

"Oi..."

"Mnng."

"Oi, Amuro."

"Mnng!"

"Chotto, Amuro."

"*What.*"

"...I could really go for a squid skewer."

"So go get one."

"Everyone's asleep."

"So? Wake them up, samurai."

"...these are Hare lands. Rabbits probably won't have very good squid, ne?"

"No. Probably not."

"Duck, maybe. But duck skewers aren't nearly as good. I really could go for some squid."

"..."

"...oi, Amuro..."

"*What?*"

"Do you think the Soshi girl will go to Winter Court?"

"W...what? No! Why would even think that...?"

"You know...diplomatic envoy?"

"She's so green a Mantis could wear her. And besides, who'd send some one like *that* to the Emperor's own Court?"

"...that's true..."

"...."

"...it's just, the thing is, Yamagi was telling me the squid skewers at Winter Court are the best of the season!"

"Datura."

"Ah, Amuro?"

"Tomorrow, when we have the chance to sleep in a real room, I'm not losing Fortunes and Winds. Otherwise, I might kill you. Or possibly myself."

"....good night, Amuro."

~~~~

"Oi..."

"..."

"Oi, Amuro?"

"...what."

"Satoshi's pretty good at Fortunes and Winds, ne?"

"If you mean 'good at cheating in Fortunes and Winds'...yes."

"The sakura tree's nice, though."

"It's not in season."

"I guess not. But the changing leaves are pretty. Worthy of haiku."

"..."

"Sa...kur...ah. The...leaves..."

"..."

"Change...ing. With. The. Sea...sons."

"...that's six."

"Six. Changing with the...oh, yes, it is."

"If you aren't sleeping, why did you come to bed, Datura?"

"Uh? I'm just trying to fall asleep. Haiku helps calm the mind, spirit and body, you know."

"...*I'm* going to sleep."

"I assumed so, you're in bed, after all."

"..."

"Like...my...restless...heart."

"..."

"I should put that on a scroll."

".....that's *six*."

~~~~

Satoshi leaned back from the game table, grinning through the crimson mesh of his mask. "Two nights in a row, eh? I hope you're both getting comfortable with each other."

Amuro glowered but Datura shrugged with casual apathy. "I guess the Kami just favor you more, Satoshi."

Satoshi spread his hands and bowed his head piously. "The Kami favor the worthy, that's true."

"If it's the Kami favoring you, then I'm Akodo Toturi and I've come for your women," Amuro growled with only the faintest implication of actual humor.

In the corner, quietly sipping some tea, Yogo Tadachi watched the three bushi from under the rim of his wide-brimmed hat, eyes as bright and attentive as a hungry crow.

"Well then, I suppose we'll see if the Kami favor Akodo Toturi more than Bayushi Amuro tomorrow night, eh?" Satoshi replied as he got to his feet, adjusting the sash of his hakama with an exaggerated gesture, as if the pouch of koku hanging from it was so heavy it threatened to fall. Amuro's face grew as red as his haori, though not nearly so fashionable, and he lurched to standing, giving only the most abbreviated of bows before stalking out of the Scorpions' chambers, pulling the screen shut behind him hard enough that it bounced back open. Satoshi chuckled and gave a more appropriate bow before leaving as well, presumably to enjoy the peace and quiet of his private room.

Left alone, Datura fell to picking up the game dice. Abruptly, from the corner, Tadachi spoke up.

"You're very good at that game," he said, voice cool. Datura glanced over with a bland, pleasant smile.

"I've lost almost every time we play."

"As I said - you're very good at the game."

"I'm sure I don't follow Tadachi-san..."

"Is Satoshi in on it? It's the type of thing I can see him enjoying, as it needles Amuro so."

Datura's bland smile grew an edge and he shook his head. "I don't need to depend on Satoshi to succeed. It's easy enough."

"Is sleeping alone so bad, Datura?"

The bushi shrugged, his grin rearranging into the bland, inoffensive smile. "Amuro and I have very enjoyable conversations at night."

With little more to say, Datura gathered up the dice pouches, bowed, and left as well. Tadachi sipped his tea.

~~~~

Amuro was the first to return, his cheeks flushed with sake though he still stood straight. He

looked to be hurrying to his and Datura's room. Tadachi was in the corner of the common area again, and once again, he was sipping tea.

"Amuro," he said, stopping the bushi.

Amuro stopped with a roll of his eyes, shifting on his tabi-clad feet. "What is it? If I can lay down now, I can get some sleep before Datura comes and keeps me up all night."

"I won't keep you for long," Tadachi replied, taking a sip of tea. "I only wanted to compliment you."

Amuro raised his eyebrows, giving Tadachi a skeptical look. "Eh?"

"You're very good at Fortunes and Winds."

"Not good enough," Amuro growled.

"No?" Tadachi raised his head just enough to look Amuro in the eyes. The bushi glanced away first, with a faint smile, bluster falling away. He shrugged, wordless. Tadachi lowered his head, brim of his hat obscuring his eyes again. "When will you tell Datura?"

"Never. He's to be wed when we get back to Kyuden Bayushi, to Soshi Maki."

"Ah...the shugenja prodigy, isn't she?"

"That's right. He'll most likely manage their holdings. This is our last assignment together."

"You two trained together?"

"Since we were children."

"I see." Tadachi considered Amuro, who still had that faint, bittersweet smile. "Kami favor you tomorrow, Amuro."

"Good night, Tadachi-san," Amuro replied with a bow, and vanished into he and Datura's room.

Tadachi sipped his tea.