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## "Crossed Currents"

What happened to Ran Fujimiya.....

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The story behind 'Princess', set between 2. Under Pressure and 3. Changing Tides. This is Aya's side of the decision to change time by ruining Esset's plans

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Information on the anime series:
http://www.ex.org/5.3/30-anime_weisskreuz.html

http://www.netrunner.at/wk/WeissKreuz_Anime.html

If you don't know the animated series Weiss Kreuz, also known as Knight Hunters, or if you do....*this* story is about what happens when the precognitive body gaurd of a rotten politician, sees the future going down the toilet if his real bosses get their way. He sets out to change the sequence of events that lead up to the event that everything hinges on. Except that by changing that scenario, he then finds he has to deal with the alternative consequences of his actions. The end of the world, jealous lovers, teenagers, the mafia, more paranormal crap, and the fact that while having paranormal powers is a plus, sometimes you get reminded you are still very, very human.

The original story and characters of the Japanese made animation, Weiss Kreuz were created and owned by Takahito Koyasu and Project Weiss. Characters from Kizuna were taken out to lunch and spoken to discreetly about 'favors'. Kizuna is a japanese manga created and owned by Kazume Kodaka. This is a doujinshi novel.

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# Crossed Currents

## Chapter One
## "Who Do You Love"

Aya-chan....calling to him....battered and bloody...
He clawed off the blanket, sitting up, gasping, heart pounding.
He put his hands to his face, trembling all over. Home...bed...bad dream.
He sighed shakily. It took a few more minutes to be able to think!
He looked at the luminous dial of the clock on the bedside table.
Three twenty in the morning.
He'd never get enough sleep!
He laid back down.
Damn Yohji!
He'd compromised the entire purpose of Weiss!
Who the fuck would have thought the son of a bitch was gay!
And that he'd be so fucking suicidal as to sleep with the enemy! Only Kudoh Yohji would be able to lower himself to such a damned cliché!
Tears of rage stung his eyes.
"Bastard!" He hissed at the streetlight lit ceiling. "Traitorous, selfish, conceited, whoring.....lucky....BASTARD!"
He turned over, curling up, to cry himself back to sleep in misery.

He was gone again! Aya doubted he'd been home at all that night.
"Where the hell is he!" Ken complained. "This stupid place has to be to run like a real business and him acting like it's all a joke! "
Aya was too tired to care for Ken's angry ranting as the youth moved about the shop slamming plant pots and equipment around. His own hands barely obeyed him to clamp the stem support spikes on the flowers he was prepping for the day's arrangements. It would be so easy to just tell him. But would it shut him up?
(Yohji is out getting his brains fucked over by that Schwarz mind reading FREAK!)
He caught himself on a spike's metal edge and swore, putting the bleeding finger to his mouth.
Ken looked at him. Totally focused on him, like some animal spotting weakened prey.
Kami-sama!
Aya looked away, ignoring him. He didn't even want to think about what the idiot must be thinking right now! He knew that he would want to take a shower just to wash off the idea of being disgustingly pawed.
He almost swept everything on the work bench to the floor! Instead, he forced himself to calmly take off the apron, then threw it down. "I'm going to the hospital. I want to see my sister. Close the fucking shop up or run it alone

until Omi gets out of school--I don’t care!" He went to grab his keys from the shelf under the cash register and strode out in nearly a run.
She looked so....normal.
Except for the IV and monitors...
Her wounds had long healed.
Why did he keep dreaming that way? Why did he still see her as she was that night? Cut and bruised from the explosion and then being struck by the car?
She was safe, here. Being taken care of!
He caught her hand in his, looking at her face, wishing she’d open her eyes...wake up so that he could tell her....he was so sorry!
He must have cried again for half an hour or so. He didn’t even really remember putting his head down on her arm and sobbing, he just realized that at some point...he had.
There were tissues on the table beside the bed. The nurses must know he needed the damned things, the box was always replaced. He wiped at his face, feeling like a fool.
He got up and went to look out the window. It was so cold in here, because of the machinery....but outside, so sunny and warm looking.
Some times it seemed...that the day light held a world he could never quit touch again.
He sighed. His eyes were puffy from too much crying. His sinuses and throat ached, he was tired and hurting all over.
So cold in here.
People out there, they lived their lives and never knew, or wanted to know what really went on in the world. They got up and went to work and came home, and tried not to think about the bad things that happened all around them. Those things happened to ‘other people’. No one would ever blow their homes up, murder their parents, run their sisters down with a car....
No one would come to them and tell them they had to kill for a living, kill to survive, and to pay for hospital bills the insurance had long run out on just to keep their comatose sister alive. To live on the end of a leash like a dog, and an expendable dog, at that.
He closed his eyes, feeling it again...the vertigo of too damned much stress and lack of sleep and being torn apart by the whole fucking nightmare of his life.
He opened them and turned to look down at her. "Aya-chan...you don’t know how lucky you are sometimes." He whispered bitterly. He reached down to touch her cheek. It was chill. It scared him a bit...but then he pressed his lips to it and she was still warm, still pliant. Still alive.
Just as he had needed to come here, to reassure himself, he needed to get out. Now.
There was no place he could be for long, no place he could stand. If only because he couldn’t get away from himself, no matter where he went.

"Again?" He hissed at Yohji when the lanky and obviously dissipated blond finally walked in, just as the shop was closing.
The man brushed past him. "Whatever." He muttered coldly, passing through the curtained door and going upstairs.
Aya didn’t move. He knew if he moved just then, it would be to go up there and attack the man, just for the sheer joy of beating his brains out against a wall.

He just stood there until Omi touched his arm, startling him. "Aya-kun, Manx just pulled up outside."
He looked at the boy, taking a moment to actually focus on him.
"Are you all right?" Omi asked.
Aya drew his arm away from the teenager’s touch. "Hai."
Omi frowned a little. "I’ll make some coffee. Since we wont sleep tonight." He added dryly as Manx walked in under the jangling shop bell.
Aya sighed. He wasn't all right. He felt dead tired and ready to fall apart.
No.
They wouldn’t.

The video taped mission briefing played out.
As the screen went blank on the television, Yohji looked very grim, Aya thought from where he stood with crossed arm, leaning on the railing to the spiral staircase.
Could he do it?
(Can I do it?) he wondered to himself.
This was a shock. In the run ins they’d had with Schwarz...Well for one thing, those men were all freaks with some sort of super-natural powers.
For another thing....
For another...
From the sofa, Yohji caught his eyes, looking into them.
Aya saw it, too. The man was worried.
Aya lowered his eyes, avoiding him. Kudoh’s stupidity wasn’t his problem. This was a mission. Remove Scwharz to get to Takatori.
How could Yohji go to the man who had more than once, tried to kill one of them? The man who had kidnapped Omi to be tortured? The man who helped murder Omi’s cousin right before him, for her to die in the boy’s arms?
"Do you accept this mission?" Manx broke the silence.
Aya looked at Yohji. He barely heard Ken and Omi’s replies. He wanted to hear Yohji’s.
There was a pleading look in those light green eyes this time. He looked like he needed a cigarette badly.
Fuck you, Kudoh, he thought. "I accept." He stated.
Yohji shifted uneasily, then stood, to Aya’s suspicious eyes, obviously nervous.
"I accept." He moved to put a hand on Manx’s ribs, his thumb that close to her

breast on the fabric of her tightly fitted little designer suit. "Provided you seal the contract with a kiss." He smiled with all his usual flirtatious brilliance.
"Ki o tsukete, Kudoh," She replied with cool sauciness, looking up at him and taking his wrist to remove the offending hand from her person. "I'll seal it with a knee in your privates."
"Gojo na onna..." Yohji complained.
"Do you accept or not!" Aya demanded.
Yohji looked at him.
"Hai. I accept." He said after what seemed like a very long time, only a second.

So here they were.
Aya felt cold inside, despite the leather over coat. He kept his hand on the hilt of his katana under the unbuckled but belted coat. Omi and Ken had headed up to the roof.
He and Yohji were outside here, waiting for Omi's signal once the security system was tapped into and the body heat tracking program was activated. Then they, too would split up and take the front and back doors.
"If you're thinking I can't do it, you're right." Yohji said, taking the finished cigarette from his mouth and throwing it to the ground to step on.
Aya looked at him.
Damn it!
The man was a fool. How could he? How could he fall for the enemy? Was it truly just because of being rejected? (How was I supposed to know! How was I supposed to prevent this? And how guilty am I!)
There. He had allowed himself to think it.
The unthinkable. The unforgivable.
Traitor!
Yohji was looking at him. What must he be thinking? (That I would betray him?) Aya thought. (When I would give anything in the world to be in the same shit he's in right now?)
He swallowed hard. Fight it down. Never....never....
He pulled himself together....as much as he could. And when he spoke his own voice sounded strange to him.
"It's better that we kill Takatori. Never mind Schwarz." For shit sake the man was in his own penthouse. "I don't think they're here." Did he sleep with them watching over his bed? Surely they had time off sometime...Or Yohji wouldn't be off all damned day...
What the hell?
Yohji had closed his eye, and put a hand to the wall, looking as if he were about to faint.
"Ahhh..." His knees buckled, and he nearly collapsed.

Aya blinked. Was the man mad?
Then he opened his eyes and looked into Aya's face again. He spoke with absolute certainty, relaying a message. "Crawford wants to know if Taketori's death will settle this?"
Aya opened his mouth...stunned...then shut it, blinking, and tried again. "They are here?"
Yohji was silent.
Aya tried to think. Of course...the telepath had him, body and mind!
Takatori's death?
In exchange for what?
Was the gaigen bastard unable to do it either? Had he somehow managed to fall for this idiot? Yohji you fool!
Kami-sama, it was so hard to make up his mind! The dreams, the nightmares, his need to kill Takatori at all costs....to pay the debt to his sister...his parents...He looked at the blond half breed. (Guilty...I'm just as guilty as him....a traitor!)
"Tell Crawford..." How odd the word felt in his mouth. "Tell him...Yes."

It was all out war. The alarm had gone off in the building and the noise was incredible. He could barely hear to understand Omi's instructions and warnings through the head set. Having no idea of what had gone on in the penthouse, the security guards were on the defensive, and obviously, under standing emergency orders to shoot to kill.
Aya held the bloodied katana ready, moving carefully along the corridor, eyes and ears straining to see and hear any sign of movement heading his way. One kill after another, it didn't matter. He had to see Takatori dead, to be certain this was not a trick of the gaigen red head on his bakana lover.
The close in tightened up as Yohji, then Ken and at last Omi appeared, to head down the last hallway leading to the elevator to the 'mansion', the penthouse apartment.
There were bodies everywhere, the blood so pooled that the carpet made soft wet noises under his motorcycle boots, making him glad for the extra traction of the specialized soles.
He heard a noise, ever so faintly...and froze...then steeled himself, griping his katana more firmly and bracing himself for a strike...he stepped around the corner...
An arm block...a gun. Right in his face. And behind it...
Those eyes...
He had to be strong, to be ice cold.
This was the enemy.
Crawford didn't move a muscle, looking right back at him.
Aya glared, his training in kendo his only armor right now. Show the enemy no fear, terrify him with your fierceness.

Crawford kept the gun right were it was, but did not pull the trigger, nor did he move the blocking arm from Aya's one inch either way.
Aya considered now that the deal had not been a trick...or he'd be dead, right? Right?
He slowly lowered the katana...remaining ready to use it the moment he even sensed he had to...
Crawford raised the gun, aiming ceiling-ward, obviously just as ready to lower it again, putting his other arm down slowly.
"Not a one alive." The red haired gaigen said.
Talk about tension cutting with knives and all the old remarks pertinent so awkward a situation. Two enemy teams, sworn to kill each other....and with plenty of reason to do so.
"Aya!" Ken interjected. He was angry, ready to kill.
But out of the corner of his eye, Aya saw Omi pocket his darts.
The youngest Schwarz calmly changed the clip in his automatic pistol, keeping it aimed up, but no longer hostile, just wary.
Even the one-eyed gray haired one did not seem so ready to continue any fighting.
Yohji, unable to take it any more, leaned against a wall and took out his cigarettes, flipping the package to partially eject one and taking the end in his lips, while fishing out his lighter.
That was it.
The very end of it.
Aya sheathed his sword. What ever happened now....happened.
And to his surprise....the tall gaigen holstered his gun under the tailored cream linen jacket.
Aya flicked his head to get the hair out of his eyes.
Then he looked at the grinning red haired gaigen.
The devil seemed to be incredibly pleased with himself.
Well, why the fuck not? He'd fucked his way into completely disabling Weiss. How proud he must be...Aya wished him dead!
The gaigen smiled even more, a broad, feral grin.
And Aya felt something touch his very soul...nearly making his heart stop...

## Chapter Two

### "In the Flow of the Tide"

Aya felt dizzy...
Yohji caught him, holding him up.
"Where the hell did they go!" Ken demanded, looking around the hall.
Aya blinked. What...?
They were gone. Schwarz was gone. "The telepath." He said coldly. Then he shoved Yohji away.
Ken swore and started complaining. Aya ignored it,
Omi yelled something at Ken that shut him up.
Aya's head still felt so strange. He had this picture in his mind...like a memory, an image played over. Takatori was dead. The brunette boy of Schwarz had shot him on Crawford's order. He could see it...as if he had actually been there.
He had to be certain. The police would be here soon. But he didn't care.
"Leave!" He ordered. "I'm going to make sure Takatori is dead!"
"Omi, Ken, go." Yohji said, nodding at the elevator, and throwing down the finished cigarette. The tiny glow on the end of the butt was extinguished by the blood it landed it.
"I don't need you here!" Aya glared at the man.
Yohji wasn't having that for an answer. "The hell you don't." He said. "You're so tired you almost fainted. I'm sticking by you, Aya. Like it or not."
Aya considered striking him, then decided to let him hang as well if the police caught them here. Seeing Takatori dead was more important.
He strode to the elevator to the penthouse and hit the button.
Yohji came to step in with him when the doors opened.
"He did something to our minds." Aya stated.
The doors slid open again.
"Yeah." Yohji said. "But Takatori is dead. That was the deal, Aya."
"You trust him!" Aya was amazed at his stupidity.
"Look." Yohji pointed.
Through the open double doors on the opposite side of the foyer, one could see a body on the floor, empty eyes staring blankly up, mouth gaping, a trickle of blood from a black spot on the forehead.
Aya slowly walked over to take a better look, heart pounding.
Again the scene played out in his mind.
It was him. The man who had destroyed his life. Dead.
"Why?" Aya asked. "They could have walked right past us and let us kill him. Why suddenly kill him and let us know about it?"

"We'd better get out of here..." Yohji said, hearing the sirens outside.

Yohji helped him down through from the top of the elevator when it was safe to come out of hiding up there. Aya still felt very strange, but he was so tired.
So far, so good, no one was in the parking garage. With all the bodies upstairs...
Yohji caught his wrist and drew him along the wall into the deep shadows. There were police here. They'd just been searching between the cars quietly. Minutes that passed like hours got them outside on street level. About two blocks away, Yohji whistled for a passing cab.

"Why?" Aya asked again in the darkened shop, breaking the long silence of the trip as Yohji locked the door.
Yohji turned to him. "Aya.." He said, sounding reluctant about it.
"What is going on?" Aya asked coldly.
Yohji sighed. "Crawford can see the future, you know that."
"Hai." Aya said slowly.
"Schuldig told me Crawford's been having visions of what will happen if he doesn't find a way to change it somehow."
"Give me one good reason I should give a damn." Aya stated.
Yohji sighed again in tired annoyance and put his hands on his hip, looking at him. "Oh, you give a damn." He informed him in a very 'face the facts' tone.
Aya blushed.
I'm going to go upstairs and pass out now." The blond said. "You can keep fooling yourself, or join me." He added quietly, then turned and went through the curtain.
Aya felt as if he could not stop burning.
The 'dizzy spell', the 'memory' of Takatori being killed--the mind reader. Crawford.
He knew!
Aya felt himself slipping.
The telepath had read his mind. He knew--everything.
Not only that, but he'd told Kudoh.
He'd told Crawford.
Aya felt nauseous. He went quickly to the small washroom off the shop's storage room, to throw up until his stomach stopped heaving. Shaking, he rinsed his mouth and face, and dried them on a clean towel.
He'd never turned on the lights. He'd become that accustomed to living in darkness.
Weak from exhaustion, he climbed the stairs.
Kudoh had left the door to his room open. He was snoring softly.
Of course he could sleep, Aya thought bitterly.
He went on to his own room, and collapsed on his own bed.

This time, thankfully, he slept.

"Aya!"
He opened his eyes. Someone was shaking him...
God. Ken. "What...?"
"It's nine A.M. time to open the shop!"
"Get out of my room." Aya said.
He was right there, standing over the bed, a hand on his shoulder from shaking him awake.
Ken looked mildly hurt, and drew the hand away. "I was only waking you up..."
"Get out!" Aya snapped at him, fully awake now.
Ken frowned and got out.
Didn't even shut the damned door, Aya noted. He turned on to his back and closed his eyes again.
So tired....

"Aya?" A quiet voice this time. "Aya-kun, are you going to wake up?"
Omi....shit what time was it? He opened his eyes. Ceiling was bright. He closed them again. "What time?" His mouth was so dry.
"After noon, just about. You were so tired." Omi said.
He sighed and moved, slowly to sit up. His limbs felt numb, he'd slept that deeply.
"Are you okay?" Omi asked, concerned.
"Yes." He said. Like it or not, he was at least alive and functioning. Beyond that...the living hell of his life...he didn't want to think about the new problems just yet.
"There's lunch waiting when you feel like coming down." Omi said. "And...Ken's upset. Yohji thinks we need to all sit down later and discuss what happened last night before we report to Kritiker. Ken is set on finishing the mission, even though Takatori is eliminated." He looked a bit grim just then. "So when your ready, okay?" He said softly.
Aya knew the boy worried. "All right." He said. "I need to wash. I'm not going to rush."
Omi hesitated, then, nodded and turned to go back down stairs, shutting the door behind himself.
Aya frowned. (So. Yohji 'thinks' we need a debriefing of our own. To what conclusion? That we lie to Kritiker?) He got up, taking a deep breath to clear his head, or try to.
He needed a shower and clean clothes. Then he would allow himself to think.

The basement 'entertainment' room.
He'd taken the soft armless chair to avoid being near anyone, still too worn out to stand apart from them as he normally did. Since the day of the explosion, he'd hated people touching him. He was still too tired now to even want to brush

against any of his team mates accidentally. It did something to him.
Made him feel.
He didn't want to feel.
This time it was Yohji who stood apart from them, his cigarette smoke curling up the stair case. Omi and Ken sat on the sofa, Omi comfortably settled back, Ken on the edge of the seat, slouched forward and tense as hell.
Ken was so mad. He could barely contain himself, Aya noted with contempt. Everything was such a big deal to Ken, such a big battle to fight. Justice? Hah! Who ever wins, wins, and you are either dead or you deal and go onto the next fight. Ken just couldn't seem to go on. He still kept fighting that last lost 'game'.
(How am I any different?) Aya suddenly had to wonder.
"We failed the mission." Ken stated.
"Takatori is dead. What more is there?" Yohji said in his quiet, drawling voice.

"We were ordered to dispose of Schwarz! But Aya had his little fainting fit and they got away!"
Hmm, Ken was really seething about that. Aya blinked at him, curious that he might possibly explode, with all that rage building up.
"We're all tired, Ken." Omi said. "You can't blame Aya for what Schwarz's mind reader is capable of. Besides...he got to all of us."
The 'even you', was left silent.
"We can go after them and finish the mission!" Ken insisted.
Yohji looked at Aya. "Aya?"
"We should report to Kritiker first." Aya said.
"We were given a mission, we all accepted it, we need to complete it!" Ken said loudly, but not looking at him.
"Takatori's death has changed things." Aya said quietly. "We should report first. Kritiker knows by now that he's dead and that Schwarz's bodies are not there. We have to report, for further orders."
"I agree with Aya." Omi said. "Takatori was the main target. As far as we know, Schwarz is incidental."
"Agreed." Yohji said, having not taken his eyes off of Aya.
Aya frowned slightly. What did the bastard want from him? So they were liars, and they had gone against orders. Now what? Facts were facts. Schwarz had got away. Takatori was dead. It was only a matter of the next mission.
Ken flung himself to his feet and went up the stair case.
Omi sighed.
Aya remembered Omi putting his darts away last night, how odd it had seemed at the time. He looked at the boy. The telepath had gotten to him, too, somehow. He must have...
He looked at Yohji. The man stood there, looking at him, as if he were the one who had to do something.

//You can keep fooling yourself or join me.// Yohji had said.
"What is going on, Kudoh? Suppose you spell it all out for me in simple terms, instead of using it to get me into bed with you."
Omi blinked, a bit shocked.
Yohji took a deep breath, and pushed the hair back that never made it into his pony tail. "You know Aya, right now, under any other circumstances, I would say you could take your prick and shove it up your own ass. Crawford's seen what will happen to your sister if we don't stop it. Killing Takatori was an offer toward an alliance to change the time line. He wants your sister out of that coma just as bad as you do. The big difference, he can make it happen, and you can't."
"What has my sister got to do with this?" Aya snarled, ready to throw himself at the man and pull him to pieces, this was pushing him that close to insanity.
"This isn't going to make any sense, unless you keep in mind that we are dealing with people who have supernatural abilities, okay?" Yohji was loosing his temper just a bit as well, his voice raising slightly.
Aya slouched in the chair, crossing his arms.
"Aya, just let him tell it." Omi said quietly.
Aya sulked in lieu of any better reaction to this bullshit. What did anything he say or did matter now? They were as good as gone. He and Ken would be next, and then Kritiker would be hunting them down. What ever that telepath had done, they couldn't fight him.
"Aya...." Yohji said. "Schwarz's bosses, Esset, are the ones keeping your sister in that coma. She's being genetically altered. Somehow they found out she was as close to perfect as could be in the first place. And they've been feeding her some serum ever since, to finish the process. Crawford said they intend to use her in some ritual that will allow them to gain a power to take over the world. I know it sounds cracked but hear me out!"
Aya had been going to get up, but now he sat back again, glaring at him.
"Crawford doesn't want that to happen. He's going to do everything he can to ruin the chances of that timeline happening. And to do that, he has to go as directly against it as he can. Killing Takatori before he became Prime Minister of Japan was the first step. An alliance with us is the next. He'll save your sister, in exchange for us helping him defeat Esset."
"Why the hell does he need our help? Why not just kill us." Aya said, ice cold.
(Big fucking joke, hunh, Kudoh? Do you think it makes me weak? Ready to just let someone else put a new collar on me?)
"Because it's going to take more than Crawford's team to stop this. Everyone has to be in the right place at the right time and the more of us working against the time line, the better chance he has of stopping this disaster. Part of that change is making us allies rather than enemies." Yohji couldn't stand it any more He had to have another cigarette! "It's twisted and it's confusing, but damn it, Aya, Takatori is dead and your sister has a chance of recovering! What

more do you want?" He demanded, lighting the cigarette.
Then his leaf green eyes met Aya's with a dead certain knowledge.
//...keep fooling yourself....//
Aya went crimson again. How dare he?
Yohji didn't say a thing more. He took the cigarette from his lips and blew out a puff of smoke, waiting for an answer.
"What about Kritiker!" Aya said. "Do you think they will agree to this alliance?"
"It's worth a try." Yohji said.
Aya could tell it wasn't the answer he had wanted. Good. What ever he'd found out, what ever he made of it, he was never going to get the satisfaction of seeing Fujimiya Ran give a shit about a useless emotional...disturbance.
"I want my sister out of that hospital and safe." He said. "Tell your lover's boss that and only that will make me believe him!" He got up and shoved past him to go up the stairs.

## Chapter Three
## "Worlds in Motion"

Aya leaned on the Porsche, arms crossed, waiting.
Yohji was smoking. The annoying fumes drifted Aya's way, despite having ordered him to get down wind.
And what was with the crop tops? He'd worn them occasionally before, but now he wore them constantly. In fact...the man dressed as if he were heading for a club, not for a meeting between assassins.
Purple eyes narrowed hatefully. More like dressing for an assignation with that gaigen mind reader!
He'd only worn his normal 'work' clothes. He wasn't about to go into this without his weapons. He drew a deep breath, forcing himself to stay cool, a hand on the hilt of his katana.
It didn't matter what Schwarz knew, he was still Fujimiya Ran, and not about to let them just take him over like that idiot Kudoh!
'Ran'?
He thought it over. 'Ran' or 'Aya'...he was still.....himself.
He would deal only with the promise of imouto being brought out of the coma. Nothing else mattered!
He looked around, for anything to distract him from his thoughts. Nothing. A dark parking lot, near the docks. Ships being loaded in the distance, work that never stopped even for night.
"Aya..." Yohji said softly. "Talk to me."
Talk to him! There was nothing more to be said!
And anyway, it was too late. The black MB sedan slid to a halt about twenty feet away, the engine being shut off, though you could barely hear it when it was running.
They got out of the car.
Crawford was all in black. Oddly enough, it made him look less threatening? More casual? Perhaps it was the lack of a tie that gave the impression.
Schuldig wore a very dark olive suit with a light olive shirt. He walked around the car with his hands in his slacks pocket, the perpetual smirk on his face very arch tonight. As if the cat had got the cream.
Aya knew a lot of money had to have gone into those clothes, and that car. His Porsche was four years old. That MB was so new it was next year's model. Takatori must have paid them well. Bastards.
Yohji had not moved from the other end of the Porsche, and now Schuldig kept walking until he was right in front of the man.
Crawford stopped a good two and half meters away, a little more prepared for what might happen should there be trouble. "Fujimiya." He said in a coolly

polite tone.
Aya felt it again.
He didn’t want to feel it. He had nothing to with this part of himself. This weakness! "Kudoh told me you can help my sister." He stated. "Why!"
Schuldig made a noise of mildly annoyed dismay, looking at him sidelong. "The kitten is wet, Bradley."
"Shut up, Schuldig." Crawford said calmly, as if it were something he had to do all the time.
The man was obviously used to it, because he only chuckled, and then reached up to take Kudoh’s cigarette pack out of the rolled up sleeve of the crop top.
Aya was too used to being in life or death fights with these two not to keep an eye on how close the man was to that idiot. How many times had the bastard tried to kill him! "I want to know why my sister has anything to do with your plans." He said, barely managing not to snarl.
Schuldig helped himself to a cigarette and tucked the package back into Yohji’s sleeve, lighting the thing with his own lighter, and inhaling deeply, all along keeping his eyes on the blonds’ and the blond man returning the look.
"I’m sure Kudoh told you the basics." Crawford said dryly, also keeping an eye on the pair, having crossed his arm and assuming a rather relaxed but ready stance.
Schuldig leaned over to pull Yohji’s head to his, mouth to mouth and exhaled the smoke into him in a kiss.
Yohji caught him by the hips and responded.
Aya looked away from them only to catch the look on Crawford’s face as he, too, saw this going on. It was anger.
A lot of anger.
Then Crawford looked at him, and it was gone, just like that. Again he was the unreadable foreigner. "You want her alive, I want her out of Esset’s hands. Schuldig!" He snapped the last word out like the crack of a whip.
Aya had to look, and was stunned.
The devil had one hand up Yohji’s damned crop top and the other blatantly down the front of those impossibly low cut pants, and Yohji was not protesting one bit, but holding on to his jacket front, kissing him, the cigarette fallen to the tarmac forgotten.
"K’suo." Aya hissed in disgust. "Dõsiai no hentai."
Schuldig forced himself to come up for air, to look at Aya evilly. "Takes one to know one, my sweet little man." He got his hands off Yohji, and rather flustered, walked back to stand behind Crawford, breathing hard.
Aya’s cheeks flamed red.
Yohji fixed his pants and smoothed down his shirt, looking rather like a school boy being caught naughty in the hall way. "Damn it, Schuldig." He muttered.
Crawford took two steps closer. Aya still had the car behind him, he couldn’t back up without it being obvious. But the movement was somehow not

threatening...
"This is going to sound crazy." Crawford said carefully. "And it's going to take a lot of explaining. I'm asking for a truce, at least long enough for me to tell you what I have to. Will you accept that for now? Until you have this information to make up your mind?"
Aya looked at him. His japanese was perfect, his voice...Aya swallowed, nerves about to go. "For now." He managed to say.
"I can tell you right now, Kritiker will not accept this." Crawford stated. "If you agree to this, your employers will deal with you as a traitor."
Aya nodded once. "Hai..." he said quietly. "My sister..." He found himself loosing his concentration somehow.
That scent, some lightly applied and very rich cologne.
He forced himself to get a grip! "My sister is the only reason I do anything!" He stated.
Crawford looked at him coolly. "A commendable loyalty."
Behind him, Schuldig laughed in soft derision.
Aya wished he had one good chance of killing him!

A neutral enough spot, a bar. Crawford got comfortable on one side of the booth and ordered a round of three beers and a coke quite easily, as if this were only a social occasion. Schuldig had slid in first, so Yohji followed suit, sitting across from him. Aya sat down.
Damn it, how could the man be so....unconcerned? They had all tried to kill each other!
Then he realized something. Three beers and a coke?
The waitress came back smiling and bowing and set the bottles on the table with the glasses, opening the bottles for them.
And Aya found himself left with the coke.
"You don't drink." Crawford said, as if guessing his thoughts, and had a swallow of his beer strait from the bottle. "I shouldn't either, but I know when to quit."
Schuldig laughed softly.
The man had the most annoying laugh! An incompetent tibetan throat singer couldn't make a more ear grinding noise. Aya poured his coke into the glass and tried not to scowl so obviously. "Explain." He said. "You said it would take time. I'm sure we don't have all night."
"We have enough time." Crawford said. "It's when you go home, that the trouble will start." He moved his right arm to rest on the back of the seat.
Behind Schuldig.
The german leaned back with a smile and sipped his beer from a glass, looking at Yohji with cat-like, half closed eyes, his shoulders resting on Crawford's arm....
Aya felt the strange sensation of vertigo again.

He had to shut himself away. Imouto...concentrate on imouto. On her being healthy and strong again.
"Aya?" Yohji said, sounding concerned.
"It’s nothing!" Aya stated, then focused on the American again. "Talk, Crawford. Explain to me with out all the little useless details. What will bring my sister back!"
Crawford smiled slightly. "All right. Starting from the beginning. Esset is a group that has been around for hundreds of years. Since the crusades in Europe, perhaps even before that. They mix science with strange religious and superstitions. Some of which actually work, take my word for that. Now....they have been waiting some time for a sign that a perfect sacrifice had been found. A human being who’s body was so perfect, it could be used to host a demon they intended to call to this dimension again."
"A fairy tale." Aya said in derision.
"One you would do well to sit through quietly and attentively." Crawford said, his voice like ice, but calm as could be. "Or the sleep you fall into will be your last one."
Yohji shifted beside him, and reached under the table, to his lap, pulling... Schuldig slipped, yanked down, off the vinyl covered seat, and laughed, nearly spilling his beer.
Aya glared at Kudoh.
"Cut it out, Schu." Yohji told the german.
Schuldig’s response to this, after getting his butt back on the seat, was to half turn and kiss Crawford’s jaw. In public! "Move. Restroom."
Crawford got up, frowning, so that the red head could get out of the booth. Yohji stood up, giving Aya an expectant look.
Aya got up out of the way, just knowing what he was up to and despising him! Yohji moved past him to follow the damned German to the men’s room. Aya sat back down like a sulky child.
How could he? How could he just....
He looked at Crawford. The man’s mouth was tense, and he swallowed the rest of the beer in a few swallows then set the bottle aside. Aya couldn’t say anything. What was there to say?
Crawford signaled the waitress for another beer. "When your sister was struck and put in the hospital, Esset sent people to find her, and you, to get rid of the witnesses that arrogant moron Takatori left behind. You didn’t come back for a few days. So they waited, figuring leave her alive and you’d come around sooner or later. In that time, something tipped them off to your sister’s genetics being the sign they were looking for." He glanced towards the men’s room with a flicker of annoyance across his face. "So they reported to Esset."
"What do you mean, about her genetics?" Aya asked.
"It takes a particularly strong body to house this demon they want to raise. She has that potential. So they decided to strengthen her the rest of the way.

Keeping her in a coma, removing DNA samples, then re-structuring them and injecting them back in. And now, it looks as if the process will be completed just in time. There will be an alignment of certain planets they feel is necessary for the ritual."
It was all so insanely cruel! Aya couldn't see how anyone would go through to much expense and trouble for some stupid superstitious ritual...and all this time....he had been keeping her there! Where they could do this to her!
Crawford was quiet now, looking at him with those grave brown eyes.
The waitress brought his beer. He let it sit, still regarding Aya, waiting.
Aya frowned. "Why not just kill her? You're Schwarz, why bother with us at all?"

"Because." Crawford said. "I have to go against everything in the premonition. And if that means making an ally of you, then so be it. I want to save us, not the damned world. I won't live as a mindless slave."
Aya was certain by 'us'...he meant him and the German. The look on his face when he glanced at the restroom area for the third time.... Then Aya realized....if he could see the future....he could see....he'd known that it would happen. And he hadn't stopped it.
Aya fought it down. No! He wouldn't allow himself to fall.
Yohji and Schuldig came out at last, looking rather.....well, like two men who had had sex in a bathroom stall, there was no denying it!
The red head opted to have Crawford move over instead of getting up, being sure to move close to him. "Miss me?" He said teasingly to Crawford, behaving for all the world like a flirting woman.
Aya moved over for Yohji to sit, not wanting him to touch him at all.
Yohji gave him a look that stunned him. After all, the man had just satisfied his lust hadn't he? What reason did he have to look at Aya so sad and longingly in that brief glance, before picking up his beer and drinking it.
Crawford pushed his glasses up and looked at Schuldig. The German smiled but it was not his usual feral grin. It was rather hesitant and uncertain.
Crawford drank his beer. "Do you want your sister back alive or not, Fujimiya?"
He looked at him. It was a demand, no matter how calmly spoken.
"You know my answer." Aya stated. "I just want to know how."
"Get her out of that hospital, transfer her to another one. I'll cover the bills, you just see to it she gets moved suddenly and with no trail."
"And there is Kritiker to deal with." Yohji said. "Ken's in an uproar over failing the mission to kill you."
"Then we should just dispose of him." Schuldig said.
"No." Crawford frowned slightly. "That's not possible, and should it come to the point where anyone finds it necessary. I'm warning you, even if your life is in danger, do not kill him. His death can not come from your hands."
Aya was shocked that there would be any idea of Weiss killing their own team member. No matter...how tempting.....But if this man saw the future, and Aya

knew damned well from experience he did..."Kritiker has eliminated agents before." He said quietly.
"Just go home now and deal with what ever turns up." Crawford advised. "I can't give you any more than that, things are changing so much now I can't take the time to sort it all out because it will only change again. Do not kill anyone in the next twenty four hours, not even in self defense. You need to be free to get your sister transferred. And stop trying to do everything alone." He added, strangely. "Let Kudoh help you. You're going to collapse at this rate. Then, you'll be useless."
Schuldig got up and out of the way, the meeting obviously over. Aya noted the German wasn't so full of himself now. In fact he was rather quiet, the smirk gone. Was it possible the creature felt shame? Aya snorted silently. Well, well...
But it was time to go and he was certain now that one of Kritiker, would be waiting for them.
"Well?" Yohji said in the car, as Aya drove it out of the parking lot behind the bar.
"I'm going to do as he said, move Aya-chan to another hospital." Aya stated.
Yohji was quiet for a few blocks. Then he seemed to not be able to take it any more. "Aya, can't you ever trust me?"
"What do you want from me!" Aya demanded, then was surprised at his own explosion of emotion. Where had that come from?
It was as if he were off to one side, watching himself, and had suddenly seen himself acting like...a confused child, tired and worn out, not knowing what the world wanted from it. How strange he was acting.
"At least for you to let me help you." Yohji said quietly.
Crawford had said to let him help. "I suppose you've discussed this at length while fucking around with that male whore." Aya snapped.
"And if it weren't for that 'male whore', would you care for me? Why should I shut myself off from any comfort at all just because you do? Or would you rather I keep bringing home women?"
"I don't give a fuck what you do!" Aya 'watched himself roar at the man, trying to keep the car on the right side of the road. "I want Aya safe and out of that damned hospital bed! That's ALL I WANT!"
Yohji looked out the window. "I love you, you stupid son of a bitch." He murmured.
Aya felt as if a switch had been snapped in his mind. He blinked and focused on driving the car safely. This was all so insane. He fought the sudden urge to just laugh at it.
A bunch of assassins at each other's throats, and all falling stupidly in love with each other? And what were the odds that they would all be attracted to other men?
It was just too much. He shrugged it off and made up his mind that if it was

Manx they would be safe a while longer. Birman could be a problem. But he had a cold feeling that there was more of a chance it would be someone else, assigned to keep them in line and watch them until the job was completed. He'd been that 'someone' before himself. He knew how it went.

Dogs that out lived their purpose were put down.

## Chapter Four
## "Do You Really Care"

Aya parked the car in the alley way space and got out, deep in thought. He'd already noted the strange car parked in front of the shop. He hoped Yohji was going to be able to keep his big mouth shut.
It was a surprise to him, when as he reached for the doorknob to the service entrance of the shop, his wrist was again grabbed up and he was spun into an embrace and kissed.
Yohji....
He found himself responding. The feel of the man, against him, pressing so close, so warm and strong, arms holding him...he wanted to be held. It had been so long since he had wanted this, someone to touch him. And this...this was so frighteningly what he needed....
A hand in his hair pulled him closer, a face pressed to his neck, a voice murmuring to him....
It was like a drug shooting through his veins.
He found his hands in the dark blond hair, the lips on his throat sending flashes of heat down through him, arousing him. He wanted this.
Then he remembered....the look on Crawford's face when Schuldig had sat down beside him again.
He shoved Yohji off, fighting his own desperate need to keep him close, reality getting a death grip on his mind again, never mind his traitorous body. He fell back against the door, looking at the man.
How could he?
The next thing he knew, his dagger was in his hand.
Yohji held up his hands. "Aya...You're flipping out again." He said.
He knew he was 'flipping out'.
He was damn well aware of it. The adrenaline in his blood was sending him past the limit, he was so high from it right now.
"Aya..." Yohji coxed gently. "Calm down."
"I don't want to calm down." He stated.
Yohji backed up just a step.
Aya braced himself. He knew what that meant. Yohji had long legs. He moved instantly to put up a blocking arm to shield his knife hand, changing his own stance for a counter strike...
"Aya. Talk." Yohji said. "Talk to me. Tell me what's wrong."
"Can't you stop?" Aya hissed at him. "Can't you see what you're doing?"
Yohji kept his eyes on him, his voice calm, neutral. "What am I doing?" He said.

"He's taken, Yohji!" he said, as if the fool could understand that. "You're

fucking him right under that man's face. Don't you give a fuck who you hurt? Who you destroy?"
Some light of understanding sparked in the hazel green eyes. "Don't go there, Aya, you don't know what goes on in that mess. I'm not the one doing the destroying." He kept his hands up, stepping back just a bit more...out of striking range even for himself.
Aya realized he was gripping the blade's hilt so tight his knuckles were growing numb. "I'm not blind." He stated. "Do you care about anyone but yourself? "
"You wont let me care for you. And what about you? Your sister, sure, but to be so upset about Schuldig cheating on Crawford? You have slipped a few gears." He half sat down on the lid to one of the metal trash cans, bracing himself with his hands on it. "One good thing about Schuldig, he doesn't play around with games and masks. The only reason you give a shit about it at all is because you want to be in Crawford's bed." He took out his cigarettes and pulled one out to light.
Aya felt sick. Flat out, nauseatingly, violently sick.

He woke up.
Manx was standing over him, looking very concerned. "Aya-kun, are you all right?"
No. He wasn't. But it was Manx, and that meant he had time.
"Yohji said you had some kind of 'fit' in the alley way. You tried to attack him and then blacked out."
"I remember." He said. He was on his own bed, in his room, everyone was crowded in here...
It was Omi who brought him a glass of water. He took it and half sat up to drink it.
"It's that mind reader!" Ken accused.
"Calm down, Ken." Manx said. "Aya is not well. You look so tired." she smoothed his hair back from his eyes.
He fought flinching back from her fussy womanliness. He drank the water instead.

Yohji.
Was that what Crawford had meant about not killing anyone in the next twenty four hours?
The minute that time was up....
"Ken's right." Yohji lied calmly. "What ever Schwarz is up to this time, we can't even trust ourselves any more. Kritiker should take us off the active list, before that bastard manages to get one of us totally under his control."
"You mean like you, Yohji!" Ken said. "You've been acting really strange lately, disappearing all the time! Coming back with no explanation!"
"So maybe I have." Yohji said calmly. "All the more proof. Who knows what that telepath is capable of. Maybe the more times he tries, the deeper into our heads

he gets? Look at the way you've been acting, so angry all the time. Distrusting the rest of us."
Manx looked at Ken curiously.
Ken went blank faced, then drew a deep breath. "That's not true!" He said.
"And what about Omi." Yohji drawled, looking at him. "He hasn't been himself at all lately. Not sitting in front of the computer for hours, being more careful how he dresses when he goes out..."
"YOHJI-KUN!" Omi protested indignantly. "This is one time we don't need your foolish joking!"
Yohji smiled a little and shot Manx an 'oh don't we?' look.
She smiled a little and patted Omi on the shoulder. "There will never be any stopping Kudoh-san making inappropriate jokes at the inappropriate time." She gave him a stern look now. "But the fact is that Aya is tired and worn out, and has such dark circles under his eyes. I think taking you all off active duty is a good precaution. And Ken...you need some anger management training. We'll assign someone else to take over the in-completed mission. Aya, you need some rest." She looked down at him. "Maybe you should see a doctor."
He laid back down. What good would a doctor do?
Manx shooed everyone out of the room.
He drifted back into sleep.

"Aya."
Was it morning already?
He sighed and tried to understand...it was just getting light in the room, the pale light of early dawn.
Yohji sat down on the bed's edge. "I'm sorry about that." He said, setting a cup of tea on the beside table. "But it got that creep of an agent that was here off our backs. You should have seen him. Total by the line of the law. Kritiker must have found him in the recent police scandals."
"Why are you in my room so god damned early?" Aya said coldly.
"Because you need to wake up." Yohji said. "Tired my ass, you'd sleep for a month to get away from this rather than deal with it. I called around all the hospitals. There's one in Minowa, Nagano, with a good facility for long term coma patients. I told them it was my brother so no one will be tipped off to a teenaged girl being moved." He took a piece of paper out of his pocket. "Here is the hospital and the ambulance company's addresses, you'll need to have her transported under a licensed medic's care." He put it next to the tea cup.
"So what do you expect from me now? Another kiss?" Aya sniped.
Yohji apparently didn't get the sarcasm of that remark. And Aya was still too groggy to realize it....until he was pinned to the bed, with warm, soft, sensual lips on his.
Some sort of noise left his throat, he heard it. Then, again, he felt silken hair in his hands, he wasn't wanting this to stop, holding the man there, to

keep doing this...
Yohji pulled the blankets off him and ran a hand up under his shirt...
Aya gasped and retreated from him, half falling off the other side of the bed.
"Will you stop it!" He said, nearly pleading. "Just STOP IT!"
"I'm sorry!" Yohji said, dismayed. Then he got up and walked to the door. He stopped and looked back. "Let me know when you're ready to go get her. I don't want you to have to do this alone." Then he went out, shutting the door.
Aya pushed his hair back from his forehead and sat back on the bed, his mind reeling, his heart pounding.
If this kept up...
He moved to reach for the tea with a shaking hand.
Yohji had made it good and strong with nothing else in it.
At least the man was good for something.
Then he looked at the piece of paper.
He reached to pick it up and look at the addresses on it. Yohji had gone through all that for him? Just to be nice? To prove how he felt?
Aya felt sort of sad now, sipping the tea. The man was a pig, but he'd always been a good team mate. Even now...as a traitor...a fellow traitor.
The thing was to keep him from becoming his rapist!

Thankfully, Kudoh didn't try anything like that again during the time it took to get the arrangements made and to see his imouto gently rolled into the ambulance. He kept an eye on traffic now, making sure to stay right behind the ambulance. He didn't feel like getting lost.
"I have to smoke." Yohji announced after twenty minutes of this.
Aya huffed in annoyance.
Yohji got one out and lit it up, but tried to keep it out of the car by hanging his hand out the window when he wasn't inhaling it.
"You said..." Aya hesitated, then decided that if his mind was no big secret why should anyone else's secrets be safe? "What is going on, Yohji? About the 'mess' and you not being the one doing the destroying?" He sighed heavily.
Yohji looked at him, then looked at the back of the ambulance again. Traffic sucked. This was going to be a long trip. "I told you, Schu's a professional. Crawford doesn't give a damn who he's with, as long as he does his job."
"And you're on of his 'jobs'." Aya sneered sweetly.
Yohji frowned. "Maybe at first." He said.
Aya glanced at him. Did he actually believe that?
But then...he remembered how the gaigen had looked at Kudoh across the table, and the laughter as he had caught him by the ankle and pulled on him like two teenagers fooling around.
He knew how Yohji could make people laugh and want to be with him. How the women
came around.

Yohji had made him laugh a few times too.
If only....he'd said some woman that day...when he'd kissed him in the shop the first time.
That, he'd have been able to forgive. He'd have tried....to forget this stupid fixation.
"Crawford beats him." Yohji said. "He was pretty beat up a few weeks ago. But....he keeps going back, because if he left, Esset would track him down and bring him back. I don't want those bastards to take over the world or what ever they plan to do, but when this is over, I want Schuldig to have somewhere to go, away from Crawford."
Aya felt like shit. Yohji and his weak spots. That hooker at that club, any stray woman with a sad story, animals, kids, and now, their worst enemy. "Well when Kritiker gets a hold of the truth, we'll all be fortunate to have our lives, let alone some place to go."
But...he'd seen the man's eyes. He'd seen the way he looked at the german. And how Schuldig had stopped his grinning and joking.
A professional? And how much of what Yohji saw....was the truth?
Crawford had said he would do anything to stop Esset from having their way. And how easy was it to put a few well placed bruises on someone to make a convincing victim?
"I hardly think he needs rescuing." Aya said coolly. "The man's a cold hearted killer, just like us."
"Don't we need rescuing?" Yohji asked quietly.
Damn him.

She was safe. He smoothed her hair gently. How he would tease her about being sleeping beauty when she finally woke up. But it would be difficult to visit her as often now.
(And, rather a relief.) The evil half of his mind said.
He shook his head.
No.
As much as he hated hospitals now, he would always visit Imouto.
That sarcastic part of him was getting more and more annoying lately. The more exhausted he got, the more it chipped away at him.
She would be up soon. What ever they were doing to her had been stopped, if Crawford had told the truth. And somehow....he had the feeling that the man had not lied.
Yohji glanced at his watch. "Time to be heading back."
Yes, it was. He bent to kiss her cheek. "I'll see you later, Aya-chan." He said softly.
Outside, he took time to look around. The trees and grass, the flowers. He'd noticed the rose bushes in the planter along the building. Strange, how the only 'nature' he came near was dead . Cut and dying flowers.

"Don’t scowl at the roses, Aya, you’ll wilt them." Yohji reached to take the stem of one perfect blossom in his fingers.
"Don’t!" Aya said. "Don’t pick it!"
Yohji let go of it.
"We have enough dead things around us." Aya said, and walked away to the parking lot.
It was time to start living again.
Yohji caught up with him as he unlocked the door. "Let me drive?" He offered. "You’re tired."
Aya looked up at him.
Yes.
He took a deep breath and let it out slow.
He was.
He held up his hand with the keys in it.
Yohji took them, and in the process, let his fingers linger on Aya’s.
Aya looked up at him, into those green eyes. He was so close. Aya felt so tired.

Somehow he was laying his head on the man’s shoulder.
Yohji held him gently for a little while. "Get in the car. We’ll go home." He walked him around to the passenger side and unlocked it for him.
Aya got in. It hadn’t felt bad this time....to be held. Comforted.
If only it weren’t Yohji.
Though...He looked at him as he got in behind the wheel. Yohji was here with him.

At home, he went up the stairs slowly. A nap would be the best thing right now.
He felt as if he were going to black out again.
He shut the door and went over to lie down on the bed, closing his eyes.
Yohji was here with him, but for how long? How long before Schuldig took him away again?
He opened his eyes.
And something formed itself in his mind. Something.....evil.
Yes. How long before Yohji took Schuldig away?
And left Crawford.....alone?
Surely the man was vulnerable somewhere.
If he'd had the nerve to reach out...when Crawford had looked toward that bathroom in annoyance. If he'd had the guts to just.....touch the man...
A touch could break so many barriers.

## Chapter Five
## "Now And Forever"

The bell over the door clattered.
He looked up.
Manx.
He kept working on the arrangement he had on the bench.
"How are you feeling, Aya?" She asked.
"All right." He lied.
"Did you think about seeing a doctor?"
"I just need more sleep." He picked up another gladiola for the arrangement and carefully set it into place.
"You had your sister transferred to Minowa. You never mentioned wanting to have her moved." She was right beside him now, looking at him.
He finished the arrangement and cleaned up the bits and pieces of peat moss and cut stems to put them in the trash can. "It was a moment's decision." He said.
"I was hoping she'd have a chance of recovering there. They're supposed to have brought a few long term patients back again."
"I thought coma's were indeterminate things." Manx said.
He looked at her now. "If they have a good record, don't you think I want the best for my sister?" He stated.
She seemed to think this over. "Yes. But you realize, we would have liked to have been made aware of the transfer. If only for her safety sake."
"Thank you for your concern." He said.
She sighed, giving him a frustrated look. "Aya....are you really feeling all right?"
"I'm just tired." He stated. (Go away.)
The door opened again, and they both looked.
Aya looked at her. Sometimes when he saw her now, he almost thought it was his sister. "Ohayo, Sakura-chan."
"Aya, where have you been the past few days?" She chided. Then looked at Manx curiously. Her eyes flicked back to him. "You're very unreliable for a florist. What if I had wanted some flowers for my teacher?"
"Did you need flowers for your teacher?" he inquired.
"I might have gotten a better grade in history." She pouted. "Where is Omi? I want to steal you away for lunch."
He thought this over. No school today, it was Sunday. "It's his day off." Where was he anyway? The teenager took off a lot now. Certainly he had his pager but still.....
Yohji pushed the curtain aside. "Sakura-chan. You're too young for him, stop flirting with him and find a boy your own age to torment with those pretty

looks* He patted her on the head and pulled one of her pig tails.
She blushed.
He smiled at Manx, and Aya could almost hear the switch snap on. "Do I wake to an angel? Or is this only a dream?"
She gave him a warning look.
The switch snapped off. "Its a dream." He said dryly. "Aya, you let me over sleep again!" He switched tactics.
"You're perfectly capable of setting the alarm yourself!" Aya retorted.
Yohji put a hand on the bench and leaned over, invading his personal space to look him in the eyes and murmur. "Mah, Sweetheart, you wore me out so bad I could barely turn over, let alone set the alarm." He winked lewdly, then got the hell away before Aya could respond.
Aya went red.
Manx, for once was shocked. Then she rolled her eyes and smiled. "Does he NEVER stop?"
"BAKANA BUTA!" Aya yelled at him as he ducked out the front door.
"You know he does it to get on your nerves." Manx told him. "Don't be angry and let him know he's succeeding."
Aya frowned.
Yes. He know why Yohji had done it.
Sakura stood there blinking.
He stepped behind the counter to open the cash register and took out some money.
"Why don't you bring lunch here?" He said.
"Okay." She said, still a bit stunned.

Ken set the phone down. "Schwarz killed three agents. We are back on the mission."
"So much for a break." Yohji had been outside on one when the phone rang. He'd just come back in to hear this. "What about that? Why us?"
Ken looked at him. "Because I asked that we be given the chance to finish the job! To kill those bastards!"
A flower pot slipped from Aya's hands, crashing on the floor, and he grabbed the counter, wavering a bit.
No...
Yohji took him by the shoulders and walked him to a chair. "Aya. What's wrong? Do you feel ill? He can't be sent out like this!" He told Ken.
Ken looked at him anxiously. "Aya?"
Aya couldn't say what was wrong with him. He wasn't sure. He just wanted....
The whole world seemed to tilt and slide side ways.
Then Yohji was holding him about the shoulders from behind the chair. "Aya, breath!"
He was trying to.
"What's wrong with him!" Ken demanded.

"I don't know." Yohji said, near his ear, arms tight about him. "Aya, what is it?"
"I....can't." Aya heard himself sob. "I can't do it..."
"Sshhh." Yohji said.
He held onto Yohji's arms, leaning on him. He wanted someone to hold him, to stop him from slipping away into what ever this strangeness was that was pulling at him.
"I'll take him upstairs." He heard Yohji say. He didn't want to be let go of....

"It's all right." Yohji assured him, pulling him to his feet.
"Shouldn't we get him to a doctor?" Ken asked, very worried now.
"No." Yohji said. "He needs to rest. As for that mission, Aya's more important than your ego, Ken!
Aya wasn't sure exactly where he was. He knew Yohji was taking him up stairs and he went, but that was some other part of him. He knew Yohji was trying to keep him quiet....holding him with one arm about his neck, managing to keep a hand over his mouth.
He knew that he was saying something that shouldn't be said. But what was it? He couldn't hear....

He woke in darkness this time.
He'd been dreaming....oh, but this time, when he woke, there was an arm about him.
He ran his hand over it.
Real.
A sigh and some shifting of a body behind his, a nose nuzzling his neck, the arm pulling him tighter.
He smiled, remembering his dream, and ran his hand up to caress his bed partner's hair.
Long hair?
"Aya?" Yohji asked sleepily. "You awake?"
He knew his disappointment was useless. But, still, it hit like a knife through his heart. Of course it was Yohji....
And Yohji was here, warm, and real. He allowed himself the embrace, a comfort he needed right now.
It was bad, this need. He felt lips seeking his and turned to meet them.
He had to catch Yohji's hand and hold it away from his dream induced hard on.
"No," he murmured. No, I can't...not with you."
"Aya...please!" Yohji begged.
"No." He kissed him again, wanting so to feel a pair of lips, a mouth on his.
Yohji pulled away from him and sat up.
Aya, ashamed, turned away from him.
"Aya..."

"What?" He asked quietly.
"Why him?" Yohji said softly.
"I....don't know."
A hand found his shoulder. "Do you want me to leave?"
He put his hand over Yohji's. "No. Stay. Please?"
Yohji lay down again, pulling him close.
The last thing Aya heard as he fell back to sleep was Yohji crying, very quietly.

Ken blinked.
Ken just stood there and blinked.
Yohji had come up behind Aya in the kitchen and put his arms around his waist and kissed him on the cheek and said good morning to him.
And Aya had not killed him.
Aya had not even threatened to kill him.
Aya had stood there, his reading glasses on, looking at the newspaper he had just brought in. "There is a description of the bodies that have been found, "two shot, and one with it's bones shattered by some considerable over all pressure, not consistent with a fall..." " He read aloud.
Yohji had taken one hand off him to hold the paper so he, too, could read the article.
Ken blinked some more.
"Sound's like Schwarz. That kid is dangerous."
Ken decided he needed to go for a walk.
Aya watched him as he left the room.
Yohji kissed his neck, holding him tighter.
"Yohji, stop it." He warned mildly.
"Mmm....All right!" Yohji pulled away, going to look in the refrigerator.
"This is too dangerous a game to be playing." Aya told him.
"Right now, I could care less what Kritiker does." Yohji said, still surveying the internal damage of the appliance supposed to hold food and obviously lacking in it's purpose.
"I mean...." Aya attempted. Then he took a deep breath and spit it out. "I mean sleeping together and you kissing me....Yohji! We can't!"
The man didn't even look at him. "You may not love me, but I love you, and as long as you let me hold and kiss you, I will. Say no, Aya. Tell me not to touch you any more."
Aya tossed the paper on the table with a sigh. He went to open up the shutters over the shop's windows.
The sunlight was good. He'd slept well last night for the first time in months. Because someone had held him.
Yohji kept pushing it, but he felt like he was the one who was doing wrong. To let him keep it up.

Just because he wanted someone to hold him.
To love him.
He turned a few of the potted plants to allow them sunshine on the other side for a day, and glanced up, then stopped and looked, his lips parting in a sharply drawn breath.
Crawford stood outside the window, hands in his pockets, calm and cool as anyone so evil could be.
Aya felt that sinking sense of dismay he always felt now when he saw this man. Not because it always meant a fight until recently, no, never that.
Because each time, he became less able to remember the man was his enemy, a murderer, someone he was sworn to kill. He went to get the keys from under the counter and to unlock the door. Then he turned his back and walked away from it, as if there was nothing wrong at all, picking up the green plastic watering can to take care of the potted plants.
It seemed to take a long time before the door's bell clattered.
He set down the watering can and turned to look with a sigh.
Crawford and Schuldig.
Schuldig was smiling that terrible smile of his.
Aya could care less. Right now....he was ready to die.
Yohji came in through the curtain. "You're taking a chance." He commented.
Schuldig ran the back of his fingers up a tall stemmed dutch iris in an arrangement, looking at the blue crimpled edges of its petals. "That was self defense yesterday, Sweetness." He shifted those predatory eyes to Aya. "Nothing to do with our agreement with you."
Aya scowled at him.
Schuldig drew in a hissing breath through his teeth. "Such evil thoughts for such a pretty head!" He admonished.
Aya blushed. Damn him!
"You didn't keep him warm enough last night, Yoh-tan." Schuldig informed Kudoh. "Still cold as ever."
Aya felt everything go numb.
He never should have.....
Never!
It took everything he had to turn and walk past Yohji and through the curtain to go up the stairs and shut the door to his room, this time.....locking it.
He walked over to the bed and sat down on it.
Everything had shut down. His heart, his soul....his mind.
Any chance he had, was over now.
He put his face in his hands, and couldn't even cry this out. There was nothing left.
A few moments later there was a tap at the door.
"Fujimiya?"
He looked up, stunned.

"I know you aren't feeling well lately, but it's rather important to get this over with. I have some bad news."
Aya couldn't feel any worse. He knew immediately it had to be about Imouto.
He got up slowly and walked to the door, feeling very cold and stiff and tired again, as if last night's healing rest had never happened.
He turned the lock and opened the door.
Crawford stood there, looking at him, the same as he had earlier, outside the window. Except now, his expression of calm neutrality held an awful awareness of something.
Aya drew a breath, realizing he'd been holding his. "Hai?" He said meekly.
"Schuldig tried to raise your sister's mind from the comatose state." He put a hand up to the door jam to lean on it a little, looking at the floor for a moment as if gathering his thoughts. Then he met Aya's eyes again. "Her mind is functioning perfectly." He said. "But....her soul is gone. The heart beats, the lungs breath, the body functions, perfectly healthy, but.....there is no one in there. They've managed to create the perfect sacrifice after all. An empty shell." He paused a moment, then said very gravely. "I'm sorry, Fujimiya. I made him try three times. We nearly lost him the third time, he went so deep. She's gone."
Aya closed his eyes, and somewhere along the way he heard a long drawn out wail.

Then he was sobbing uncontrollably, his face against silk softened wool, held somewhat loosely as he clung for anchorage in this hateful, empty, alien world he seemed to have somehow fallen into.
"Schuldig, pack up his things." The deep, quiet voice said. "Kudoh doesn't need any help." He added dryly.
"Kritiker will not like our stealing their kittens out from under their noses."
The german's irritating voice said in a purring brag.
The hands holding Aya's shoulders lightly now shifted to his back, one a bit lower, and rubbing a little, as if in a sort of awkward attempt to comfort him...."As if I give a damn for 'Kritiker'."
"Shall we destroy them, then?" Schuldig asked from behind him in the room now, and Aya heard the closet door slide open.
"No." Crawford said, and Aya felt the quiet laughter rumble in the chest against him. "Let them live."
Schuldig laughed in a sniggering manner. "It must be pretty bad if it makes you laugh, mien Mann."
"How do I stop him?" Crawford asked, as if perplexed suddenly.
"Sah!" Schuldig huffed out an annoyed breath. "Pet him until he stops on his own. So heartless." He complained.
" 'Pet him?'' " Crawford said archly.
"Just hold the poor little thing, he'll wear himself out." Schuldig said lightly. "Surely you are not going to allow this trash in the house. I'm not

touching that sweater....I think it blinked at me. I don’t think it’s a sweater.
I think it’s some sort of bizarre growth of fungus. That color..."
"Schuldig, just pack some damned clothes and let’s get the fuck out of here!"
Crawford roared at him.
Aya sighed deeply and held onto him.
A hand cupped his cheek. "What am I to do with you?" Crawford asked quietly.

The End

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