

Changeling Press

福  
喜  
富

Tokyo Ink

ANN VREMONT



**Tokyo Ink  
Ann Vremont**

**All rights reserved.  
Copyright ©2008 Ann Vremont**

**Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.**

**ISBN: 978-1-60521-018-6**

**Formats Available:  
HTML, Adobe PDF,  
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader**

**Publisher:  
Changeling Press LLC  
PO Box 1046  
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046  
[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)**

**Editor: Katriena Knights  
Cover Artist: Reneé George**

**This e-book file contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language which some may find offensive and which is not appropriate for a young audience. Changeling Press E-Books are for sale to adults, only, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.**

## Tokyo Ink

### Ann Vremont

Shimizu -- the once-glittering glass pyramid in the middle of Tokyo Bay that housed a million people -- is now a crumbling super-prison owned by Iyashii Corporation. Tetsu Hogosha's mother was caught in the city's conversion. In a criminal system where the care and feeding of a child adds time to the mother's crime, she signed him away to be an Iyashii bond employee as her only chance at freedom.

Now Tetsu is a free man and head of Iyashii's security forces for the country. But he has a secret sideline that might one day break Iyashii's hold on Shimizu. For months, he has watched the male dancer serving Iyashii's executive tea room. Tetsu knows every flawless movement the male geisha will make, from tea ceremony, to fan dance, to the slow revelation of his naked, tattooed flesh before he takes the executives, alone or in pairs, into the bedroom suite adjoining the tea room to satisfy their every desire.

For just as long, Tetsu has tried to convince himself he watches his unwitting accomplice only to record the secret messages embedded in the tattoos' design. But when Iyashii sends its top assassin after the male geisha, Tetsu is faced with the cold hard choice of protecting the message and its secret language at all costs or rescuing the one man capable of challenging his loyalties.

## Chapter One

A bank of monitors lined the wall of Tetsu Hogosha's office, but he kept his attention focused on the screen monitoring the executive tea room. The room was occupied by three of the Iyashii Corporation's directors and a male entertainer they had hired for their meeting. Looking at the executives made Tetsu's skin crawl -- corporate vampires dressed in black silk with their pampered asses cushioned by red leather couches.

As much as he wanted to take a torch to them and have Iyashii's first bona fide executive barbecue, he ignored them and watched the entertainer. Most of the dancer was still hidden beneath the voluminous robes of a traditional geisha. He was *gaijin* -- Canadian if Tetsu had the accent pegged correctly -- and a consummate professional. He moved flawlessly from the tea ceremony into a fan dance. Tetsu knew the dancer's routine. The robes would come off soon, revealing his body and a network of temporary, yet highly intricate tattoos against the pale skin.

The tattoos were why Tetsu watched, and he waited impatiently for that first glance of naked flesh. Tetsu's right hand rested alongside a mobile interface, his stylus poised to begin writing. With his free hand, he kept fiddling with his gun holster, first adjusting it, then patting the gun resting against his side. These meetings always made him nervous. Information that people would kill for was being exchanged. Only the exchange wasn't between the company directors but between Tetsu and the dancer.

And the dancer didn't know it.

That was the beauty of the Code. It turned ordinary people, slaves to the machine, into unwitting, walking billboards for the ongoing defiance of their corporate overlords. Like its original inspiration, *Nü Shu*, or "women's writing," the Code was openly displayed as a design element -- painted on fans, embroidered on scarves, and

tattooed onto human flesh. The young man's body was covered with the secret language, and all he knew was that he'd found an inexpensive and talented tattooist who always found time to fit him in on a regular basis for fresh artwork.

Tetsu leaned forward, his grip on the stylus tightening as the dancer snapped his fans shut. He flipped the fans in the air, catching them so that he held only their fragile tips and the short handles were pointed out. One of the directors, Mikio-san, shot an arm out in what looked like an attempt to catch the dancer's sash. The young man deflected him, smiled, and sidled out of arm's reach.

*Youran -- Western Orchid.* That was the dancer's stage name, and it was a strange fit. Lean, but muscular and hovering around six feet, he was decidedly larger than the average male geisha. Nor was anything about his face particularly small or fine-boned as the name might suggest. The eyes were a peculiar slate blue, like the afternoon sky before a thunderstorm, and large. The dark ring of kohl around them and the peacock swirl of reds and purples that fanned out from their outer corners made them look larger still. The nose and jaw were full -- too big, even -- but the cheekbones were set high and the mouth... Tetsu couldn't be sure about the mouth. It looked tight yet full-lipped, but the make-up made the lip area seem smaller. Tight for sure, though. The dancer's wicked tongue and lips were the reason behind Mikio-san's patronage.

It should have been the dance that made Mikio-san call Youran again and again. Tetsu had watched the dancer perform over a dozen times. It was a slow magic, the way the young man moved. Most particularly when he was undressing like he was now. First the sash, all eleven feet of it. A turn. A twist. It set the sound of taiko drums playing in Tetsu's mind -- the fat hammer head of the drumstick hitting the tight skin of the drum head as the dancer froze and sweat glistened along his pale skin.

Sometimes, Tetsu forgot why he was watching, forgot the Code and the stylus and the mobile and the almost countless years of his life he'd wasted gaining his own high level post at Iyashii. Wanting something could do that to a man, make him put aside purpose and reach for all the benefits of privilege.

When that happened, he would think of Shimizu and what had become of the city in the hands of companies like Iyashii. The once glittering glass pyramid in the middle of Tokyo Bay that had housed almost a million people was now a crumbling prison system. His mother had been caught in the conversion, and he'd been born into it. "Squatting" -- that was what the government contractors had arrested her for, dragging her from her small one bedroom flat in Shimizu's university district and hauling her before a corporate magistrate. A one-year sentence became two years after her pregnancy was discovered and they began billing her for their so-called medical services. She'd signed him away at six, doing so her only chance at freedom. That had made him a bond employee.

Lucky for him he was smarter than most of the other kids similarly bonded to the company. He was a free man now and head of Iyashii's security forces for the country, and with a secret sideline that might one day break the hold Iyashii had on Shimizu.

Shimizu, where the Code had started.

Tetsu leaned closer to the screen as Youran peeled the last of the sash away and slipped gracefully from the robe, unaware that he was a living, breathing communiqué for anti-corporate terrorists. It was all there, ident numbers for the political prisoners, their transfer dates from the corporate magistrates' holding locations to Shimizu. As head of security, there were other ways for him to access the information, but not without setting off a million alarms after the transfers were intercepted. He picked up the mobile and started recording the symbols, sighing as he got down to work.

Some days, he just wanted to watch Youran dance.

Half an hour later, the message was translated and forwarded to team commanders who would begin planning the strikes on the prisoner transport. Tetsu could have stopped watching, could have turned the screen off and gone home for the evening, but Mikio-san had taken the dancer into the suite adjacent to the tea room. The young man was down on his knees, the black hair that had been so carefully coiled and pinned now undone and falling around his sculpted shoulders and back. The mouth, busy working Mikio's erect cock, was still painted with its red center and purplish-

black corners. The red-tipped fingers, despite their obvious strength, worked the man's balls with a light touch.

Tetsu zoomed the ceiling camera in, focusing on Youran's face. The eyes were closed, the lashes impossibly long and brushing against his prominent cheekbones. The sound was off, but he could tell that Mikio was close to ejaculating. He had grabbed two handfuls of Youran's hair, forcing his head back and then thrusting into the dancer's mouth. Youran passively accepted the violent, clumsy fucking Mikio now offered, with only the smeared lipstick and the strain around his closed eyes showing that this was nothing but work.

It unnerved Tetsu, looking down on the dancer like that -- almost as if it were his own cock in the young man's mouth. He would have been more gentle, slower despite the ache he already felt in his balls and along the painful length of his erection. And he would have tasted the dancer, too. That was something Mikio-san never did. Tetsu would have tasted all of him. The skin along his neck, his nipples, the small of his back. It would be a feast that went on all night, not this callous rutting paid for on an Iyashii expense account.

Tetsu looked away as he saw the dancer tense against the first spurt of Mikio's cum. He glanced at the monitors along his office wall, taking in the executive tea room, the elevators and the front security desk.

"Fuck!" Tetsu hit the one-way speaker to the front desk just as Obara no Ryuu walked past. Iyashii's top assassin didn't sign in, didn't say anything, just gave the guard on duty a nod.

It was late Friday. Most of the employees in the building, if they weren't security, were doing data entry or cleaning offices. Tetsu turned the sound in the tea room back up; the only obvious targets, other than himself, were the three executives.

"Do you think we'll both get a turn before Ryuu shows up?" That was Jun with his high nasal whine. He had his hand in his lap, absentmindedly rubbing at his crotch and leaning toward the suite's door. "Mikio-san always takes too long."



So Jun and the other knew about the assassin. Did that mean the target was Mikio... or the dancer?

Timed slowed for Tetsu. He checked the elevator monitors and saw Ryuu pull out a hypopress and load a blue ampoule into it. So the Iyashii enforcer wasn't here to kill someone. At least not until the interrogation was over. But why hadn't anyone said something to him? Why, as head of security, was he out of the loop on a kidnapping or hit in his own office building?

He jumped from his chair, grabbed his jacket and mobile. He slid the jacket on, his thumb working the mobile's keypad. It took three keys to temporarily shut down the elevators, three more to stop the camera feed and erase the night's video and two to send a pre-programmed message to the man that had inked Youran's body.

G2G. Go to ground.

He pocketed the mobile and opened the top drawer of his filing cabinet. Inside were a can of butane and a lighter. He hesitated reaching in. The dancer's skin was so pale, the designs covering it fleeting works of art replaced every few weeks. His chest tightening at the thought, he grabbed the accelerant and lighter, tried not to think about what it might come to. Protecting the Code came first.

Heading for the stairway, he just prayed he wouldn't have to kill Youran to do it.

\* \* \*

The suite had two access points, the first through the tea room and the second a secret hall that ran from the suite to the stairway. Tetsu went in through the hidden corridor. He unlocked the door to the suite with his pass card then jammed it open. Seeing the dancer still down on his knees, this time with Jun in his mouth, Tetsu hit the suite's panic button, locking the door to the tea room. At the same time, he lifted his gun, firing off a shot that hit Jun square in the forehead.

Youran rolled to the side, taking cover on the other side of the bed. Tetsu leapt onto the mattress and grabbed a fistful of the young man's long black hair. His mind registered its softness even as he jerked the dancer to his feet. He resisted the urge to shove the barrel of his gun against Youran's face and force immediate compliance.

"I'm here to protect you." He hoped the full truth didn't reveal itself in his voice or his eyes. Mikio and Katashi were yelling from the other room, pounding on the door. He pulled a sheet from the bed and thrust it at the dancer. "There's a man on his way up -- a killer. Obara no..."

Youran's gaze widened before Tetsu could finish naming the notorious Iyashii assassin. The dancer glanced down at Jun's lifeless body and shook his head. "You're mistaken."

Tetsu felt the sharp press of time against his senses. If the guard at the front desk had any sense, he'd already released the temporary lock on the elevators, and Ryuu would be on his way up.

Or waiting in the stairwell.

"We're both probably dead already!" He pushed at the dancer. "Now, go!"

He prodded Youran to keep moving down the hall leading to the stairs. Instead of taking the stairs, he pulled Youran into the main hall, wrapping the sheet around the dancer's body as they went. He could hear the elevators running again -- couldn't know if they carried Ryuu. Stairs, elevator -- it didn't matter. He could think of only one way down that didn't end in their deaths.

"No, absolutely not!" The dancer started struggling but it was too late. Tetsu already had the panel to the recycling chute pulled open. He hit the young man hard in the center of his back, knocking him off balance and sending him forward into the chute head first. He followed after him, the sound of the elevator bell the last thing he heard before the panel door slammed shut.

## Chapter Two

The fourteen floors to the basement level took four and a half seconds. Time enough to anticipate the impact with little ability to minimize it. Tetsu saw the dancer plow into the clear bags filled with shredded paper, his arms wrapped around his head. Tetsu mimicked the motion, tucking his chin to his chest. He continued curling into himself as his body left the chute, rolling alongside Youran.

The dancer tried to scrabble away but Tetsu hooked him by the foot. It wasn't easy -- Youran almost matched him in strength and build -- but he managed to pull the dancer back with one hand while he felt his own body to make sure he still had everything on him. Gun, butane, mobile and lighter.

He forced himself to move, dragging Youran with him to the service stairs that led up to street level and onto an empty alley. He stuck to the alleys until they found a middle class apartment building. He could tell from the heat vents sticking out that there was a shared laundry room. It was simple enough to break the lock on the building and steal some pants and a shirt from a dryer. There was a sink there, too, and he scrubbed Youran's face briefly to remove most of the make-up. Lingering was risky. Riskier still was taking a pair of sandals from the genkan outside an apartment, but he couldn't walk around the city with a nervous barefoot man without attracting attention.

From there, they moved into the grungier parts of the city, areas far outside any corporation's control. He had a one room safe house, with a hot plate, canned food and, more importantly, chemicals that would painlessly remove the ink. Along the way to the safe house, he learned the dancer's real name -- Gabriel, or, as the dancer preferred, Gabe.

In the room, Tetsu took his jacket off, pulled his mobile and the butane from the pockets and placed them on a small table. He'd stay offline until Gabe's skin was a

blank canvas once more. Gabe came over to the table, picked up the can of butane. His brows were as pitch black as the rest of his hair and they came down in a sharp pinch of contemplation.

“You carry this around all the time?”

Tetsu took the accelerant from Gabe and grabbed the ink remover and a washcloth. “Sit and take off your shirt.”

Gabe widened his stance and crossed his arms. “Tell me what this about.”

“Telling you puts other people in danger. Now sit down.” The dancer lifted his chin but didn’t otherwise move. Tetsu put the bottle and washcloth down. He didn’t want to order the dancer around with his gun -- if that would even work -- and he didn’t have time to cajole him into compliance. Hell, he could tell by the stubborn set of Gabe’s jaw that would be futile, as well.

So he moved without warning, grabbing Gabe and spinning him until the dancer was pressed chest first against the wall. Tetsu kicked Gabe’s legs wider apart to throw him off balance and pressed his hips hard against the dancer’s ass to wedge him against the wall while he stripped the shirt from Gabe’s body. Surprise had made the first half easy, but now Gabe was fighting back, his dancer’s strength and agility making him hard to hold.

“*Kisama!*”

Gabe could call him a bastard all he liked, but the ink had to come off. Tetsu soaked the washcloth with the liquid and began scrubbing at Gabe’s back and arms. Gabe wouldn’t stop struggling, forcing Tetsu to keep him pinned between his body and the wall. He could smell the expensive perfumes the dancer had put on for the private performance at Iyashii. The quiet scent with its nuanced layers would have been lost on Mikio-san and the others. There was no magic or soul in those men. The beauty of the design on his skin, the Code, everything -- it was all lost on those powered by avarice. They would acquire the dancer because others thought him beautiful and talented. Then they would use him and discard him, only to collect another.

Tetsu slowed the movement of cloth over skin as the fight in Gabe weakened. "Are you ready to finish this yourself?"

Gabe nodded, the motion sending up a fresh burst of the dancer's scent. Tetsu moved back, let the cloth fall to the floor as he turned away. He'd used the young man, too. Did it matter that he thought he had a good cause?

He laid down on the narrow mattress that would comfortably sleep one of them tonight and stared at the ceiling while Gabe worked the oil based solvent onto his lower body. A layer of black lay on his skin from the dissolved ink.

"Everywhere," Tetsu warned. "Then shower."

Once wouldn't be enough. He knew that. There were ultraviolet readers that would still pick up the pattern. Another application would be required after the shower, when Gabe's pores had opened up from the heat.

"Make it a hot one."

"What?"

He looked over to find Gabe rubbing at the tattoo on his cock. Tetsu didn't groan, wanted like hell to do so. He could feel it in his chest and his balls, both tightening with want. With the ink mixing with the solvent, Gabe looked like he'd been dipped in a barrel of oil. Slick black skin glistened from his ankles up to his neck and back down to his wrists.

Tetsu cleared his throat. "I said that it needs to be a hot shower."

He went back to staring at the ceiling until he heard Gabe start the shower. It was surreal, having him in the next room. He tried to count how many hours he'd spent watching him on a live feed and then digitally altering the stored media so that no one could decode the tattoos if they ever discovered what they were looking at. There had been brief, chance encounters in the building -- at the security desk, in the elevator. Tetsu's suits were expensive enough and his nails clean enough that Gabe had played him as a potential client, offering demure glances and a gently swaying manner that demanded Tetsu look at him.

That world was gone now, he thought, searching through a dresser drawer for the UV reader. The job was gone. Gabe would soon be gone, if not dead.

The water stopped just as he found the reader. Tetsu slumped against the wall, waiting for Gabe to come out. He could explain dissolving the surface layer of ink as part of disguising the dancer's appearance. There was no good way to explain the reader, or to know whether Gabe would piece it all together.

Gabe stepped into the room, a towel around his waist. His hair hung wet down the center of his back. Water droplets sparkled across his shoulders. He turned at the waist until he caught sight of Tetsu. His gaze dropped to the UV reader, and he raised his brows questioningly.

"Dry off, then lay down on the bed."

Gabe walked to the edge of the mattress. He took the towel from his waist and began slowly seesawing it against his back. He kept his head turned so that he was watching Tetsu over his shoulder. He lifted a leg, stretched it out on the bed as he dried the skin. It was a performance to him -- Tetsu held no illusion as to what Gabe was trying to do or why. Gabe must have come to the conclusion in the shower that seducing Tetsu was the best way to ensure his own survival or get Tetsu to lower his guard long enough to escape. Knowing this didn't help dampen his body's reaction when Gabe turned and began drying his chest.

"That's enough. The blanket will absorb the rest." Tetsu motioned at the mattress. "Stomach first."

Gabe obeyed but took his time getting into position. First he got on his hands and knees in the center of the bed. Then he let his lower body slide back. Tetsu turned the lights off, purposefully cutting the show short. He switched the UV reader on and slowly passed it over Gabe's body, starting at the calves. When the reader's light hit the top of his thigh, Gabe lifted his shapely ass.

"Stay still." Tetsu's voice was strained. He knew it but couldn't keep the edge out. He'd spent so many hours watching this man's body -- to have Gabe purposefully teasing him now was almost unbearable.

“Roll over.”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

The words left Gabe in a breathy sigh. Tetsu tried to ignore them. He began the pass of the UV reader just below Gabe’s chin. He reached the nipples, saw Gabe pinching them to hard points. As the light moved lower, so did Gabe’s hands.

Screw it! He’d seen enough to know that the marks were still faintly visible under the reader. He switched it off and fumbled for the light switch on the wall. With the light on, he rinsed the washcloth out and tossed it at Gabe, along with the bottle of ink remover.

“Do it again.”

Gabe rolled over. “I can’t reach everywhere.”

Tetsu tossed the reader on the table and picked up the washcloth. He drenched it and started rubbing. He kept his touch hard, more to keep from falling for Gabe’s attempts at seduction than out of a need to penetrate the deeper layers of skin. “There, you can do the rest.”

He got up, moved away, heard nothing and looked back. The damn tease would only do it if he was watching! “This isn’t a game.”

“But this is the first time I’ve been able to capture your attention.” He was stroking his cock again, playing with its full, hard length.

So Gabe had recognized him. That didn’t mean he wasn’t trying to play him. Tetsu let his voice go cold. “Finish and rinse off again.”

“How hot should I make it?”

No mistaking the dancer’s meaning. Tetsu busied himself with his handgun. He’d only shot one round from the magazine, and he threaded a replacement back into the clip. “Ice cold for all I care. Just hurry it up.”

Gabe prowled his way toward the bathroom. Just as it had been while Mikio-san fucked the dancer’s tight little mouth, Tetsu couldn’t look away, couldn’t miss the image of hard muscle moving beneath pale oiled skin, the dark red nipples, the cock flushed with blood and those slate blue eyes staring at him. Tetsu grabbed Gabe’s arm,

knowing the minute he touched the other man's flesh that he had to unload the dancer soon.

"Look, just a little while longer and we can work on putting this behind you. Maybe not your old life..." He couldn't help himself. He dropped his gaze to Gabe's erection. He wanted to grab hold of him there, stroke him, take him in his mouth and suck on him while Gabe offered him the same pleasures. How long had he wanted this? How long had he wanted, specifically, this one man?

He looked away and dropped Gabe's arm. "In the meantime, stop playing your little whore games. Things will go easier."

Gabe moved, the bathroom door shutting quietly behind him. Tetsu turned to the dresser, pulled out a spare mobile Iyashii couldn't trace. Once nothing showed up on Gabe's skin with the reader, he would contact the others in his cell, find out what they knew and come up with a plan for relocating the dancer.

Soon.

Before Gabe's constant chiseling at his self-control made Tetsu crack.

\* \* \*

The second scan of the UV reader came up clear. Tetsu told Gabe to dress and then began contacting the others. His first call was to Tori, the tattoo artist who had been giving Gabe a sweet deal on the temporary body art. Tori had closed up shop and put a "family emergency" sign in the window. Watchers were set on the building, but no one from Iyashii had come around yet.

There were six others in the cell, each reporting the same scenario. They had cleared out and placed sentries who were still reporting no activity. Tetsu's corporate apartment and Gabe's hotel room, however, were crawling with Iyashii security forces. He had, of course, pumped a bullet into Jun's head before running off with the little *danshou*. Certainly that was reason enough for them to search both their living quarters. He put the mobile in sleep mode.

"I told you to get dressed."

"And stop playing my whore games."



"That is what you were doing." The whole exchange was even-toned until he looked toward the bed to find Gabe on his side, casually stroking his stomach. His hair had dried and partially hid the left side of his face. Tetsu remembered Tori saying how hairless the dancer was everywhere other than his brow, lashes and scalp, speculating how he must wax the skin to its smooth perfection.

Tetsu moved to the bed and stood looking down at the young man. "Why are you doing this?" This time his voice cracked.

"You saved me --"

"*Usotsuki!*" The line was pure bullshit. "You want something... you want..."

"You."

That had to be a lie. Gabe didn't, couldn't. It wasn't so much that Tetsu was plain. His body, he thought with a touch of pride, made up for a too common face. But his rank and privilege were gone now. And he'd only been a lower-level executive before the day went to hell -- just chief of regional security. It might have meant money enough for a wife and one child -- but a *shudo* mistress of Gabe's reputation?

*Tendou*, did it matter? The dancer was offering himself. Did it really matter that the strings attached to the offer probably ran a kilometer long?

Sliding onto the mattress, Tetsu pushed Gabe onto his back. He threaded his fingers through the silk-black hair, brought his lips down hard on Gabe's mouth. The dancer moaned, yielding to Tetsu's force. His tongue swept into Tetsu's mouth, wriggling with the same need that moved the rest of his body. He grabbed at Tetsu's shirt, untucked it and started clawing at his belt.

## Chapter Three

Tetsu felt his common sense retreat. It was the long period of wanting that was his undoing. Wanting was bad. Protocol, training, instinct. Wanting shoved those things to the side until the only thing left was the object. Here it was, beneath him, body arching against him, kissing him, sucking at his bottom lip, gnawing, even. Gnawing in the same way wanting Gabe had silently gnawed at him these last few months.

Tetsu rolled onto his back and let Gabe strip the rest of his clothes from him. The dancer moved quickly, expertly. And then it was flesh on flesh, cock against cock as Gabe slid up to kiss him with the same bruising force Tetsu had offered.

Bringing his legs up along Tetsu's sides, Gabe straddled him. "All those times I tried to get your attention at Iyashii -- you were pretending to ignore me?"

"Yes." His chest hurt. Breathing was difficult. He wanted Gabe to stop talking and kiss him again. He tried to pull Gabe down but the dancer slipped away. Tetsu lifted his head to see Gabe's dark head descending over his cock, the red lips parted. He thought about all the things he had seen Gabe do with the Iyashii executives. He'd seen Mikio-san and whiny little Jun simultaneously come in the dancer at opposite ends at the same time Gabe's strong hands serviced one or two other men. And the things he had seen Gabe do to Jun! The whips, the plugs. Or the rare times when Gabe had shown real pleasure in being taken rudely from behind with no amenities to ease his lover's entrance.

Tetsu knew already that if he were to have the smallest sampling of Gabe, then he must have him all and be completely possessed by this young man in return.

"Oh, god, we can't." He would start hyperventilating if the dancer's lips actually touched him.

Gabe's mouth hovered just above the swollen head of Tetsu's cock. He licked his lips once. "What do you mean?"

"There's no..." He groaned, tried unsuccessfully to evade the long swipe of Gabe's tongue along the length of his shaft. The sensation was a tortured heaven. He shuddered, felt the sensation of a dagger being buried deep in his chest as he constricted his perineum to keep from coming.

"You have a UV reader --" Another swipe and then a long suck of the tip before he spoke again. "A spare mobile and ammo --" He pulled Tetsu's shaft into his mouth then released it with a lingering pop. "And you're telling me you don't have the most basic, most essential, supplies?"

Tetsu shook his head. He didn't trust any words he might utter to be coherent. He had meant to say there was no going back. But, already, it was too late. That tongue, those lips, had touched him. He wanted more.

Tetsu flung his arm out, pointing Gabe toward the dresser, where the first aid kit and its tube of MedGel were. Gabe started to move away. Somewhere past the heavy sound of blood flowing through Tetsu, he heard his plea to the dancer. "Don't stop."

"Believe me, Tetsu Hogosha, I have no intention of releasing you any time soon." Gabe descended again and sucked hungrily at the tip of Tetsu's erection for a few seconds before leaving the bed.

He watched the practiced sway of Gabe's ass as he walked to the dresser and found the first aid kit. It was mesmerizing to watch him move, but Tetsu wasn't so far gone that he didn't realize Gabe had used his last name. He'd never offered the dancer his full name. He studied Gabe's face, looking for signs of treachery as the young man walked back to the bed.

Gabe stopped, tilted his head at Tetsu. "I'd rather have you staring at my cock."

Damn that smile. It was wicked and knowing for sure, but treacherous? "You have a beautiful face."

"And a beautiful cock." Gabe's grin turned carnivorous as he pounced onto the bed.

Gabe began working Tetsu's cock with his mouth again. Tetsu liked to think that he was bigger than average, but Gabe could suck him all the way down to the base and hold him there while his tongue curled and pressed and stroked like some kind of twisting snake. Pleasure brushed his eyelids shut. He forgot, almost. Something Gabe had said.

*Hogosha.*

"How do you --" The words froze in Tetsu's throat as Gabe began fingering the ring of his ass. Gabe kept sucking him as he teased the tight hole, the dancer's wide shoulders forcing Tetsu to lift his legs higher and wider apart.

Gabe hadn't opened the tube of MedGel yet, and his tongue followed the same path as his finger to gently lick at the outer rim. Tetsu could feel the moisture Gabe was laying down and then the slow prying of his finger. Tetsu knew, from the video surveillance, what Gabe was doing, letting the spit drip down onto his finger to ease him deeper into Tetsu's ass. But it was a remote kind of knowing, and the ease with which his inexperienced body accepted the slow probing almost unhinged him.

"Cover me... please, please cover me." Words. Wrong. Tetsu bit at his lip with a pleasure-filled frustration. He was going to come. He wanted Gabe's mouth on him. That was what he had meant. He clamped down on the finger, tried to regain some of his control. "Suck me. Suck my cock again."

But the little tease wasn't about to end the torture. He opened his mouth wide and stuck his tongue out to slowly curl Tetsu's balls into his mouth one at a time. These he sucked, moaning as he did so. The moans matched the slide of his finger inside Tetsu.

"*Kisama!* Stop thi --" His voice broke. He arched, forcing himself down hard on Gabe's finger as he reached down with both hands and pulled Gabe's mouth from his balls. His mind was beyond the possibility of pain, the wrenching just another sensation that made him ache to explode inside the dancer's mouth.

He pulled Gabe forward by the hair until the swollen lips were level with the throbbing tip of his erection. Gabe grew still, remaining motionless until Tetsu released his head.

"Please, Gabriel."

"Mikio told me Iyashii had a mole."

Sweet heaven! Tetsu threw his head back against the pillow. No words, he couldn't handle words -- just licking, sucking and moaning. Ah! The vibrations from those moans. They'd traveled straight up his cock like electricity along a lightning rod. He had no mind left to him to wrap around Gabe's statement and no will left to resist his interrogator.

"Is that why they sent Ryuu? Just because Mikio told me there was a mole?"

"No!" He tried to squirm against the finger still inside him, but Gabe pressed his thumb against the spot where Tetsu's scrotum smoothed into his perineum. It kept the pleasure stacked deliriously high but effectively cut off his ability to orgasm.

"Does it have anything, then, to do with why you were willing to burn my skin off?"

There, the truth of it. The little *danshou* had known for quite a while and had been playing him.

"Yes." God, how could the pleasure still be there, pressing on his spine, keeping him so close to the edge even though he knew he was physically at Gabe's mercy? He could feel the strength in the other man's hand threatening at the same time it thrilled him.

"You were the mole -- you just didn't know it."

"*Shimizu*? The 'mizu code'?"

Tetsu tried to sit up, almost passed out. He fell back, a fresh layer of sweat breaking out along his skin. Gabe released him, moved off the mattress. A sideways glance told him the dancer had gone into the bathroom. He heard water running and closed his eyes, then jerked back to reality when Gabe switched the room's light off and slid back onto the mattress. His hand, when he laid it on Tetsu's stomach, was ice cold.

"I've heard of the Code, of course, but had no proof it actually existed."

Tetsu shook his head, forgetting they were in the dark now. He wanted to see Gabe. The young man's voice was too neutral. If anything, he sounded casually curious. It seemed impossible that Gabe had been moaning and kissing him a few minutes before.

Of course, that had been nothing more than a performance -- a means of discovery. And Tetsu had gladly walked straight into Gabe's trap. He rolled to his side, faced the wall. He tried to remember where in the room he had put his gun. The cool press of Gabe's hand between his shoulder blades made thought impossible.

"Would you believe me if I said I wouldn't tell?" The whisper came across deceptively sincere.

"I wouldn't believe anything you say now."

Gabe chuckled. "Liar. I can make you forget that you're angry at me -- at yourself." He waited, a heartbeat or a hundred. "Shall I prove it?"

Tetsu rolled, grabbed in the dark for Gabe's hands and found them. In an instant, he had Gabe pinned beneath him. The dancer went limp, compliant.

"You have me, it seems..."

*Seems.* Tetsu knew the truth of that. Already, he was growing hard again, his erection lengthening against Gabe's stomach. He let go of Gabe's hands but the dancer caught his, forced them up until they were pressing against Gabe's throat.

"Will you hold me like this?"

Tetsu's grip tightened, the fingers curling around the back of Gabe's neck while the thumbs stayed firm against the Adam's apple. Gabe lifted his legs high, bringing them up to wrap around Tetsu's waist and back. His ass butted against the head of Tetsu's cock.

"Or take me like this?"

Tetsu didn't answer, his concentration consumed with not gripping the dancer's neck any tighter. It took too much willpower to let go or relax his grip. He wondered again: how long had he wanted this one man?

Tetsu dropped his head until they were touching foreheads. He should have had other men before this. But that hadn't been possible -- not if he wanted to climb Iyashii's corporate ladder. The entertainers, the *shudo* lovers, were the privilege of the highest executives, not regional security chiefs. It was a mark of sophistication, like an expensive cigar or a car that still burned petrol. To take a lesser male lover... well, there were words for that. Ugly words. And anyone branded by those names would never work higher than the bottom rung of Iyashii or any other corporation.

Gabe tensed his ass cheeks, pinching at the tip of Tetsu's cock. "I want you to take me like this."

Tetsu felt like he'd been turned to stone. Every muscle was screwed tight, the strain heating his skin. Only his lips could still move. "You want something else from me. You're using your body to get it."

Gabe eased his hands between their bodies and placed his palms flat against Tetsu's chest. "I want you. Beyond tonight."

Lying little bastard. Cruel to sound so sweet, so sincere. Tetsu's mother had been at university, back when there were such things, before corporate academies were the only education to be had. She'd only talked to him about his father once before she signed Tetsu away. He'd been a professor, married. "A false cupid," she had called him, quoting some long-dead poet. "Evil his heart, but honey-sweet his tongue. No truth in him, the rogue. Cruel in his play." That was Gabe.

The dancer's voice changed when he spoke again, became more distant. "*You used me,*" he reminded Tetsu. "And now all you have to lose is your Code."

"It's not some trinket." The cold growl of his own voice surprised Tetsu, and that surprise tightened his grip around Gabe's throat. He heard the dancer wheeze and let go, instantly, at the sound.

Gabe threw his arms around Tetsu's neck. "No, not a trinket. That's why you won't give it up." He kissed the side of Tetsu's mouth. "That's why you can afford to risk a little temptation -- if the only thing to lose is the one thing you won't give up, how can you lose?"

There was no window in the room, no faint trace of light to illuminate a lie. But there was a gun, and a lighter and accelerant if it came to that. Tetsu let the kiss dissolve into his flesh and spread through him with a drugging effect. When Gabe slid his hands down to Tetsu's chest again and gently pushed, Tetsu rolled onto his back.

"What is it you really want?" he asked as Gabe kissed the bend of his neck. The dancer's mouth was warm and lingering, sucking at the flesh until Tetsu could feel the bruise forming.

"I want tonight." Gabe moved down, licked at Tetsu's nipple, then took it into his mouth. His hands stayed busy between feather stroking Tetsu's balls and tightly palming the shaft. "And then I want tomorrow -- but I don't want to talk about that right now."

Tetsu laced his fingers through the thick silk of Gabe's hair, his hands pulled along as the dancer's mouth moved ever lower, the tongue swirling along the flesh, the mouth hesitating for a few seconds here and there to kiss or suck. "And if I knew what you want for tomorrow?"

Gabe stopped and turned his head to the side so that his cheek pressed flat against Tetsu's stomach. His hands moved out to Tetsu's sides and, fingers splayed, he held Tetsu's hips. "We couldn't have tonight."

*Tonight.*

Gabe's hands slid back into place to wrap warmly around Tetsu's cock. His lips settled over the tip and began a slow descent. He kept the flat of his tongue firm against the head of Tetsu's erection. As Gabe's lips worked the shaft, Tetsu's earlier sense of urgency faded to a languorous ecstasy. He felt each fingertip, each strand of the dancer's hair as it fell across his chest.

This time, when Gabe teased the ring of Tetsu's ass, Tetsu felt the slick layer of MedGel. Gabe guided Tetsu's legs further apart and brought his heels forward until his knees were bent. The position let Gabe breach Tetsu more easily. Gasping as the finger slid into him, Tetsu tightened around it.



Gabe kept one hand around the base of Tetsu's cock, holding the erection so that it pointed toward the ceiling. As his finger slid into Tetsu, Gabe's lips moved over the shaft. When the second finger slid inside him, Tetsu felt the sharp pull of orgasm and thought he would burst, but Gabe gently pulled back. He seesawed Tetsu, thrusting and sucking to push him against the edge of climax over and over.

But he wouldn't let Tetsu come. It went on like that for minutes. Sometimes hard and fast, sometimes slow with the fingers flexed and stroking deep inside. The mouth teased in the same manner, swallowing him down to the base and then dancing around the edge, with Tetsu hovering sharply. Tetsu had seen this, too, on the tea room vids, seen the dancer stretch the moment of release out so far his client's mind was in danger of fragmenting into millions of over-stimulated neurons.

He wanted it to go on forever. He wanted it to end immediately.

Tetsu moaned, squirmed, felt the tiny explosion of brain cells and the fall into insanity begin as Gabe started to withdraw completely. The dancer clamped one hand around Tetsu's cock, squeezing tight as he squirted a heavy layer of MedGel onto it. He rubbed the gel over the entire shaft, then slid his whole body forward until his ass hovered over the swollen head.

Gods, yes, he wanted to come inside Gabe. He fought the instinct to grab the dancer's hips and thrust upward. He let Gabe settle slowly onto him, working his way down inch by squeezing inch, his ass moving in slow circles as he gripped Tetsu tighter. Tetsu reached out, found Gabe's cock and began to stroke him with both hands. Thick, big like his own. He wanted its thickness in him -- in his mouth, filling his ass with the same hard strokes Gabe had delivered with his hand.

Gabe leaned back, settling fully onto Tetsu's cock. He reached behind him, down between Tetsu's cheeks to rub the sensitive ring of flesh with the pad of one fingertip. Everything moved slow now -- the small circles Gabe made against Tetsu's ass, the short, undulating way he gripped Tetsu's cock with his body.

"Hold. Right there." Gabe lifted halfway up and put his free hand over Tetsu's to stop him.

Tetsu could feel the ripple start in Gabe -- in his cock, and then with the three rolling squeezes of the dancer's ass that brought Tetsu up and over the brink of orgasm. The dancer trembled, his cum squirting onto Tetsu's stomach. The muscles of his thighs and ass locked in a butterfly dance that elongated Tetsu's climax.

He thought he'd gone deaf from the ecstasy of it until Gabe, sighing deeply, leaned forward to rest against him. The dancer still held him inside, and the small flutters slowly faded to the sensation of a subdued pulse. He felt himself growing smaller, and anxiety clutched at his chest.

The night was almost over.

## Chapter Four

They stayed at the safe house until a little after one, Tetsu tucked into a chair in one corner while he studied his mobile's screen. He was irritated. Gabe would only tell him to which district they were going. The fact that it was within a ten-block radius of Iyashii made him twitch. He plotted street routes and looked at maps for the old sewer and subway lines below ground that would hopefully get them into the district unseen. When he was finally ready, he surprised Gabe by pulling the bed away from the wall and removing a tile from the floor.

"And I just thought the floor was just falling apart," Gabe joked as Tetsu unfolded a thin cartridge belt on the bed. There were eight slots total on the belt, each filled with a slim black cylinder. "What are those?"

"Timers, explosives." Grim-faced, he put the belt on. Gabe had moved closer to the door. "Sure you won't tell me who we're visiting?"

"Soon."

*Soon. Almost. Not yet. Be patient.* Round and round they went with the same questions and answers for two hours, like broken records as Tetsu demanded to know whom they were visiting and Gabe stalled. Threading their way through dark alleys and overcrowded streets, Tetsu felt like a little kid in one of those old time storybooks, on his way to grandma's house but knowing the wolf already was in residence.

"We're close now," Gabe said after they'd reached the business district and Tetsu had dragged him into another dirty alley. "It's the Valnyk building."

Tetsu pulled Gabe further down the alley. ValCo was no friend to Iyashii Corp. Each company had "areas of interest" the other wished to take over. Iyashii had petitioned for mineral and water exploitation rights in Canada the last three years straight and would have received the grant if the CBC officers they kept bribing hadn't

wound up dead. Which was fair enough considering how many Valnyk execs had received involuntary recruiting visits from Obara no Ryuu.

Tetsu tried to think who at Valnyk would be particularly susceptible to Gabe's charms. Certainly no Valnyk execs had shown up on the security scan as clients of Gabe. "Who?" he asked at last.

"The CEO." Gabe offered Tetsu a flat, wry smile, but his gaze narrowed.

Magnus Valnyk -- late fifties, second generation Canadian. Ruthless in a way that made him successful and well-respected by his Japanese competitors. His private life was just that -- private. If he'd been doing the dancer on the side, nostalgic perhaps for a homegrown accent, no one would have known. But he wasn't the kind of man you went to for favors -- or safety.

Tetsu shook his head. "We need to go back to the safe house and think this through. Magnus Valnyk isn't going to help you."

"No," Gabe agreed. "But he'll help himself. You're going to hand him enough information on Iyashii to do some serious damage to the company."

"Why would I do that?" It was difficult reading Gabe's face in the shadows, and the dancer's expression seldom gave anything away. And even those moments of revelation were suspect.

"One, you'll do it for protection -- for both of us." Gabe's answer was matter-of-fact, like he'd been asked to name Jupiter's moons or calculate the distance of Saturn's orbit. "Two, you'll do it to bring Iyashii down. Feed Valnyk what you want to get what you want. You want Shimizu closed down? Valnyk can do that."

"And open up his own facility," Tetsu offered. "No thanks."

Gabe shrugged. "Then go back to your safe room."

He turned, using his dancer's grace to slip away from Tetsu's grasp. By the time Tetsu realized he was grabbing at shadows, Gabe was at the mouth of the alley, stepping into the daylight of the open street. Tetsu followed. He might be going to his death. He knew that. If he presented himself to Valnyk and then turned the man down

because the cost was too high, the bastard would hand deliver him and Gabe to the Iyashii company.

Well, maybe not Gabe. Tetsu still didn't have that figured out, especially with the way Gabe was walking straight up to the front door of the company's Japanese headquarters. The dancer turned, gestured briefly in Tetsu's direction while he said something to the guard stationed out front and then entered the building.

Tetsu crossed the street slowly, watching the guard on the door as he went. He knew the stance, guessed the caliber and fit of the man's weapon by the way he held his hand close to his side. If Tetsu turned now and walked away, would the guard follow him?

"It's not the guard who matters," he whispered to himself and stepped onto the curb. He held his hands palms forward, arms slightly out. The doorman was quick and efficient. What looked like a superficial pat to Tetsu's sides served to disarm him of the gun and the belt with its explosives.

Gabe was waiting at the elevators. Another guard tried to stop Tetsu. The man put a hand on Tetsu's shoulder and reached into the pocket that held Tetsu's mobile, but Gabe cut the inspection short.

They were in the tallest building still standing from the Old Tokyo quakes, thirty-two stories and all of it owned by ValCo. Valnyk's office was somewhere near the top. No one outside the company knew for sure because the last ten floors were unnumbered on the elevator panel, and the buttons were re-programmed weekly -- at least that was what Tetsu had heard from his sources. Looking at the panel, he noted twelve unnumbered buttons. Close enough.

He tried to get a sense of how long it took to pass each floor so that he'd have an idea of where they were if -- likely when -- the need to escape arose. But Gabe had moved up close, body to body, and placed his hand on Tetsu's chest.

"It's going to be okay. I promise."

Gabe moved to kiss Tetsu but he turned his head to the side. "I don't know why security is giving you a free pass, but you can only guess how a man like Valnyk will react."

"I was the mole -- not what you'd put on my skin. Me."

Tetsu jerked his head in Gabe's direction, felt his mouth go slack and snapped it shut. His hand went instinctively to where his gun should have been. He dropped his hand to the side. "For what?"

Gabe shrugged. "Whatever. I pick my own targets. Magnus and I have an understanding. Originally, I was hoping for someone in logistics or security. Someone like you." Here he offered the slightest of smiles, the pained wince that accompanied it only a little conciliatory. "I settled for Mikio-san."

Out of everything Gabe had said, one thing struck Tetsu hard. He had called Valnyk "Magnus." He looked at the lights above the elevator doors. They'd cleared the twentieth floor already. They could be stopping any second. He knew what he wanted to ask Gabe. And he knew why he wanted -- no, needed -- to ask. But he had no right.

He felt another floor go by. Even if he had no right, he needed to know what they were walking into. "That doesn't mean --"

"Magnus will do what I want in this, trust me."

He had his hand against Tetsu's chest, the warmth of his palm radiating through the fabric to heat the skin. But, from there, ice spread across Tetsu's flesh. He felt... *something*... he didn't know what, sinking. Why would a rich man like Magnus Valnyk do what Gabe wanted? Gabe was *danshou*. A beautiful *danshou*, talented and accomplished, but still *danshou*. For a single moment, a flare of jealousy ignited and blocked everything else, even the Code, from his mind.

Tetsu leaned against the elevator wall. He wasn't sure if he was feeling faint or if the elevator was stopping. He wasn't ready to meet Valnyk yet -- not until he knew. Grabbing Gabe's arm, he pulled the dancer closer. "Is he your *danna*?"

Gabe's smile was dark and unreadable. Gently he took Tetsu's hand and pulled him away from the wall. The elevator doors slid open behind him, but not before he quietly answered. "Magnus Valnyk is my father."

The elevator opened onto an entry room covered with one single cut tatami mat. The room served as a *genkan*, and Tetsu numbly watched Gabe slip off the sandals Tetsu had stolen yesterday. When Tetsu continued to stare at the sandals, Gabe dropped to his knees and removed Tetsu's shoes and socks. Still on his knees, Gabe looked up at Tetsu. His head was tilted a little to the left, but the slate blue eyes were focused on Tetsu.

"I need my father to meet the man who shot Jun Shugoro and outwitted Obara no Ryuu last night."

Tetsu felt his own gaze narrow, and his professional mask settled into place. "I don't see why you didn't tell me, though."

Gabe cocked a surprised brow in Tetsu's direction as he swiftly stood up and faced the door that shut the entry room off from the rest of the floor.

"Right, dumb question," Tetsu agreed. Tetsu's life would still be forfeit if he showed up at Iyashii, but there were a dozen other companies in the city that would pay a king's ransom to not only have Magnus Valnyk's son as their hostage but to know that the young man had certain... tendencies. But that meant Gabe didn't trust him. Fair enough. He was still worried the little *danshou* was playing him.

He nodded at the door. "Let's meet Daddy, then."

\* \* \*

An hour later, Tetsu had the feeling no one had ever called Magnus Valnyk "Daddy." Gabe, when he called his father anything, referred to him as Magnus with an undertone of longstanding animosity. It was as if "Magnus" were some truce father and son had arrived at -- some middle ground between "Father" and "Mr. Valnyk."

He'd figure that out later. Right now he was still busy convincing Valnyk that Gabe had recruited him before last night's shooting. More than that, he had to convince Valnyk that he was of continuing use in bringing down Iyashii. He had two weeks. Less

than that because of the time he would need to set up a secure location with the right equipment.

Tetsu finished typing up a list on a laptop Valnyk had provided. He turned the screen around so Valnyk and Gabe could read it. They both looked slightly confused.

Valnyk scrolled through the requested items. "Why just components?"

"Because I don't trust you, Mr. Valnyk, any more than you trust me." There were other reasons, of course. He'd programmed the security breaches into Iyashii's system years before Gabe had first danced his way into the tea room. He'd done it at other companies, too, all in the name of serving the Code. He'd shown others the way in, but none knew how to deconstruct his work. In the hands of Valnyk's programmers? They'd shred it eventually. Maybe it would take six months or a year and dozens of them working on it. After that, it would only be a matter of time before they realized his was a betrayal broader in scope than just one man against one company.

"You'll have it as you wish," Valnyk said after a few seconds. "But not here in Nu Edo. Iyashii has a full hit squad out on you both."

Valnyk's irises were a pale blue that bordered on white, and it was easy to track his gaze as his attention shifted between Tetsu and Gabe. Tetsu could tell that the man was still trying to figure out just how involved his son had become with the Iyashii traitor -- whether it had moved beyond recruiting Tetsu to something more.

Tetsu was still trying to figure it out himself as he and Gabe lifted off at dusk in a ValCo helicopter.



## Chapter Five

Tetsu was drawing when Gabe came out of the bathroom. More than filling time while he ran a debugging program, he was getting a message ready for Tori. It was a simple theme intricately drawn -- a geisha draped in a kimono decorated with cranes. One hand held a fan, the other reached up to pluck a cherry blossom. In among the blossoms, the tree bark and cranes, the folds of her obi and her elaborate hair, were the logistic details of a revolution.

A small revolution, to be sure -- just big enough to bring down Iyashii when the security system at Shimizu and half a dozen other major facilities failed at 2 a.m. on the following Thursday. While prisoners were fleeing their cells, others would be streaming in to hack files -- arrest records, bond agreements, financial accounts. Less than a week away, the attack was the culmination of a month's intensive effort and over half his life's work.

"I liked the last picture better." Gabe had crossed the room and was standing behind him.

The last picture had been a mistake. Alone in his room, trying to come up with a Code-laden image to post, his mind had drifted to Gabe. The drawing had started with his eyes, thick-lashed, demure. Then the strong line of his nose and the mouth, open, receptive. It was only a few minutes work to fill the mouth, shading in a thick cock to stretch the lips wide. Foreign hands knotted in the thick black hair, holding the dancer's head in place.

Gabe had entered the room uninvited while Tetsu was uploading the file, and seeing the image had been all the excuse Gabe needed to offer himself, to coax and prod until Tetsu, unwilling to cross that line with the dancer again, had taken refuge in the bathroom. Three days of silence had passed between them since then.

Better another three days pass in silence, Tetsu thought, tossing the stylus down and swiveling to face his one-time lover.

Gabe had ordered one of the guards left in place by his father to fetch some bronzing pills, hair lighteners and shears, and now the long black hair and pale skin were gone. "Disappointed?" he asked, sinking to his knees in front of Tetsu.

Tetsu pushed his chair back, as if he were getting a better look but really to put more distance between the two of them. "Surprised. You look completely different."

"Different enough to fool FaceSpot?" He turned to show each half of his face in profile.

Tetsu wanted to run his hand over the short blond brush of hair or trace the new contours the darker skin and clever use of make-up had created. Instead, he turned back to the drawing tablet. "On the street, in a crowd, probably. At a checkpoint? I don't think so."

Gabe, still on his knees, cleared his throat and waited.

Tetsu turned the monitor back on, watched the slow progress of the status bar. "Let me work."

"You said the software check would run all day, on its own."

"I need to upload the picture." If he didn't clear the little *danshou* from the room, there'd be another fight that would accomplish nothing more than entertaining the guards and giving them something to fill their reports to Valnyk with.

"That's like thirty seconds."

He knew without looking that Gabe's lips were drawn into a pout. Despite Gabe's skill and the practiced façade of their earlier meetings, he seemed to have dropped all pretense the minute they had entered the ValCo safehouse and shut the door on his father's guards. Now, whatever he felt was instantly reflected on his face, whether it was hurt, passion, anger or desire. That is, if it all wasn't an act put on twenty-four/seven. Tetsu wanted, desperately, to believe it wasn't an act, that Gabe's sexual overtures were genuine.

But he always came back to “why?” Why would Gabe help him protect the Code and lie to Valnyk? Trying to have a conversation on the subject wasn’t helpful, either. It was downright dangerous as the little *danshou* would immediately switch from verbal to oral persuasion.

“Look, if you’re going to stay in here, sit in a chair at least.”

There was movement, but not in the direction Tetsu wanted.

“Close enough?”

Tetsu glanced over his shoulder. “*Kisama!*” Gabe was on the bed, back against the wall, long legs open in front of him. At least the bastard had shorts and a t-shirt on. Tetsu couldn’t deal with him naked, not all golden-skinned like he was now with sunlight from the window shimmering over his flesh and those slate blue eyes staring out at him.

“When are you going to trust me?”

Tetsu bit at his lip, trying not to repeat weeks’ worth of bad answers. That they were all true didn’t make them any easier to hear or say, and he didn’t want another heated argument between them. *You’re a spoiled little rich kid playing a dangerous game. Off-balanced. Mental.*

*You frighten the ever-loving fuck out of me.* That was the biggest truth. And it wasn’t because the dancer was half-crazy. It was the way Gabe made him feel whenever he thought about him. His chest tightened, his balls ached, his thoughts began to spin until he was dizzy from it. How would it feel when he found out it was all a lie? Or to find out it was real and then lose him? There were hit squads hunting for them, all looking to collect kill bounties of half a million doyen each, and the streets would be flooded in a week with escaped prisoners. Eighty percent of those freed were harmless victims of the body corporate. But there was no way to free them without releasing the other twenty percent. Everyone’s safe little world was about to be flipped upside down. Collateral damage was a given.

“When are you going to answer me?”

Droll but precise, Gabe's question forced Tetsu to look at him. He reminded himself not to look at the dancer too long. The room would start spinning, growing smaller until Gabe seemed within reach. And he couldn't allow that -- he couldn't reach out.

"Maybe when you tell me the real reason you keep trying to seduce me." Alarm bells sounded in his head, distant and faint as they warned him to look away. He risked a few more seconds of looking at Gabe, hoping, this time, the answer would be one he could accept.

"How about, I'm bored and I like to fuck and it's been a month?"

Gabe's flippancy made him angry, and when the warning came again to look away, Tetsu listened, answering over his shoulder, "I'm sure at least one of the guards would oblige you."

There, he'd said something stupid, hurtful, and the exact opposite of what he wanted. He forced his attention to the monitor, silently praying Gabe would give him the chance to take the words back. And if he didn't? If Gabe left the room and went outside to where the guards were and picked one to fuck or suck? Tetsu closed his eyes and tried not to picture Gabe's tanned skin slick with sweat as he twisted in the arms of another man.

He turned toward the bed. "Gabe, you know..."

Empty. He leaned forward, half rising from his chair to look into the next room. Gabe's door was closing, the bedroom light flicking on. Tetsu fell back into the chair. The arguments, at least, were getting shorter.

And the silences were getting longer.

\* \* \*

Late evening and Gabe was still in his room. Tetsu stared at the door, willed it to open. When it didn't, he turned the vid screen in the front room on and wandered aimlessly around the small space. He wanted to be standing when Gabe finally left his bedroom. Alone in his own room for hours, Tetsu had seized on the thought as some

odd psychological imperative. He wanted Gabe to come out into the front room, and he wanted to be standing. Everything would be fine then.

Provided he was standing.

Damn! The little *danshou's* craziness was rubbing off. Waiting was stupid. If Gabe wouldn't come out, he'd go in. He let the small globe he had picked up in his trip around the room fall to the carpet. He walked to Gabe's bedroom, lifted his hand to knock, decided that would be asking permission to enter, and dropped his hand to the doorknob.

The room was dark, lit only by the glow of the vid screen in the front room. He flipped the light switch. Nothing. He made his way to the bed. He could feel Gabe's clothes underfoot -- the jeans he'd worn that morning, the t-shirt and shorts, belts, a shoe. Distressing, the way they brushed against him and the uncharacteristic mess.

He sat down, clumsy in the dark, and reached for Gabe. The dancer was on his side, close to the wall and facing it. Tetsu ran his fingertips down Gabe's side, finding only bare flesh. Gabe shook his hand away and moved closer to the wall.

"Your light's out." Lame observation. He should have said something else. He should have said he was sorry. Or told Gabe how much he wanted him.

"I unscrewed the bulb."

Quiet, mechanical. Gabe's voice disturbed him. He slid across the bed until he was too close for Gabe to move away. Naked in the air-conditioned apartment, Gabe's skin had grown cold. Tetsu stretched out against him and snaked his arm between Gabe and the wall. He rubbed his open palm against Gabe's chest. The skin felt different -- dimpled?

"What the hell have you been doing?" He pushed Gabe onto his back and reached for the bedside lamp. Three clicks and still no light. "Fuck." He grabbed Gabe's arm, ready to pull him into the front room but Gabe twisted away.

He rubbed his palm over Gabe's arms and legs and thought of the belts on the floor. Welts, not dimples. But he hadn't heard anything -- certainly not the slap of

leather against skin. How then? He shook his head. Nothing the dancer did made any sense.

“Stop freaking. They’ll fade by morning.”

The voice, not so mechanical this time, was no less unnerving. Or maybe it was the words, the implication that this wasn’t the first time he’d done something to himself. Tetsu gave Gabe’s shoulder a gentle nudge. “Look, come into my room.”

“No. But you can leave mine.”

Tetsu sat up long enough to strip his clothes off. He turned back to Gabe, half covering Gabe with one hand resting on his shoulder.

“Doesn’t work, remember?” Angry sarcasm rippled through Gabe’s words.

“What doesn’t work?”

“Seduction,” Gabe answered.

“I’m not trying to seduce you.”

Gabe responded with a laugh, bitter and short. “Good luck with that line. Hasn’t worked too well for me.”

Tetsu brushed his lips against Gabe’s cheek. “It’ll work on you.”

“How’s that?”

There was no curiosity to Gabe’s question. The anger and sarcasm were gone, too, making the question no more than a dull chess move. Tetsu climbed on top of Gabe, trapping him. He kissed his nose, brushed the other cheek. How many of Gabe’s advances had he rebuffed? It wasn’t something the dancer was used to. He knew that. But was it enough to unhinge him?

Stupid question. A rich boy on the streets working as a tea room whore, Gabe had been unstable from the beginning.

“It’ll work on you because you’re crazy,” Tetsu answered honestly.

“And you’re not?”

The sudden clearness in Gabe’s voice startled Tetsu. Had he been acting? Were the dark room and welts just another scene, then? He jerked back but Gabe caught him before he could leave the bed.

"No. Answer me. You don't think you're crazy? This thing with the Code, your whole life dedicated to it."

"It's not crazy when you know why you're doing something." Tetsu tried to twist free but three weeks sitting at the desk programming while Gabe passed the idle hours training had made him the weaker of the two.

"You think you know why you're doing it?" Gabe swung a leg onto the floor and used the new leverage to push Tetsu flat onto his back.

"For the kids who weren't smart enough to get out. For my mother."

"Your mother sold you to save herself." Gabe released him and rolled to the edge of the mattress. "You're fucking lying to yourself if you think differently or that you're doing it for her."

"Why then. You have all the answers -- why?"

"Hate. You hate Iyashii."

"Iyashii isn't a person --"

"It is. Men like Mikio-san and Jun." Gabe paused and, in the faint glow of vid light from the front room, Tetsu could see that Gabe had turned from the wall and was looking at him, tears in his eyes. "Men like my father."

There was no faking the raw emotion in Gabe's voice. Tetsu wrapped his arms around him, pulled him close. "Where's Valnyk fit into all this?"

"I want ValCo -- and I want Magnus dead."

"Your father? You want your father dead?"

"Do you think he deserves it any less than Jun? He's ordered hits on dozens. Ruined the lives of others, drove them to suicide."

Tetsu sensed a new level of pain in Gabe's last words. There was something unsaid, something personal. He knew Valnyk was a widow, had been one for the last two decades.

"Your mother?"

"Not that. She was assassinated when I was six -- merger negotiations."

"Who, then?"

"My first lover, Yasura Ujisato."

Tetsu shook his head. Ujisato had committed suicide shortly after ValCo had bought out Yasura Industries below value. That was... twelve years ago? "You would have been --"

"Precocious?" Bitter humor laced the question. "Right you are, Tetsu-san. My father realized early what I am -- the kind of lover I would take when the time came. At first, he tried to shame me out of it. Then came the fist fights."

Tetsu could feel Gabe tense in his arms, growing stiff and distant at the memory. "It's okay, you don't have to talk about it."

"Because you won't believe me anyway?"

Tetsu squeezed him, pressed his lips against Gabe's before he answered. "I believe you. It's just... you're hurting so much right now. I can hear it, feel it in every word."

"You need to know I'm not a monster --"

"I know it."

"Then I need to know it." Gabe brought a hand up, wiped at his cheek. "When he couldn't bribe, humiliate or beat it out of me, he used it. He wanted to bring ValCo into Japan's market, knew he had to acquire or merge with one of the big companies here. He looked for weak spots. He made sure I met Uji -- at the theater, in tea ceremonies, where there were loose women to make us both uncomfortable and curious at the same time."

"I had it bad for him, broke down in tears confessing to Uji one weekend at my father's house. That led to -- well, I think Magnus still has the video."

"Blackmail?"

"Yes, to sell Yasura and to sell it cheap. I don't know if it was the shame of sleeping with me or betraying the family business that drove Uji to kill himself. But Magnus had a hand in it, either way."

He had to ask, not that he didn't believe the story but because the other half of the equation, taking control of ValCo, didn't make sense. "So that's why you want him



dead. But why do you want his business? I mean, your mother is dead because of it, your lover, too. Who knows how many people?"

"That's exactly why. It's one of the fifty largest companies in the world, the largest in North America. I can change things from the top down."

"But who says you'll get it?"

"It's Zaibatsu. He doesn't have his own majority holding in ValCo. He only holds my mother's shares in trust for me." Gabe sat up, his voice shifting from the pain of old memories to a new excitement. "It'll be chaos when the security systems at Mizu and the other prisoner facilities fail. Iyashii's stock will be worthless. Magnus will be high on the victory -- open, careless. I've seen how he gets at times like that."

"And if we can't get to him?"

"Then we get to ValCo. Send it spiraling, at least for a while. You've already been in the system, haven't you? You kept it off the list -- but all those other companies, you can't tell me you don't have the same programming embedded on ValCo's servers."

"Yeah, it's on ValCo's servers -- or at least it was placed there once upon a time." He stopped, weighed for an instant the possibility that the Yasura story was made up. No. The pain in Gabe's voice had been too real. "And ValCo was never off the list."

Gabe lay back down and placed his palms and head against Tetsu's chest. "Thank you."

"For..."

"Believing me, telling me ValCo was on your hit list."

"Sure." He felt awkward, didn't know what to say. Not that being at a loss for words when he was around Gabe was something new. The dancer had that effect on him. "Uhm... what are you doing?"

"Thinking."

"With my dick in your hand?"

Gabe laughed. "Crude, Tetsu-san. But, yes. I was thinking about why you came into my room."

“Yeah, but that was before blackmail, sex scandals and patricide came up.” Tetsu closed his eyes against Gabe’s expert caress. “I’m not sure I can now.”

Another laugh, deep-throated and knowing. “Roll over, Tetsu. You’re more ready than you think.”

## Chapter Six

Obedient, instantly excited by the heat in Gabe's voice, Tetsu rolled onto his stomach.

"Wait here." Gabe slid off the mattress to rummage beneath the bed and around the floor.

Light from the vid screen in the next room alternated between dark and bright as the scenes changed, only occasionally providing enough light to illuminate Gabe and the items he was sorting through. He came up with a handful of items. Pressed close to his chest, they were unidentifiable. The mystery of what Gabe intended to tease or torture his flesh with sent a shiver of pleasure over Tetsu's body, and he buried his face in the pillow to stifle the sound of his need.

"Don't you dare," Gabe teased, dropping the items at the foot of the bed. He pushed Tetsu's legs apart. "I want to hear every moan, every plea for more."

Starting at the knees, he kissed and massaged his way up to Tetsu's ass. Spreading Tetsu's cheeks, he ran his tongue along the underside of his balls, teased the smooth skin of his perineum.

*"Tendou. What are you going to do?"*

Gabe's hand slid under Tetsu's stomach, the slim fingers wrapping around his cock. "First, I'm going to get you good and hard."

*"I am!"*

"I want you harder." Pumping Tetsu's cock, the dancer ran his tongue around the tight circle of his lover's ass. A shudder rippled through Tetsu and he lifted up, straining for closer contact. Gabe licked him again, balls to ass, his tongue lingering around its rim as the cock in his hand swelled big and ready.

“And I want you to stay hard while I fuck you.” Gabe reached behind him, the room’s light brightening in time to show Tetsu that his lover held a leather strap with metal rings attached. Gabe placed the device over Tetsu’s cock and balls, blindly working it into place while his mouth nibbled and teased the back of Tetsu’s thighs and bottom.

Gabe got on his knees, fastened another metal ring around his own scrotum. He lubed his cock, smeared more of the gel between Tetsu’s cheeks, thumbed the tense opening of his ass. “Are you ready for this, to have me in you, deep, hard from all this time wanting you?”

Tetsu could feel the slow pearling of pre-cum at the tip of his erection. His pulse pounded through his balls and shaft, his body contracting around the sensation in him. He moaned his readiness, lifted his ass while his bound cock pumped air.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’.” Gabe spread Tetsu’s ass with one hand. He rolled his index and middle finger of the other hand in the lube he had coated Tetsu’s skin with. Slowly he teased the first joint of the middle finger into the tight opening. Tetsu groaned, pushed eagerly against Gabe’s intruding finger.

Gabe bent down, kissed the small of Tetsu’s lower back. “Slow that sweet ass down, Tetsu-san.”

“I want you... in me... before... I come... all over... the place.” Hard little pants broke between Tetsu’s words as he ground his hips, his body swallowing Gabe’s fingers down to the middle joint. “*Tendou*. You’re killing me... with the wait.”

“I’m just getting you warmed up, Tetsu-san.” Gabe answered, his voice a sigh as he slowly pumped his fingers into Tetsu, his greased cock sliding between his lover’s thighs, rubbing against Tetsu’s engorged cock.

“My skin’s already on fire. Please, Youran-san.”

Gabe withdrew, placed the tip of his cock against the tight quiver of Tetsu’s ass. “Slow, Tetsu-san,” he warned as the other tried to slide back. “It will be hard and fast soon enough.”

“Please, yes,” Tetsu moaned into the pillow.

Gabe pushed the full cap of his cock into Tetsu, both men sweating from the effort. "You've got me so hard, Tetsu. All that tight-assed game playing of yours in the elevators and halls, pretending not to notice me, pretending you didn't want me, didn't want this." He slid a few more inches in, rested his forehead against Tetsu's back. Another inch or two and then he reached between them, searching for the strap on his ball ring and threading it through a catch on Tetsu's.

"What is that?" Tetsu sounded high, almost delirious.

"It's for the long strokes, Tetsu-san." Gabe gave a gentle tug, instantly taking up the slack on the strap. Tetsu spasmed, squirting a thin stream of cum onto the sheets.

Rising up, Gabe grabbed Tetsu by the hips and buried himself the rest of the way inside his lover's body. He ground against Tetsu in tight circles, the sensation forcing Tetsu to curl his hands around the edge of the mattress, more cum spilling from him.

"*Tendou*. You're driving me crazy." Panting, moaning, he started to whip his head from side to side as Gabe pulled back until the engorged head of his cock and the tight ring of Tetsu's ass stopped him. "Where is it all coming from?"

Gabe drove back in, Tetsu gasping and coming beneath him. Tetsu spread his knees further apart, his chest flat against the mattress.

"Yes, hard. All of it, Youran-san."

Gabe delivered one long, hard stroke after another, the strap connecting them tugging at Tetsu's cock and balls with each slide of Gabe's dick inside him. Absorbing his lover's thrusts, Tetsu bordered on unconsciousness. The flashing vid screen in the next room played tricks on his eyes, cast huge shadows on the wall until an hysterical certainty possessed him that it was not Gabe or Youran, that pale western orchid, riding him so masterfully, but a great white dragon, burning him inside and out, bringing with him a million small deaths and resurrections.

"*Iku! Iku!*" Gabe buried his cock into Tetsu one last time, grinding his hips against Tetsu's ass as both men came. He followed with shallow, short pumps as he milked the last of their climax.

"*Banzen, Tetsu-san.*" Gabe sighed the words as he pulled out until just the head of his cock remained inside Tetsu. He reached down, released the strap and slowly withdrew the rest of the way, his hand stroking Tetsu's swollen dick. "Perfect."

A practiced flick of his hand, and Gabe removed the ball cuff from himself then coaxed Tetsu onto his back. He took his time removing the rings and strap, taking Tetsu's still erect penis into his mouth, sucking and licking the cream from it as he worked. "*Banzen, banzen.*"

Gabe pulled Tetsu up, guided him out into the flickering light of the front room. "Shower, and then we'll sleep in your bed."

"Was it *banzen?*" Tetsu asked, his voice tired and content as he leaned against the shower wall while Gabe turned the water on and squirted body wash onto Tetsu.

"It was," Gabe answered, his soapy hands kneading Tetsu's tired back muscles. "You were."

\* \* \*

Bright morning sunlight streamed into Tetsu's room as Gabe rolled over, flung out his arm and found empty space. He cracked one eye open, saw Tetsu, dressed in black gym shorts and working at the computer. Gabe pulled the blanket over his head, deeply breathed in his lover's scent on the sheets and pillowcase and tried to drift back to sleep.

"*Kuso shite shinezo!*"

Gabe threw the blanket off and looked at Tetsu typing, fingers smashing against the keyboard.

"*Kuso! Kuso!*"

"Hey, sailor, something the matter?" Gabe tried to keep the question light-hearted but he hadn't seen Tetsu so uptight while at the computer, at least not when Gabe left him alone to work.

Tetsu glanced over his shoulder for half a second then went back to pounding the keyboard. "All of the uploads are gone!"

"All of them?"

"Damn it. That's why we've limited posting on the web." He scanned the desk top, glanced again at the bed. "Where's my mobile?"

Gabe stretched toward the nightstand and the mobile. Tetsu reached it first, started working the keypad.

"Shit, everything with an anchor symbol is gone! Stripped from the servers, even the liberty servers."

"Someone hacked Free Net?" Gabe's brows shot up. "It's supposed to be hack proof."

Tetsu held his mobile up and shook it. "But not bulletproof."

"You're kid --" Gabe dropped his gaze to the mattress, nervously smoothed the top sheet. "No, you aren't kidding." He sat up, back to the wall, and studied Tetsu's worried face for a moment. "How does this change things?"

"I can't put anything with an anchor in --"

"A what?"

"It's kind of like waving a red flag at those who know the Code. Tori never put any anchor symbols on you because I already knew to look." Tetsu picked up his last scan and showed Gabe. "See these?" He pointed at one crane standing, its legs bent in the wrong direction, then at the reverse fold of the geisha's kimono and finally at the cloth she had spread on the ground with its bowl of rice with its upright chopsticks. The first was unnatural, the other two signaled death among an otherwise peaceful, traditional scene.

"No one would draw it like that," Gabe answered.

"Right." He tossed the scan on the bed, started to pace. "The anchors are used to throw the design off -- to signal the right people and avoid duplication by those outside the Code."

"And now you can't use them on the web?"

Tetsu stopped, rubbed at his jaw. "Dangerous to use them at all -- but we really needed the web on this to reach everyone quickly."

"What about a vid cast?"

Tetsu shook his head, began pacing again. "What, get to a pirate station, keep it on air more than five seconds? Sorry, I just don't see that."

"No," Gabe laughed. "I didn't mean some boat in the bay or another one of your run down buildings. I meant the six o'clock news, the news at nine. J-vid on the hour every hour."

Tetsu stopped in front of the bed, stared down at Gabe. "How?"

Another laugh from Gabe, slightly unhinged. "I always wanted to be a vid star." He showed Tetsu his profile, drew two fingers lightly along his jaw line. "There's a ValCo board meeting Wednesday afternoon -- annual shareholder vid cast. Is that too late?"

Tetsu shrugged. "Wednesday would work, but who watches vid programming like that and how do we get the Code broadcast?"

"Think, Tetsu-san. It's like when the G8 used to meet up, all that economic power in one place. Remember the coverage outside those events?"

Tetsu nodded.

"And if a billionaire CEO's gorgeous, deranged son shows up, screaming about blackmail and suicide and lovers and a father's exploitation." Gabe paused, saw that Tetsu was catching on. "If he tears his shirt off, beats his chest, moons the god damn building... where is the camera going to be, what goes into heavy rotation on the vid casts?"

Tetsu smiled. "You, covered in the Code."

Gabe rolled onto his back, laughing, his hands pressed to his stomach. "Magnus is going to freak."

"Wait -- that's bad. The guards --"

"-- will take me to him." Gabe patted the mattress, inviting Tetsu back to bed. "When the world goes more to shit than it already is, I'll already be deep in ValCo, close to Daddy and ready to strike a second time."

Tetsu put a knee back on the mattress, hovering while he tapped the mobile's keypad and hit "send."



“Done?” Gabe asked.

Tetsu nodded and placed the mobile back on the nightstand.

“Good.” He grabbed the band of Tetsu’s shorts, pulled him down to the bed.

“Because these little flashes of brilliance make me horny.”

## Chapter Seven

Late Wednesday morning in a Nu Edo hotel room, Gabe was stretched naked on the bed. Next to him, Tetsu opened a pack of body markers.

“You talked directly to Magnus?”

Tetsu nodded. “Mostly about the attack on Iyashii’s network after midnight.”

Gabe rolled his eyes. “Of course that’s what he’d be interested in. But you mentioned your concerns?”

“Yes, I said I was worried that you were going off the deep end.” Taking out a red marker, he drew the first anchor symbol on Gabe’s chest where Gabe had insisted it be placed. Next to it he placed a date symbol.

“Will you teach me the Code when this is all over?” Gabe was staring up at the ceiling, his gaze traveling over its stuccoed pattern.

Tetsu nodded, realized Gabe hadn’t seen him and quietly answered, “Yes.” Drawing the second anchor, he risked a glance at Gabe, saw that his eyes were moist and offered a weak jest. “You really are losing it, you know?”

Gabe lifted his chin, fluttered his lashes at Tetsu. “Wait until you see my debut performance, darling.”

“About that --”

Gabe placed his index finger against Tetsu’s lips. “Just put your anchors where I said and don’t ask any more questions. Father needs to see that you’re just as shocked and taken aback as the rest of the crowd.”

Tetsu turned his head to the side. He picked through the pack of markers, hands shaking. “I can’t protect you if we’re separated.”

"I told you, Tetsu-san, I have my own special room at ValCo for times like today." He turned to the wall, his voice breaking. "Do my back... and don't talk so much."

Tetsu let the markers spill onto the mattress, brushing aside all but the most vibrant colors that would stand out against the bronzed skin. "You were so pale when Tori was doing the tats." He ran his hand along Gabe's arm and outer thigh. "And hairless."

Picking up the red and black markers, he began inking a fierce dragon, its clenched teeth holding the guidon staff and white banner of the Ikkō-ikki. At its feet, a young shinto priest brought his arm down to strike the first beat against a taiko drum. In the folds of the great beast's wings and the priest's robes, he finished the message with broad strokes.

"Done," he said, scooping the markers back into the box. Tonight -- two a.m. Thursday morning, the first battle of the peasants' war against the corporate *daimyo* would begin. "Stand up and let me check it."

Gabe rose up. His posture seemed robbed of its dancer's grace. Something wild and bordering on the edge of defeat slouched into the center of the room, instead.

"You were crying..."

Gabe shook his head. "Method acting, you know?"

"No." Tetsu crossed over to Gabe, forced the dancer to look at him. "Maybe this is too dangerous for you. Not just... not just physically."

"Don't worry, Tetsu-san." He laughed, the sound bitter and unconvincing. "I promise you, there will be plenty of medication and expert care for me before the day is up. Which reminds me." He broke away, grabbed his suitcase and pulled a pill bottle from it. Inside was a big red gel capsule. Tossing his head back, he dry swallowed the pill.

He grabbed Gabe's hands, pulled him close until they were standing chest to chest. "What was that?"

"Something to counteract the sedatives they'll give me. Slow release, it should start kicking in around nine tonight."

Tetsu nodded, closed his eyes and touched foreheads with Gabe. "I guess you should get dressed, then."

Gabe stood there, passive and unmoving. "Kiss me first."

Tetsu pressed his palms gently against Gabe's cheeks. "Not like it's the last time." He drew Gabe's mouth to him, his tongue parting his lover's lips as their hips met. Gabe groaned, rose up for a second on his tiptoes, his erection rubbing hard against Tetsu's stomach.

"I don't want to wait to have you again, to be taken by you."

"Soon," Tetsu promised. He took Gabe's cock in his hand, gently tugged it. "We'll be together again, with no Magnus or ValCo or Iyashii to separate us." He tightened his grip, squeezing and stroking until Gabe tilted his head back and moaned. Tetsu swooped down, taking his mouth, sucking and tasting the reddening lips.

Gabe rose up on his toes again. His body arched in the beginning of a swoon as Tetsu's kisses became more passionate, the strokes of his cock more demanding.

"Soon," Tetsu repeated and dropped him onto the mattress before turning and walking out of the hotel room to the guards in the hallway.

\* \* \*

"Take us around front," Gabe ordered the driver as they neared ValCo headquarters.

The driver tilted his head toward the rear-view mirror, his gaze masked by dark sunglasses. "Our orders are to take you to the underground parking, sir."

"Orders from whom?" Gabe's tone was even and crisp. A few degrees colder and he would sound like Magnus. "Iyashii? You're not setting me up to get shot, are you?"

The driver turned to look into the back seat, his face directed at Tetsu.

Tetsu nodded in the direction of ValCo's main entrance. "There are a bunch of vid crews today, aren't there?" He directed his question at the driver. "I don't think we have to worry about any trouble out front."

Turning his attention back to the road, the driver picked up his radio mic, relaying ValCo security that they were going around front. Forty seconds later they were pulling up alongside half a dozen vid casters with their camera crews. The driver got out, opened the door. Gabe slid out first, Tetsu using him as a shield as he leaned into the front seat and ripped the mic from the radio.

Around them, Tetsu could hear the reporters whispering, asking one another if it was Gabriel Valnyk who had just exited the car. Gabe handed his jacket to the security guard at the main entrance. The guard looked confused and Gabe gave his arm a friendly squeeze, his other hand closing around the guard's wrist. It was a beautiful sleight of hand, Tetsu thought, standing in the center of the crowd and watching Gabe pocket the guard's door controller before he turned to face the crowd. Tetsu hung back, still within the crowd.

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it is me. In the flesh." Gabe looked up, his expression one of exaggerated dismay. "But not in the boardroom despite being the second largest shareholder of ValCo stock."

One of the younger vid reporters surged forward, shoving her microphone in front of Gabe's face. "Mr. Valnyk, is it true you lost personal control of your stock after you were institutionalized?"

The whispers were at full force, reporters talking into their mobiles, asking their news desk for background information on Valnyk the Younger.

Gabe brought a shaking hand to his face, looked fleetingly at his wrist before nodding at the eager reporter. "Yes, after the death of my lover."

"Mr. Valnyk, Gabe!" Another reporter, a drab suited male who looked like he'd spent over half his life covering such shareholder meetings, corrected Gabe. "I think Ms. Tamu means when you were still a teenager. So you've been institutionalized more than once?"

Gabe looked up, gaze wide with a child's innocence. "No, why would I be? I haven't had control of my shares since I was a teen -- since the death of Yasura Ujisato."

There were gasps from the older reporters, confused silence from Tamu and the other young ones. Behind Gabe, the security guard tried to discreetly put a restraining hand on Gabe's shoulder.

"You see how it is?" Gabe shrugged the guard away and extended his arms toward the crowd, palms out. "But it all changes today." He pointed at one of the cameramen and smiled, his mood flipping in a heartbeat. "That on? Of course it is, why would it be off, right?"

Gabe pointed at the building top, shouting, "ValCo doesn't want me talking to you. Magnus Valnyk, my father, doesn't want me talking to you. Doesn't want me making a full confession of my sins -- and his."

The guard paled, dropped Gabe's jacket and reached for him. He came up instead with a handful of Gabe's shirt. Tetsu had already stressed the seams that morning, loosened the threads according to Gabe's instruction, and the back of the shirt came away with a sharp rip. Gabe spun, looked at the guard while he exposed his back with the dragon and shinto priest. More shocked murmurs rippled through the crowd and Tetsu wondered if it was from Gabe's theatrics or seeing someone outside the lower class covered in tattoos. The cameras kept rolling, reporters held their mobiles up to send quick screen caps back to their news rooms.

Mindful that Magnus would watch a replay before the night was up, Tetsu began to jostle the reporters, half-heartedly making his way forward as he nervously called for Gabe to stop. He let the reporters push him back but gave one of the bigger males a hard shove for good measure. Maneuvering his way to the side, he lost sight of Gabe for a few seconds, only the sound of his voice and the dreadful truths falling from his lips reassuring Tetsu that the guard hadn't managed to cart him inside.

Clearing the side, he saw Gabe, completely shirtless now, grappling with the guard. Gabe got his arm around the guard's waist and Tetsu could see that he had pulled something from the guard's security belt. Had it been anyone other than the CEO's son, Tetsu was sure the guard would have laid him out cold on the sidewalk.

"Knife!" Tamu kicked a rival camera operator next to her, throwing the man off balance so that she could pull her own crew member closer to the fighting.

"Fuck!" Tetsu started pulling at bodies in earnest.

Seeking reinforcements, the guard jerked at the glass door, pounded on it when it wouldn't open.

"Stay back!" Gabe screamed -- to the guard, the reporters, most importantly to Tetsu. "You don't know how it is!" He pulled the knife across his chest, just below his nipple and through the first anchor symbol Tetsu had drawn that morning.

"Getting pimped out by your own father so he can blackmail your lover." Another slash and a bright red line divided the second anchor. "Sucking Iyashii cock for a few corporate secrets."

"Do you know anything about the death of Shugoro Jun?" Tamu yelled, thrusting her mic through the press of bodies. "Were you there when he was murdered?"

*Boots, heavy, near lock-step.* Tetsu looked over his shoulder, saw half a dozen security guards streaming out a side door. Tamu heard them, too, yelling her question again as she fought to stay at the front of the crowd.

"Do you know anything about Jun-san's death?"

"No. All I know about Jun-san is that he has -- had -- a small cock." With that, Gabe looked at the rush of guards, dropped the knife and stretched out his bloody hand toward Tetsu.

Tetsu pushed forward, shouldering the closest security guard out of the way and enfolding Gabe in his arms. Gabe went limp, barely standing on his own. Tetsu's body shook as he shielded Gabe and rode the press of the security team into the building at last. He needed to be alone with Gabe, to talk to him and make sure that he had merely been playing the mad prince. It had all been too convincing.

Certainly the blood was real.

## Chapter Eight

Magnus provided Tetsu with a clean shirt and jacket from his own closet and Tetsu had washed Gabe's blood from him. In a façade of normality, they were both clean and pressed. A physician had arrived within an hour of Gabe's show to attend to the shallow cuts he had inflicted and administer a heavy dose of sedatives. Gabe had fallen asleep on the couch in Magnus's office, his head on a pillow and Tetsu next to him working on a laptop. He was ass deep in ValCo's internal network, ostensibly preparing the attack on Iyashii.

It *was* a façade of normality, but for the pacing Magnus Valnyk and the presence of a security guard in the room. Tetsu could ignore Magnus with a few polite responses, but the guard, only a few years older than Gabe, made him nervous. The man was jittery, subconsciously checking his poorly concealed gun every few minutes for the five hours he'd been in the room.

"I would have expected more from you -- god damn head of Iyashii's security can't deal with one..." Magnus didn't finish the sentence, just gestured wildly in his son's direction.

Gabe opened his eyes, hiccoughed. "Regional head."

"Shh..." Tetsu stroked his head, hoping that the pill Gabe had taken that morning to counteract the sedative was beginning to take effect. If everything went to shit, he'd rather not have to carry a drugged Gabe out.

"I was undone by his behavior... it's not like stopping a stranger." Tetsu returned to scrolling through the files, watching Magnus from the corner of his eyes.

Magnus turned and directed his cold stare at Gabe. "That's *exactly* what it's like."

"Mmm." Gabe grabbed the back of the couch and pulled himself into a sitting position. "I love you, too, Daddy."



"Don't start --"

"No, really." Gabe rose onto unsteady feet and made his way to the bar. "I want to make this up to you. Surely there's someone's cock you'd like me to suck?"

"After you've advertised it to the world?" Magnus turned his back on Gabe, shuffled through papers on his desk. "No, you're absolutely worthless to me now."

"I'm worth twenty-seven percent of ValCo," Gabe corrected. "Without me, the rabble would be running your company."

Tetsu caught the glance Magnus threw at the guard. There was something familiar in the look and his gut clenched instinctively. He recognized the distinct chance that the guard wasn't there for anyone's protection and he was in a bad position to monitor the situation. Messing with the laptop's power cord, Tetsu jerked his head at the guard.

"Jerry, right?"

The guard nodded.

"Can you switch plugs for me?" He tossed the cord and power supply over then watched Jerry plug it in, confirming placement of the man's gun. Jerry turned to hand Tetsu the other end and came up a foot short. Tetsu forced a frown. "Mind if we change seats?"

He could see Jerry did mind but the man said nothing, just moved over to the couch. The position minimized Jerry's access to his gun and disadvantaged him in keeping a watchful eye on Gabe. Jerry was making a rookie mistake, and Tetsu silently thanked the gods for Magnus having picked an inexperienced shooter if the man was indeed here to harm Gabe.

"We'll need to move things up." Tetsu spoke to the room at large but his words were meant for his lover. He dug another layer deeper into ValCo's server, taking a back door into the building's security system and making sure there were no live vid feeds for the room. He was surprised the pass codes, embedded so many years ago, still worked.

Magnus tossed a folder onto his desk. "Why is that?"

“Iyashii’s running server maintenance at midnight, core access will be offline.” He glanced at Gabe, hoped he wasn’t too drugged to remember the signal for trouble and to wait for Tetsu to make the first move.

Tetsu hit a few keys, opened the personnel files and searched through them for Jerry. Nothing. “Iyashii’s transport will go offline first, the rail into Pyramid Prison,” he said and opened the accounting files to look for unusual transfers. There were a couple dozen inter-corporate facilitators -- men and women who would place an anonymous kill bounty regardless of the target. As head of Iyashii’s security for Japan, he’d placed enough fund transfers to recognize their various account numbers.

He set the search parameter at under a million doyen. A hit on Gabe would be easy enough and thus low value. It was the cover-up that would cost Magnus. Waiting for search results, he gestured at the vid screen. He wanted Magnus and Jerry distracted. “Regular rail service will be hit, too. That should start showing up on the commuter reports in a few minutes.”

Magnus looked pointedly at Gabe before dismissing the suggestion. “I know what the vid crews are reporting right now. It’s not commuter delays.”

“Gods, yes, I don’t want to see that,” Gabe said and turned back to the bar. He poured another shot, slammed it down, then ran his hand over the bar top.

It was a beautiful piece of furniture, ebony with inlaid pearl. Above it was a sword, slightly curving and with a black and pearl saya covering the blade. Tetsu guessed it was early Ashikaga period. Certainly it was prized, given the way the lighting around it had been carefully thought out and the lack of any other trophies near it.

Turning his attention back to the laptop, he didn’t see any numbers he recognized at first. He’d meant to set the search for two weeks, set it instead for two months. No recent transfers set off red flags but there, a little over a month old, was an account number he knew well.

Obara no Ryuu, Iyashii’s company hit man. The transfer had been placed two days before Tetsu had rescued Gabe from the executive tea room.

Tetsu closed the search folder, caught Jerry checking his gun yet again. He took one last look around the room to memorize the layout, then grabbed hold of the power cord and gave it a hard jerk, separating it from the outlet.

"*Kuso*, this power supply is shit." He stood, holding the computer in his right hand and the adapter in his left. He started toward Magnus and made sure he tripped before reaching Jerry. His fall forced Jerry to catch the computer, Tetsu's knee landing in the center of the guard's crotch.

"Fuck, ma --" Staring down the barrel of his own gun, Jerry froze.

"You, don't move," Tetsu ordered before waving the gun at Magnus. "Mr. Valnyk, step back from your desk and keep your hands away from your body."

Magnus stayed at his desk, his hands close to his body but not moving. "So, Gabriel, your little *ketsuman* knows how to handle a gun."

"Persuade your father," Tetsu said, ignoring the slur while he dug his knee deeper into Jerry's crotch. Patting the man down for more weapons, he heard Gabe free the sword from its saya.

"My pleasure." Gabe crossed the room, holding the handle with both hands and bringing the tip of the blade up under his father's chin. Magnus slowly moved away from the desk, his hands palm up and in front of him.

Tetsu jerked his head at Magnus. "Jacket off."

"You've got about five minutes before security storms the room." Magnus slowly removed the jacket, stalling for time.

Tetsu wanted to correct him, to tell him he had all night to kill him and set the room, but he wanted as much of the man's cooperation as he could get. He switched the gun to his left hand and motioned to Gabe. "Give me the jacket and check the *genkan* for a pair of your father's gloves."

Gabe withdrew without question and returned a few seconds later with a pair of driving gloves. Tetsu shed his borrowed jacket and put on the jacket Magnus had been wearing the last time anyone saw him outside the room. He told Gabe to put the sword

on the bar then held out his right hand. Gabe put the glove on him. Jerry started to shift, and Tetsu tapped him in the nose with the gun barrel.

Gabe waited, the other glove in his hand.

"It'll just take the one." Tetsu said.

For the first time since he'd pulled the gun on ValCo's CEO, Tetsu saw worry cross Valnyk's face.

"Perhaps there's some arrangement to be made, Tetsu-san."

*From ketsuman to Tetsu-san.* Tetsu shook his head.

"Like the one you made with Obara no Ryuu. Tell me, Mr. Valnyk, just what services were you buying last month for half a million doyen?" Tetsu waved the gun at Magnus. "Did he even know it was your son you wanted killed?"

Magnus answered with an angry laugh. "You're joking -- tell him the *danshou* was *my* son?"

Gabe, returning to the bar and the sword, eerily echoed his father's words and laugh. Swinging the sword, he crossed back to Magnus and pressed the tip to his father's stomach.

"Now what?" Magnus asked.

Gabe pulled back, tested the weight of the sword. "1400s, right, Father?" He tilted his head up toward the ceiling, closed his eyes, his body lightly swaying as he spoke. "*Kakaru toki sakoso inochi no oshikarame kanete nakimi to omoishirazub.*"

Gabe dropped his head, his gaze meeting his father's. Magnus offered a blank stare, his brows rising in disinterest or annoyance, Tetsu couldn't tell which.

Gabe translated for him. "'Had I not known that I was dead already, I would have mourned the loss of my life.' It's a death poem, from the same period as the sword. But, tonight, it's your death poem, too," Gabe finished, thrusting the sword into Valnyk's stomach.

"But I can't die," Magnus choked the words out, looking down at the sword as it twisted in his gut. "I have an empire to run."

"It's all right, father, I'll run it for you." Gabe drew the sword up through Valnyk's stomach, into the rib cage. "It will be a kinder ValCo." He let go of the sword, watched Magnus fall forward. "...a gentler ValCo."

Tetsu removed his knee from Jerry's crotch and backed away from the couch. "Stand up." Tetsu waited until the man was standing, then asked "Just business, right?"

Jerry nodded.

"Well, this," he said, tilting his head toward Gabe, "is your new boss."

Gesturing toward the door, Tetsu lowered the barrel of the gun and motioned for Jerry to leave. Before the guard was halfway across the room, he stopped him again. "Out of curiosity, what was the kill bounty?"

"It was an entry hit," Jerry mumbled.

Tetsu laughed. "A freebie just to get in the door with ValCo?"

"Yeah, but, I don't care who the head of ValCo is, yanno?" Jerry looked sideways at the door. "I mean, I still want to work for ValCo... no hard feelings?"

"No, we don't hold grudges," Tetsu answered, a hard smile tugging at his mouth as he pulled the trigger and Jerry's dead body dropped to the floor, "against the dead."

"You're a bit of a sick bastard," Gabe laughed, the sound dry in his throat.

Tetsu turned to find him clutching his stomach, his skin pale beneath the artificially bronzed skin.

"I mean, letting him think he had a chance to leave."

"Not really," Tetsu answered, grabbing the second glove and moving to Magnus's desk. He tossed the gun on the floor, casually placed the gloves on the desk top and then shrugged from the dead man's coat to hang it over the back of his chair.

"We'll claim your father shot him while aiming at you -- the stippling and powder residue has to match up with that story." Retrieving the laptop from the couch, he executed a run program to remove the ValCo server's vulnerability to the pending attack.

"And this?" Gabe gestured at his father's body.

“Right... we’ll say it was an act of self defense, disarming him when it was clear he intended to try to shoot you again.”

“The police won’t --”

“No *keisatsu*,” Tetsu interrupted, marveling at how naïve Gabe could sometimes be. “It’s internal security and the ValCo board you have to convince.”

Putting the computer down, he led Gabe to the tinted window and its view of Tokyo Bay. A few hours remained before the attack on Shimuzu, and he could still see a dim shell of light surrounding the pyramid and spreading out over the black water. “Tomorrow, no one will have time to worry about how Magnus Valnyk met his end.”

Gabe turned in his arms, the way his body trembled and the fragile need thrilling Tetsu.

“What next?”

\* \* \*

In the end, there was little to do in dealing with the death of Magnus Valnyk. Tetsu placed a direct call to ValCo’s head of security, explaining what had just happened between the old boss and the new boss. From there, corporate counsel and the Vice President of Public Relations were roused from their comfortable beds. A courtesy call was made to the Nu Edo Chief of Police and an interview date a week out was set. Then ValCo security began handling the scene, recording it and bagging the bodies. Gabe and Tetsu were escorted to the VIP suite shortly before the attacks on Iyashii’s network and facilities began appearing on the news services and across the bay.

Freshly showered, Gabe stood at the tinted bedroom window, naked but for the towel around his waist. He had his palms pressed against the glass, leaning on it. Fires burned in the city and out on the bay.

“Are we destroying or creating?” he asked.

“Both,” Tetsu answered from the bed. The laptop was open on the bed beside him as he tracked the fall of Iyashii.

Gabe's hand moved along the glass, stopping to track the separate fires he could see. "What is that line... 'where ignorant armies clash by night'?"

"Some know exactly what they are fighting for." Tetsu moved the computer to the nightstand and joined Gabe at the window. He ran his fingers down Gabe's spine before bringing his hand to rest on Gabe's hip as he stepped in close.

Gabe shifted until his back was pressed against Tetsu's bare chest. Tetsu's hand slid across his stomach, loosened the towel until it fell to the carpeted floor. He kissed Gabe's back, down the base of his neck between his shoulder blades. His hands stroked Gabe's cock and he felt his own hardening, rising until it was nestled snug between the firm cheeks of Gabe's ass.

Gabe reached back and tugged at the band of Tetsu's pajama bottoms. "I want these off."

Tetsu stripped the pants slowly, pushing them down to his hips at first and then leaning into Gabe. Out on the bay, fireballs shot up over the dark water, the explosions as silent behind the thick glass as the gunshots down on the street. They were removed from the very chaos they had started. Here, body to body, the burning buildings, the boats, the collapsing pyramid and the flames magnified by its million glass panes were like fireflies in the night seeking one another. Tetsu ran his hands down Gabe's sides, savoring the feel of the strong, graceful frame, the heat his touch produced and the light reflected on Gabe's face that was brighter than any other he had seen.

Rolling his hips, he let the pajama pants fall away and kicked them to the side. Sweeping his foot along the carpet, he guided Gabe into a wider stance then wrapped his arms around his lover. He dipped his knees, eased himself into Gabe at the same time he took Gabe's shaft into his hands.

Gabe gasped, pressed his temple against the window. Tetsu watched the reflection of their lovemaking play against the anarchy of the pre-dawn sky. He cupped Gabe's balls with one hand, stroked him with the other in a measure that matched the unhurried ebb and flow of his own thrusts. Tetsu brought his lips to the back of Gabe's neck, tasted the salt of his lover's flesh.

“Dawn is coming... the fires aren’t burning as bright,” he whispered, willing Gabe to open his eyes and look, but Gabe was lost in the rush of sensations. His lips were parted, the slow and shallow breaths contrasting with the rapid flutter of his eyelids. Gabe moaned once, a quiver of sound and then cum slickened Tetsu’s hand, triggering his own release inside Gabe. The shiver of a million small deaths and, at their end, resurrection as daylight broke in the east.

*Banzen.*



## **Ann Vremont**

Ann Vremont is a mother, wife, licensed attorney, technical writer, high school dropout and former Russian linguist for Army SigInt. She's called Bingo for a living, waitressed at a strip club, scooped ice cream and conducted political surveys -- including for the wrong party. If she hadn't dropped out of high school, she says she would probably be a mineralogist or a geophysicist. Ann further maintains that if she had never met her husband of 19-plus years or had their son when she did, she would probably be making her living illegally -- or, if unsuccessful, sitting in jail. She has a large collection of minerals and a growing collection of lighthouses. Having been born and partially raised in Arizona, the mineral collection doesn't surprise her, but she's still puzzling the source of her lighthouse fetish. You can find her on the web at [www.annvremont.com](http://www.annvremont.com).