

On a cool autumn day, Asako Kai ventured out from the library. Such travels were common for the Espurr, now that he had learned the first couple of Riddles. His was the life of a monk, to a degree, and he enjoyed such travelling. It was the *Path* of Man, after all.

Kai took the loose cloak for this trip. It was just to check records, after all. There was no need for finery. Presently, the Espurr wore a kimono in faded orange. The mon was nowhere to be found on the kimono itself, but the pin that held the cloak displayed the phoenix of his clan proudly. But not too proudly. The mystic kept his cap angled over his face. Many times, anonymity could be a virtue.

The Espurr simply walked for many long, uneventful miles, only occasionally breaking up the routine to sightsee or brandish his travel papers. The village was far, but not too far off. He would likely reach it before nightfall. So the Phoenix just held with his thoughts. It was not what Shinsei would prescribe, but he was an Asako.

The monk's mind drifted away. He thought of his work with the Asako. Of his mystical research. He thought of his time throughout the lands of the Phoenix, and he thought of the days he spent in Otsan Uchi, studying at the College of Miracles. They all drifted by, each faintly captivating, but not overly so.

Mostly, he thought of the Void.

Kai arrived at the village at dusk. Light was fading, but Kai could still spy the contours of wooden buildings, with traces of gilding present on some. Many of the villagers had gone inside by this time, of course, but the few he saw weren't too fearful, as could be expected of Phoenix lands. The Espurr simply walked toward what looked like the headman's home. He was quickly greeted by the headman himself and the samurai quickly went through the pleasantries. Frankly, Kai did not even know which lord ruled this village. He was just here to complete a job.

Kai walked quickly to the town's library, a low building of wood and amber paint. It was a far cry from the libraries of the Asako, but Kai figured that he could not expect much in such environs. The Espurr quickly began to rifle through the scrolls, searching for ones regarding local legends. A few heimin trailed, ready to await him, but he simply motioned for them to leave and they did so promptly. Kai noted some things on a paper he had brought with him, and carefully set each of the scrolls back in their proper places. His job was done, and now he had the trip back to look forward to.

Kai walked outside of the library, heading for a building that had looked like an inn. He had planned on staying the night, given how there was next to no chance that he could reach home in the time available to him. Along the way, he noticed a man missing an eye sitting on a corner of the street. By his gaze and demeanour, he looked like an old-timer. Not even really scared of a samurai.

Kai smiled faintly to himself, before banishing emotion from his face and walking up to the old, crippled man. He bent down, looking at the man once before beginning his blessings. The man simply nodded for him to continue. Kai completed the rite soon after. He kept his mask up the whole time, of course, but that was one thing Kai had always liked about heimin. They did not make too much of a distinction between shugenja and monks.

Kai arrived at the building he had previously spied, stopping only enough to confirm that it was indeed an inn. He quickly walked through the front doors, not really bothering to check the place's name. A Larvitar stood behind the bar, looking upon the Espurr expectantly as he entered the room. A couple of

samurai – Crab by the colors – sat near the bar, evidently drunk. Kai walked up toward the Larvitar and asked for a room for the night. The heimin told him his room, and Kai nodded, more to himself than the man. He thanked the Larvitar, before heading outside once more.

There was still some time before night began, and Kai was not quite feeling tired. Not in the way that sleep could assuage. The Espurr turned to the left of the inn, entering an alley and sitting beside a wall. The Espurr looked around for several seconds, before placing down his pack and opening it. He pulled out a small object, and placed it on his lap.

Sitting there quietly was Ren. The small stuffed toy crudely mimicked the shape of a Budew. The toy was old and ragged, but Kai did not care about the craftsmanship. He cared that he was Ren.

Kai held there quietly with his friend for a long, long while.

Then came the voice.

“Asako-san?”

Kai jerked back to awareness, quickly stuffing Ren back into his pack. He turned to see another Espurr standing beyond the alley. She wore an emerald-green kimono with faint floral patterning. Her expression was composed, but Kai could detect the slightest hint of amusement, or something else.

“Yes? Did you need assistance...” Kai paused, entering thought. He could not for the life of him think of what family she belonged to...

“Agasha Jiri.” a faint smirk edged its way onto her face. “And no, I did not need assistance. I was merely curious.”

“I see.” Kai said mutely, internally calculating the likelihood that this encounter would bite him later on. “Wait, how did you know my family?”

“I have my ways.” Jiri said simply.

Kai squinted a little, before he sighed.

“It was good to meet you, Agasha-san, but I am afraid I have to de-” Kai was cut off.

“Wait! I, did not think of you in the way that you fear, Asako-san.” Jiri said a little more quietly. She looked off to the side for a while, rubbing her head lightly, before she retrieved a paper from her kimono.

Kai looked on, but said nothing. Mostly, he was confused.

“There is a place. For people like you and I. In this village.” Jiri said almost bashfully, looking off to the side. She extended the paper, and for some reason, Kai found himself taking it.

It was a flyer. It described a place on the outskirts of town, a geisha house known as the Silver Moon Inn. Kai felt his heart sink a little, and began to push the flyer back.

“I appreciate the thought, Agasha-san, but I am a monk. I have no need for geishas.” Kai spoke.

“It is...not what you would expect, Asako-san.” Jiri rubbed the back of her head. “As I said before, it is a place for people like you and me. What is written on that flyer is only what can be committed to paper.”

Kai looked into Jiri's eyes, and he saw something. He stopped extending the flyer, and slowly stored it in his pack.

“I see.” Kai said, almost as if in a dream.

“Ah, before I go, could I ask your name, Asako-san?” the woman looked off at him curiously.

Oh, right.

“Asako Kai.” Kai nodded.

“Mmm.” the Espurr nodded to herself. “It was good to meet you, Asako-san. I hope we can meet once more.” Jiri said, smiling, before she vanished into the night.

Kai blinked a little to himself before he came back to awareness. It was night now, the moon hanging low in the sky. Kai figured it would be best for him to head inside, even if he was not quite tired.

Kai entered the inn and quickly went up the stairs. He found his room and set down his pack. It was sparse, but certainly suited for samurai. Kai unrolled the tatami mat and began to lie down on the ground. He was not exactly tired, per se, but he was...well, Kai was exactly keen on thinking about his reasoning for lying down. So the Espurr just held there for an hour or two, before sleep took over.

Kai woke up early in the morning. He got dressed into his second kimono and went through his usual routine. Kai meditated for half an hour, before practicing his Riddles for a little while in the solitude of his room. They looked as good as ever, though Kai could not shake off the feeling that he was slacking in some capacity. He felt eager for other things the day might portend.

Kai took his leave of the inn as quickly and silently as he had entered it. He had the trip back to make, but there was still time.

Kai decided to make a visit.

The Espurr walked on a dirt path that led towards the edge of the village. Buildings thinned, and eventually the monk came to what appeared to be the village's end. The Espurr scanned the horizon a little more, before he found his target. There a little ways away from the village proper was a building of middling size, surrounded by a hedge of some sort. Kai figured that that was the geisha house, and so he made his way.

Kai arrived after only a few minutes. A sign outside confirmed that he had indeed arrived at the Silver Moon Inn, though it almost seemed more imposing than he had expected. The hedge was thick, and Kai could only partially make out the outline of the building behind it. The gate was low, though, and the Espurr could spy the door that led inside. Gingerly, Kai opened the gate, before walking up the path. The path itself was cobbled, but around him were flowerbeds that almost composed a miniature garden.

It...actually seemed quite lively, at least in comparison to the outside appearance. The Espurr just made his way to the front door, hesitating for a little while at the entrance. After a few seconds, he opened the door.

“Asako-san!”

Kai was greeted by an assault of perceptions. Before him was a rather clean looking wooden building that did not look anything like a geisha house. Standing straight in front of him was Agasha Jiri, the woman he had met the previous night, as well as another woman, a Leavanny who towered over him. Kai was not about to speak up, but he thought her look was a tad too patronizing.

“Asako Kai! You came!” Jiri spoke, walking up to Kai excitedly. The Leavanny followed close behind her.

“That I did.” Kai rubbed his head a little, re-adjusting his hat. “I must admit that I am still sort of confused as to the nature of this place...”

“That is fine. Newcomers typically have many questions.” the Leavanny spoke in a tone like reeds blowing in the wind. “I am Sakura, and I am hear to answer any questions you may have.”

Sakura? Now that was a tad generic, was it not? Ah, nevermind. Kai had questions to ask.

Though, Kai noticed something before he began his inquiries. The lack of a mon, the lack of a family name, the rehearsed tone. The woman clearly seemed like a geisha, but if she was one, then she was like no geisha that Kai had ever seen before.

“It is good to meet you Sakura. As for the matter at hand, I am frankly quite clueless about...everything that goes on here. The invitation was rather short on an explanation.” Kai glanced at Jiri, who only smiled.

“As is necessary.” Sakura nodded. For a moment Kai saw something come over the Leavanny's face, but after the blink of an eye, it was gone. “We must keep our privacy for reasons that I am sure will seem very sensible to you. But first, the answer to your question. Asako-sama, I heard that you brought with you a friend?” the woman asked. The smile was very well-hidden.

“I...Agasha-san?!” Kai quickly turned toward Jiri, who was only able to make out a shrug.

“I'm sorry Asako-san, but I had to tell her...” Jiri said in a way that was almost strange to see, coming from a samurai.

“I...it's fine. It was just unexpected.” Kai recomposed rather quickly all things considered. She was rather lucky that he was not the type to actually take much offense, he thought.

“Okay, well, you know of Ren, then.” Kai said.

“Actually I did not know of his name...” Sakura nodded to herself.

Kai cursed under his breath. Had he really given that away?

“What I mean to ask is this: what does my...toy have to do with this place?” Kai asked.

“You would be surprised.” Sakura grinned. The Leavanny looked around the room a little more, eyes flitting across stairs and hallways and walls. “This is a place for people who have not let a certain time in their lives go.”

“You speak in more riddles. Could you please be straight with the matter?” Kai squinted his eyes.

“You already know the answer, samurai.” Sakura spoke. There was a certain gravity to her tone.

The Leavanny looked down at Kai, almost sizing up the monk. Finally, the words came out.

“I speak of childhood.”

Kai's world went askew. He could hear and see things, but he could not quite process anything. Kai stood in a strange stasis for almost a minute. Then the world started to catch up to him.

“...Is he alright?” Jiri asked, looking up toward the Leavanny.

“He just needs his time. Don't you remember your first visit?” Sakura smiled. Jiri only blushed.

“I...” Kai mumbled to himself but he was not really saying anything. Coherency came in bursts.

“This is...umm...” Kai spoke, mostly to himself. The Espurr's heart was beating like it never had before. His paws felt clammy and he even felt a bit dizzy. The monk stretched out with an arm, beginning to lean on a nearby wall. Jiri looked worried, though Sakura seemed to be taking things in stride.

“There, there, no need to panic. We'll be here when you're ready.” Sakura spoke simply.

Kai closed his eyes and breathed. Gradually, his training came back to him. It took around another minute, but the Espurr was able to wear his mask once more.

“Alright. I thank you for your time, but I am afraid I must depart. Attachment is a sin one of my position cannot afford.” Kai said stoically. Before he could turn around, though, Jiri spoke up.

“Aww...but you're an Asako!” Jiri said.

Sakura hushed Jiri a little, before turning toward Kai herself.

“I mean no disrespect, good samurai, but I think that Agasha-chan here is right. You do not seem like a Shinseist.” Sakura spoke. Kai could scarcely believe the honorific she had used for Agasha-san...

Kai paused. He knew of course, that they were right. It was not like he was the type to be perched upon a mountaintop. It was just that Kai really did not want to think of something that embarrassed him so much.

Then Kai remembered Ren. Surprisingly, that was all it took.

“...I will stay here. I am just looking, for now.” Kai quietly said.

Jiri almost squealed. Sakura calmed her down, but she still had a smile.

“Alright then, Asako-san. We will show you around the place. Some guests are already...prepared, and perhaps you will change your mind upon seeing them.” Sakura spoke.

Kai just sighed and nodded.

Leavanny led the two out of the entrance hall, into a corridor that ended in a left turn. Walls of wood and rice paper stood to Kai's left, while windows to the right exposed the garden outside. It was a...nice place, Kai had to admit. Though he was still rather morbidly curious about what Sakura could be leading them to...

Sakura turned left and the two samurai followed. She kept going down the hall for a little while, before she stopped at a door on the wall to the right. Gently, she opened it. Her mouth moved, as though she was wordlessly in communication with some occupants, before she turned back toward Kai and gestured for him to come inside.

Hesitantly, Kai made his way.

He could scarcely comprehend what awaited his eyes inside.

Sitting on the ground before him was a Heracross. He could not tell the man's clan because he had no kimono upon which to brandish his mon. More significantly, though, he had no clothing which could cover up his undergarment.

The man was wearing a diaper.

Kai just stood in astonishment for several seconds. The Heracross just tilted his head a little.

“Is he...alright?” the Heracross asked.

“He should be fine. He's still getting used to everything.” Sakura spoke.

“Ah. Right...” the Heracross said with newfound sheepishness. He scooted up a little closer to the low table that sat in the middle of the room. Kai's mind was still recovering, but he was beginning to notice that the decorations were a little more juvenile than he had expected...

“I will leave you three be for the moment. I have to go check on Akodo-kun. Enjoy yourselves!” Sakura said with a smile, and then she was off.

Jiri had already taken her place on the ground. The Heracross was awkwardly tapping his fingers and doing his best to cover up his diaper with his arms. He was not very good at it.

Kai just sort of stood there for a while. After a minute, he half-consciously sat down. He still stared at the Heracross.

“Well, uh, hello...Asako-san?” the Heracross spoke, tilting his head a little. “My name is Hida Akama. It is good to meet you.” he spoke, reserved.

“...I am Asako Kai. It is good to meet you as well.” Kai said, still sort of in a daze.

The room was silent for a few seconds. Beginning to recollect himself, Kai spoke up soon after.

“...I am sorry. I mean no offense. It's just that...” Kai weakly pointed at Akama's diaper.

“Oh, my diaper?” Akama asked almost innocently, and Kai felt as though he was pierced by the wind when the word came out. “Well, I can definitely see how that can be awkward for a first-timer to say the least...” Akama rubbed the back of his head a little. “In any case, I take it you are the newcomer that Agasha-san spoke of?”

“Well, yes.” Kai responded. He liked the question, if only because it helped distract him from other things.

“Mmm. Well that's good to hear. I hope we haven't scared you too much...I sometimes think that the introduction is a bit too blatant...” Akama rubbed the back of his head a little more.

“It's, fine. I was the one who was asking for transparency. I am still just surprised that, um...” Kai trailed off.

“Oh come on, Asako-san! It's just a little old diaper...practically everyone here wears them...” Jiri almost rolled her eyes. “Here, I'll show you...”

Before Kai could even speak, Jiri had lifted up the rim of her kimono. Kai made out the plain white diaper beneath.

To his credit, Kai was only left still for a few moments that time.

“I see.” Kai spoke the only words he could make out. He was not quite sure how to feel.

“Why'd you have to go and scare him again, Agasha-san?” Akama shook his head. “I am going to tell Sakura next time...”

“Hmph. Just needed to shake him up a little bit, that is all.” Jiri said, turning back toward Kai.

“So, Asako-san, how are you feeling?” Jiri asked.

“I, well...I think you may be on to something.” Kai said. He was mostly numb to a great many things now.

Kai turned toward Akama.

“So...how's the Wall?” Kai asked, almost at random.

Then it was Akama's turn to be silent, before he laughed.

“Hah, oh damn, now that is one way to open up conversation...” Akama shook his head, but turned it up towards Kai soon afterward. “The Wall is doing as it is always doing. Let's just say that if it weren't

standing, I would not be here.” Akama grinned.

“Well, that does make sense.” Kai nodded. “I take it you are a bushi?”

“Indeed.” Akama spoke with a certain confidence that belied his diapered state. “I am sorry to say that there is not much more to me than the usual. Just that standard old Hida bushi...”

“Well it is good to see you regardless. Can't say we get much Crab up here.” Kai spoke.

“Could have fooled me with those drunkards in the tavern...” Akama spoke jovially. “In any case, though, I am kind of curious about you. You look pretty young for a monk, though I suppose they have to get started at some point.”

“I...thought I looked fairly normal. I'm not *that* young, all things considered. Gempukku was around eight years ago.” Kai spoke, absentmindedly tapping his right paw on the table.

“Trust me, where I am from, that is nothing.” Akama grinned.

Kai did not even think to go for the easy joke.

“Hmm. Well I suppose our clans are fairly distant from one another. Here, people usually do not wait until retirement.” Kai managed a sly grin.

Akama just nodded, actually somewhat impressed.

“Well normally I would ask you to show off your kiho right about now, but I think Asako are kind of different like that.” Akama remarked, shrugging.

“You would be correct, though I must admit that the thought of learning them has always intrigued me.” Kai said.

“Heh, well then maybe you should ask Agasha-san one of these days! Straight from a Dragon...” Akama grinned.

“Perhaps. Actually, that does remind me of another thing...” Kai spoke, beginning to turn toward Jiri. “I was sort of curious about you, Agasha-san. What is your story?”

Akama just looked at Jiri, somehow smiling even wider.

“You didn't even tell him?” Akama shook his head.

“Be quiet...” Jiri grumbled, before looking at Kai.

“I am just a shugenja.” Jiri spoke with a calm that was rare to see in her.

Kai paused for a moment. His eyes fixed on her. Then he returned.

“Mmm. That is good. I must admit that I rarely hear people speak of shugenja like that...” Kai spoke.



“Well when you have a family full of them, they don't exactly seem too rare.” Jiri smiled a little.

“Fair, fair.” Kai said.

Kai looked at the Espurr in emerald-green and thought for a little while. He should have expected her to be a shugenja. Only his hat gave a clue as to his family, and it seemed like people with the inner gift were even less common than those who could speak with the kami. Kai thought about this and many other things for a little while.

Kai was hesitant to speak up, but he did eventually.

“Agasha-san...do you think it is proper for you to...you know...” Kai trailed off, but everyone could understand what he meant. Akama briefly went pensive, but Jiri remained the same. After a few seconds, she began to speak.

“If I had reservations, I would not be here.” Jiri said confidently. “Furthermore, I could very much ask the same question of you.”

Kai just nodded.

“Fair enough.” he said.

“Alright then, now that pleasantries are out of the way...” Akama scooted forward a little bit. “...perhaps we can get to business?”

Kai looked around awkwardly for a few seconds.

“I must admit that I am not quite sure what business we could conduct...” Kai said.

Jiri giggled lightly then, but Kai would not understand why until later.

“Quite a lot, actually.” Akama smiled. “I was thinking of playing, in fact...”

“Playing...” Kai repeated the word to himself.

“Indeed. Though, I do think we should get something else done first.” Akama said. Kai did not exactly like the smile this time.

Jiri was also looking at him. Admittedly not with a smile, but expectantly. Kai definitely did not like this.

“I...am not quite foll-” Kai was cut off.

“When Sakura gets back...” Akama tried to hide a smile. “...you should ask to get dressed. Like all of us.”

“Uh, no.” Kai said. This time, he had picked it up immediately. “I am glad to stay here, but I do not think I could do...that...”

“Aww c'mon! You had the resolve to become a henshin but cannot even wear a bit of cloth?” Akama tutted.

“Don't try to force him, Hida-san.” Jiri spoke, looking a little toward the ground. “It is rather remarkable that he has stayed here at all.”

“Jus' sayin'...” Akama shrugged.

Kai stood there quietly in his victory.

His victory.

He could call it that, yes. He had achieved what he had aimed for, of course. That could easily be defined as victory.

So why did it not feel like a victory?

It wasn't because of Akama. He didn't seem particularly bent up about it. And to be honest, he thought it would be hard to hurt a Crab's feelings.

Was it because of Jiri? She had looked off sullenly, but still came to his defense.

No. It was not even her, Kai realized.

It was because he had not wanted it, Kai knew.

It had been so many years. He could *not* let the opportunity pass him up now.

Kai stood blankly for a little while. Just when Akama had been about to speak up, Kai spoke.

“I will do it.” Kai said almost without thought.

Akama and Jiri just stared vacantly at the Espurr for a few seconds. Neither had expected it. Akama had thought to speak up, before he noticed Kai's eyes. He looked like a man possessed.

Jiri, for her part, hid her real smile of the day.

“Alright then.” Akama just blinked. “I guess we'll just wait for Sakura then?”

Just as he had asked the question, a noise echoed down the hall. It sounded like that of a door.

“It would appear so.” Jiri commented.

The three samurai only waited for a little while before the door to their room opened. When it opened, it revealed Sakura, who was holding the hand of a Heliolisk. Kai thought that she looked taller than himself, and yet shorter than Akama. He was also naked save for a diaper, but Kai was beginning to build up his resistance.

“Well well. I trust that you three had a good time while I was gone?” Sakura asked. Her smile was

golden.

“Um, yeah miss Sakura...” Akama mumbled, as though Sakura's returned presence had reignited his prior embarrassment.

“Mmm. Based on the fact that you're still here, Asako-sama, I take it that you had a good time while I was gone?” Sakura asked. There was a bit more intent that time.

“...Yes.” Kai nodded. And meant it.

“Well that is good to hear. I brought back Mori-kun, so perhaps the four of you can-” Sakura was interrupted.

“Sakura, could I speak with you? Outside?” Kai asked.

Sakura's face briefly changed, but Kai could not tell if it had become grave or something else.

“Of course, Asako-sama.” Sakura nodded.

The Leavanny let go of the Heliolisk's hand. The man looked back at the two, curious and a little scared. Kai could spy Akama in a far brighter mood, but then the door was shut by Sakura. Kai's gaze turned up toward the tall Leavanny.

She was silent, as if waiting.

Kai took a moment to breathe. Then came the words.

“Sakura, I would like a change of...outfit. Would there happen to be a...room somewhere around here?” the Espurr asked.

Sakura tilted her head, puzzled, but responded quickly.

“I, of course, good samurai. There is an empty room that should suit such a purpose. I...take it you have a spare set of clothing in your pack?” Sakura spoke. Her eyes were finely appraising Kai.

“I.” Kai started. “Sakura, I speak of...” Kai's voice faded.

He tried to start speaking a few more times but he failed in each attempt.

With each attempt, Kai noticed something on Sakura's face changing. By the end, he saw the concern in her eyes. Somehow, it was not comforting.

“Asako-sama...” Sakura briefly drifted off, before she focused her speech. “You should feel under no obligation to join the others. To be quite honest, it would be expecting much of you to go through that on your first visit. You can stay just as you are.”

Kai felt something in his heart give way. It only took an instant. The feeling was terrible, like few things he had felt before. Perhaps his rational mind would have known that it was ridiculous. But at the moment, that mind slumbered. Instead, Kai just felt lost.

“I...” a word escaped Kai's mouth.

That was when Sakura noticed the tears.

Kai noticed them a second later. Tears were drifting down his face. He could not stop them. He could not stop...anything. Kai tried to compose himself, but he had never quite felt anything like this.

It was so ridiculous. That was the worst part about it. Nothing about this should have made him break. It was nothing. But it had done in a way no training or job or ordeal could. For a moment, Kai saw a golden dream he thought he would never see again. And then it was gone. Kai could not help it. And so he cried.

“A-Asako-sama?!” Sakura instinctively rushed forward. Though she was a geisha, she caught Kai when he fell. He was rambling like a madman.

“M'sorry, S-Sakura. Bad, weather. I need t-to go. Now...”

Sakura said nothing, but held Kai tightly. Soon the words disappeared, and he just cried. The Espurr shook there in her embrace, lost in terrible fear and scattered memories. There was hardly a world anymore, just him and Sakura.

Sakura did not move. Instead, she waited for the worst of the shuddering to be over. After a good several minutes, Kai stopped shaking. It was after another minute that he could manage words. The Espurr looked up at the Leavanny, fur matted with tears.

“Please...” Kai said.

The word was enough to set Sakura on her way.

Kai saw some things as Sakura carried him away, but not much. His vision was still blurry with tears, and he was still more intent on escaping his feelings than he was on surveying his environment. He could tell from the motion, though, that Sakura was carrying him. It was when additional sounds came that Kai realized they were entering another room.

Kai saw a clean wooden room with muted colors. In one corner rested a tatami mat, and in another rested a pile of pristine white cloths. Sakura set Kai down at the mat, and looked upon him intently for several seconds.

Kai nodded desperately.

Sakura remained silent, and turned toward another corner of the room. Kai could not see much, because he was too scared to look half the time, but he felt his legs being raised. Sakura began to hum a little tune. Kai weakly remembered it, from his childhood.

Kai felt calm when the tying began. He did not know why, but he did. Sakura had continued the song, which by now had captured much of his attention. Sakura just kept singing and making the final adjustments to the diaper. Kai could scarcely tell when she was finished, except for when she stopped the tune.

“Alright, Asako-sama. You're done.” Sakura spoke more softly than Kai had ever heard before.

Kai did not move. Instead, he looked straight at Sakura.

“Sakura?” Kai mumbled his question. Tears yet remained.

“Yes, Asako-sama?” Sakura asked.

“Can...” Kai paused. “Can, you use my name?” he sniffled.

Sakura went silent for a long while. She just stared at the little Espurr lying on the mat. The samurai who now looked more fearful than ever. Their eyes connected, and the two stared at each other for a long while.

“Yes...Kai.” Sakura said.

The barest fringe of a smile made its way onto Kai's face.

He was silent after that. Espurr just walked with Sakura weakly back towards the room. He knew in the back of his mind that he should have been scared about returning to the room with the other samurai, but Kai was lost somewhere else.

Before Sakura opened the door, she looked down at the little Espurr.

“Kai, could you give me your hat and your cloak?” Sakura asked simply, looking straight at him.

She did not need to explain herself. Or ask. Kai slowly took off his straw hat, and then his cloak. They were symbols of his monkhood, but he trusted her.

Leavanny gingerly took the two items, and opened the door. Kai peeked his head into the doorway slowly, still scared. Jiri and Akama and Akodo-san were there, sitting by the table. They had noticed the door opening, of course and now looked toward the doorway. Kai could only stand little peeks at a time. He looked for the thing that scared him, but he did not see it upon their faces. When he looked upon them, they looked, normal. Even reserved. Slowly, Kai walked through the entranceway. He held very close to Sakura.

Akama lightly nodded toward Kai, but kept silent. The Heliolisk looked up at Sakura and then down at Kai a few times, clearly unsure of how to react. Jiri just held by herself.

Sakura did not begin the conversation. She just gently led Kai in and stayed there for a minute, before she started to retreat towards the door. She looked back at Kai then, whose gaze had followed her. She let him know she was there.

When Kai looked back at the others, she finally shut the door.

Everyone was quiet for a good, long while.

Then Akama spoke.

“So...yeah.” he nodded awkwardly. “How is everything doing?”

Kai did not respond, but the Heliolisk spoke up soon after.

“Things seem fine.” the samurai stated. His gaze turned toward Kai.

“Hello...Asako-san? I am Akodo Mori. You are...?” the Heliolisk asked.

Kai took a few moments to come to full cognizance.

“Asako Kai.” he nodded lightly.

“Ah. Well it is good to finally see a Phoenix around here...” Mori spoke.

He hadn't intended for it to be that funny, but Akama actually laughed. Kai couldn't help but giggle when the Heracross began.

“I mean, you say that, but he is honestly the first Phoenix samurai I have seen in days...kind of crazy how these things turn out...” Akama spoke, a more boisterous character returning.

“Heh, well that is true.” Mori said, turning his head toward Kai. “I am guessing that Asako-san over here has a lot of experience with that, living in Phoenix lands and all...”

“I would say so, except for the fact that I had not entered this place until today.” Kai let the smile grow.

Everyone giggled a little.

The conversation picked up after that. Kai filled Mori in on his monkhood shenanigans, while the Heliolisk told him all about the life of an Akodo bushi. It was...well, it was what Kai had expected, really. But it was good to see a Lion here, in any case. To be honest, a Crab and a Lion were the two clans he was least expecting in a place like this...

While the gathered samurai talked and played, Kai could not help but let his attention turn toward something. Now that he had...mostly emotionally recovered, he could think about his diaper more clearly. It was...well, nice. He had asked for it and he had gotten it and he liked it. He was still very shy about exposing it, hence why he retained his kimono, like Jiri, but for some reason, Kai felt really safe and comfortable just through wearing it. He had thought of them many times, passingly over the years, but Kai had always suppressed the thoughts, ashamed. Now it was...actually, it was not even surreal. It was just nice.

Akama started to show Mori some wooden toy soldiers that he had stashed away, and the two slowly drifted off into mock fights and discussion of military tactics. They did so while diapered, but Kai was quickly getting used to such things. Jiri and Kai just talked for a little while, but eventually Akama and Mori decided to switch games. They now played as samurai. And so of course, they invited Jiri and Kai. While the two bushis played as warriors, Jiri and Kai played as a priest and a monk, respectively. Kai was a little bit apprehensive at first, but he surprised himself by how much he got into the role. Even if he really felt like a child while doing so.

The play continued for about an hour. Sakura came back at one point with tea and rice, and the four samurai-children thankfully accepted the lunch. After eating, they continued for a little while longer, but Kai gradually started to withdraw from the game. He was beginning to notice something.

“Kai?” Jiri looked over at Kai, tilting her head. She had withdrawn from some scene that Akama and Mori were still engaged in.

“Oh...hi Jiri.” Kai mumbled. He gave a weak smile.

“Oh...well hello. Are you alright?” Jiri asked.

“I am...okay.” Kai said.

Jiri looked on a little more. It looked like he was concentrating.

Jiri looked back a little bit to check on Akama and Mori. When she was satisfied, she turned back toward Kai and whispered.

“If you need the lavatory, you can use the gardens outside.” Jiri said quietly.

“I...wait, what?” Kai tilted his head, honestly confused.

“Outside. You can pee there.” Jiri whispered. “Unless you're busy with something else...”

“No, I mean, I *do* have to pee.” Kai felt a bit of embarrassment as the words came out. “But I am not going to do it in the garden!” he whispered rather loudly then. “Where is the lavatory?”

Jiri looked off sheepishly for a moment, before she rubbed the back of her head and turned toward Kai.

“I...don't know where it is.” Jiri admitted.

“You, don't know where it is? But you're a regular here, how can you not-” Kai spoke, until he came to the realization. Jiri just lightly smiled and blushed.

“Only Miss Sakura and the headmistress know where the lavatory is. I suppose you could ask them, but...” Jiri just pushed her paws together.

Kai sighed, before fixing his gaze on Jiri once more.

“Look, it doesn't matter. I'll just go and look for the lavatory myself. I will be back.” Kai said.

Jiri looked a bit worried, but said nothing more as Kai exited the room. The Espurr closed the door quietly behind him and looked around the hallway. There were...lots of doors, he realized. He guessed that this wing of the building had...little rooms like this? Kai walked down the hall, trying to think of where a lavatory would be...

Kai looked through the rooms of the front hallways, but he mostly found little playrooms like his previous one and utility rooms. Kai took a peek outside, trying to see if they had an outhouse, but he saw none. Kai went back inside. He could feel the pressure beneath growing, but Kai did not pay it

much attention.

It could not actually happen, after all.

Kai returned to the entrance hall, turning towards the stairs. Perhaps, Kai thought, the lavatory was up there. If it was really used mostly by the staff – a fact Kai was still trying to come to terms with – then perhaps it would be up there, where the headmistress was presumably stationed. Honestly, Kai was not very familiar at all with geisha houses. But what knowledge he had would have to suffice, he thought.

Kai crept along carefully down the central hallway of the second floor. The Espurr moved quietly, so as to not attract the attention of whoever might be up here. Strictly speaking this was not really necessary, but Kai really did not want someone to see the kind of situation he was in at the moment. He could jus-

SLAM!

A door swung open. Kai recoiled, jumping back towards the wall behind him. He messed up toward the end and tripped, but his reflexes still saved him from damage. He looked back toward the doorway, spying an elderly Lilligant standing in the middle of it. He was about to ask her if she was alright, before he noticed something.

Something wet.

Standing there against the wall. Kai slowly peed his diaper. Kai wished he had felt more embarrassment, especially given how it was happening in front of another person, but really, he just felt relief. Of course, that waned when he finished peeing, and remembered the situation he was in.

The silence was interrupted quickly.

“Apologies dear, I had not seen you there.” the Lilligant said somewhat slowly, beginning to take stock of him. Kai just held there on the wall paralyzed. He realized belatedly that she probably wouldn't be able to tell that he had wet his diaper, given how it was covered by his kimono, but that was a cold comfort to him.

“Come on in. I would hate to leave you alone after I almost smashed you like that.” the old woman said simply, and re-entered the room she had previously just began to leave.

It was so plain and nonchalant that Kai could not help but actually listen to her directions.

Kai walked into a room that was dustier than many he had seen in the geisha house thus far. There was a window at the back, letting in light, and a small desk at which the Lilligant sat. Around, Kai saw a few other features, like shelves full of scrolls and paintings on the walls and a tatami mat on the ground, but for the moment, he was really just concentrating on the woman. She looked up only slightly as Kai approached, drawing herself away from whatever she had been doing on her desk. Kai noticed then that one of her eyes was rheumy. She could likely only see out of one eye, Kai thought.

“Well then, there is the little kitty that I almost crushed. I do apologize, but my perceptions are getting the best of me these days. I hope that you are alright.” the woman spoke.



"I am fine." Kai said.

"Well that is good to hear." the elder nodded. "In any case, I take it you are the newcomer? Little Agasha-chan had quite a lot to say about you when she came back last night..."

"I...yes." Kai nodded, feeling strangely...calm.

"Mmm. Well that is good. Most people do not stay for long after seeing inside this place..." the woman chuckled to herself. "Ah, I am getting lost again. I am Yokonori. I've ran this place ever since its founding. It is a pleasure to meet you."

"Oh, I am Asako Kai." Kai got the introduction out of the way, more curious about other words that had been said. "You, founded this place?" Kai asked.

"Well, yes. Someone had to, after all. I may not look like it, but I was a very good geisha back in the day. I saved up a lot of money with the plan of starting my own house one day. Originally it was just going to be normal, but then I met a person like...you, dear."

Yokonori looked off briefly, towards the window. In a single expression, Kai could make out depthless complexity. And then it was gone.

"In any case, things happened, and I eventually founded the Silver Moon Inn. I've kept her running nicely for the last forty years. I will admit that it is hard to get understanding girls to staff the place, but every so often you get a lass like Sakura. When I find people like them, I know it can be done." Yokonori looked off again, shorter this time. She sighed, before turning back toward Kai.

"Well in any case, it is good to meet you in the flesh, Asako-sama." Yokonori spoke. The old woman's eyes flitted over the Espurr for a little longer, before mouth opened once more.

"Oh, before you go, would you like a change?" she asked simply.

Kai's eyes went wide.

"How...how did you know?" Kai asked legitimately.

"I've been at this for a long time, honey. I know the smell." Yokonori said softly.

Kai did not say anything, but he did nod his head. The Lilligant guided him to a tatami mat in the room, and helped him lay down. After taking off his kimono, the old woman got to work. Kai was really not sure what to expect, given how the last time he had had his diaper changed was over twenty years ago, but the woman worked swiftly. In no time at all, he was left in a clean diaper.

"T-Thank you, Yokonori." Kai nodded his head firmly, looking up toward the woman.

"It was no problem at all. Really, that probably barely makes up for almost smashing you earlier..." Yokonori just shook her head.

Kai heard footsteps by the door. As soon as he noticed them, he quickly turned his head towards the door. Standing there was Sakura, with an expression somewhere between worry and curiosity.

“Headmistress? Did-” Sakura was interrupted.

“No need to fear, Sakura. I already changed the little guy.” Yokonori looked toward Sakura.

Kai blushed, but he still started to move toward Sakura.

“Oh. Alright, then. I had been looking for him since it was getting close to the evening. Thank you, miss.” Sakura bowed toward Yokonori.

“It was no problem at all dear. Take care there.” Yokonori waved back at both of them.

Kai just looked back at the woman as Sakura guided him back down the stairs to the first floor. He had to explain to her then, of course, about how he had gone looking for the lavatory and accidentally used his diaper, but it was hard to feel the embarrassment when he was mostly just lost in...something. Beyond the windows of the entrance hall, Kai could see a faint orange-red glow.

“I’ll have to go soon.” Kai said. Something left his voice.

“I know.” Sakura just nodded.

Kai returned to the room with the other samurai and said his goodbyes. Things were sad, but Kai's departure was really expected, all things considered. He got patted on the back by Akama and shook hands with Mori, a Unicorn custom that Kai was really surprised to see from a Lion. He said goodbye to Jiri last. It was simpler than the other goodbyes, but somehow it hurt more. When he was done, Kai returned to the entrance hall. Sakura was standing there with his cloak and hat. Kai approached her slowly, taking his time to don each piece of equipment. When he had finished, he remembered something.

“I do not know how to ask this, but do you want your diaper back?” Kai asked.

“Consider it a gift.” Sakura said.

Kai smiled a little, then, and took one last long look at the Leavanny before walking outside.

Kai had just made it out of the gate before he heard running from around the geisha house. He turned to see Jiri, who had hastily donned her sandals. The fellow Espurr reached him quickly, extending out a hand. In it was a lavender lily.

“For your trip, Asako-san.” Jiri said simply.

“I am afraid that it would look better with you, Agasha-san.” Kai said.

“I insist, Asako-san. The lilies are wonderful this time of year.” Jiri said.

“All the more reason to leave them with you.” Kai said.

“I have plenty of lilies. I know not when you might see another.” Jiri said.

Kai said nothing, and took the flower.

He looked at Jiri for a while, before she smiled, turned away from him, and ran back towards the geisha house.

Kai returned to the road, pondering.

The flower would become dessicated after a few days, Kai realized.

But in the moment, Kai did not mind that.

Kai breathed in once, and began the long trip back to the library.