuoka in 1978. At the age of 17, he debuted with "Summer, Fireworks, and My Corpse" and won the Jump Novels Nonfiction Award. Some of his best works include "GOTH," "ZOO," "Jojo's Bizarre Adventure" novelization, as well as "The Book."