



## Echoes of the Butterfly: A Promise in Lightning

Frederico Valverde



Battered and bloodied after the horrors of Final Selection, young Souta Haruki looked up through the haze of exhaustion to see a vision of impossible grace. Kanae Kocho stood before him, her butterfly haori fluttering like wings in the moonlight, appearing as an untouched sanctuary in a world that had tried to break him.



Years of grueling training and lightning-fast strikes earned Souta the title of Thunder Hashira, allowing him to finally stand as an equal beside the woman who had haunted his dreams. They stood together on a quiet balcony overlooking the estate, the weight of their roles momentarily forgotten in the warmth of a shared, lingering gaze and a soft touch of hands.



In the hidden corners of the Butterfly Estate, their love flourished in the small spaces between missions, characterized by Kanae's quiet, possessive way of tucking a stray hair behind Souta's ear. The world outside was filled with demons, but here, in the curve of her smile and the heat of her breath against his neck, Souta found his only true home.



The light left Souta's world the day Kanae was buried, leaving him a hollow shell who haunted her gravesite like a restless ghost in the pouring rain. He stopped eating and sleeping, his eyes growing sunken and dark as he whispered secrets to the cold stone, desperate for a voice that would never answer him again.



Shinobu found him trembling in the darkness of the estate and pressed a final, crumpled letter from her sister into his hands. Reading Kanae's words—her plea for him to live, to protect their family, and the reminder that he would always belong to her—Souta finally wept, the crushing weight of his promise becoming the only thing keeping him from falling apart.



Now a protective older brother to the girls of the Butterfly Estate, Souta sat on the rooftop with Shinobu, listening as she vented her frustrations about the emotionally distant Giyu Tomioka. He offered a gentle, knowing smirk, teasing her about her temper while secretly plotting a way to give her the chance at happiness he had lost.



Under the soft glow of the estate lamps, the air between Shinobu and Giyu grew thick with unspoken words and agonizing pauses until her frustration finally boiled over. She grabbed the front of his haori, pulling him into a desperate, messy, and deeply human kiss that shattered his defenses and forced him to finally acknowledge the love she offered.



Souta watched the successful union from the shadows with a bittersweet smile before retreating to the cemetery, where he collapsed in front of Kanae's headstone in total silence. Her spirit flickered into existence for a heartbeat, her hand ghosting over his hair with a touch he could almost feel, before she faded back into the mist and left him sobbing quietly.



Amidst the carnage of the final battle against Kokushibo, Souta pushed his body beyond its limits, his lightning-fast blade acting as a final shield for his comrades. As his vision blurred and his heart slowed, he felt no fear, only a profound sense of peace knowing he had kept his promise to protect the family Kanae loved.



Souta opened his eyes to find himself in a garden of endless spring, where the air smelled of wisteria and the sun never set. Before he could process the peace, a familiar figure in a butterfly haori sprinted toward him, and as Kanae threw her arms around him in a crushing embrace, the long years of loneliness finally dissolved into a forever they would never have to leave.