

Grasping at Shadows

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/146519) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/146519>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heat Guy J
Relationship:	Shun Aurora/Daisuke Aurora
Characters:	Shun Aurora , Daisuke Aurora , Clair Leonelli , Giobanni Gallo
Additional Tags:	Control , Domination , Mind Games , Incest , Insanity , Death , Obsession
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2007-04-24 Words: 6,171 Chapters: 1/1

Grasping at Shadows

by [Truth](#)

Summary

After all is said and done, what really happened between Shun and Daisuke Aurora – and how much will never be known?

Notes

Written for the Yaoi_Challenge Obscure Fandom Challenge 2007

There was something a little... *odd* about Daisuke Aurora's personnel file. The fact that it was locked to the Chief of the City Safety Management Agency wasn't all that unusual and the fact that it was approximately ten times the size of any of the others might have raised a few eyebrows, but the cruncher was the fact that the file itself was around two years older than Daisuke's actual term of employment. After that, the additional levels of security and hellishly complex encryption were something of an anti-climax.

Among the masses of data recovered from Shop Echigo's network and the partially reconstructed records from the machine in Shun Aurora's secret office, very little attention was paid to any 'private' dealings. The new City Manager was more concerned with any other time bombs which might have been planted, still be ticking away, ready to go off. Shun Aurora might still have a job with Judoh City Management, but his word wasn't being taken at face value.

Takanowa Enterprises had a data recovery team that was second to none and it was they who were combing through the remnants of Sergio Echigo's empire. Contracted by the City, that did not keep them from sharing their findings with their majority shareholder – Company Vita.

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There had been a curious inevitability to the entire incident, a dark haze that had settled over him the moment that he'd realized who was at the other end of the telephone line. Shun remembered it all very clearly, despite the odd, almost painful disconnection that had surrounded him.

He remembered finding the gun, working his way slowly through the twisted paths of Judoh's underworld to obtain the illegal weapon in a state of perfect and complete calm. It seemed as if it were all happening to someone else – someone who had perfect control over himself and of everything around him.

Shun's first murder had been so very easy, to kill a man whose image he saw in the mirror every day - the man who had destroyed his family.... No. Echigo had not been a man, he'd been a *Celestial* and Shun could see it in his own reflection; in his mother's eyes and the lines of his uncle's face.

With the sharp, flat echo of gunshots still ringing in his ears, the smell of cordite and death in the air, Shun came slowly back to himself. The Celestials had destroyed his family. His mother had left them and, not satisfied with that, Echigo had killed his father. Only Daisuke was left, and Shun would never, ever let him go. Daisuke was too young to really remember their mother's betrayal and he would never know what their uncle had done. He would remain untouched by the Celestials. Daisuke belonged to *him*.

Staring at the empty desk before him, aware of the body that had fallen behind it, Shun finally registered the presence of his uncle's machines. Dressed up as maids, they kept to their stations, staring sightlessly ahead – lifeless and without reaction to the murder of their master. He took a step back, finally letting the gun drop, and wondered why they did nothing.

The answer, when it came, was deliciously simple. They did only what they were programmed to do – and Shun was his uncle’s guest... and *heir*. Echigo had not anticipated murder from his eldest nephew and that had been his last mistake.

Mind racing furiously, Shun stood motionless in his uncle’s office, surrounded by silent machines. By the time the unpleasant buzz of flies reminded him of Echigo’s body, lying behind the desk on a corner of lush and now blood-sodden carpet, he knew *exactly* what he must do.

‘To destroy the power of the Celestials.’ He turned to the nearest machine, instructing it to clean up the mess. ‘To keep Daisuke far away from their *corruption*.’

“Any that trespass here are to be destroyed.” He heard the words come out of his mouth, watched the machines nod and accept the order without question even as his mind was racing.

Echigo controlled everything from *here*, which meant that all the information Shun might need was already at his fingertips. Money, power, connections to organized crime, priceless information on the machines and what drove them; it was all here, within Shun’s grasp.

Shun Aurora could see his whole life spread out before him, a complex map of destiny and inevitability. His life... and that of his brother.

Daisuke wouldn’t understand. He didn’t remember the way that Shun did. Daisuke was still a *child*, a teenager, and he would do as he was told. If Shun kept a careful control over him, the taint of the blood they shared would not spread.

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“The only way this could possibly be creepier would be if he’d kept a diary.” Giobanni looked up from the computer display, which was looping Sergio Echigo’s last moments over and over, and glanced up at Mauro.

Mauro had a giant stack of hard copy in his hands and was trying, with limited success, to keep it all in order as he set it carefully on Clair’s desk. “It’s possible that he did. A great deal of the data was corrupted... who knows what was lost?”

“We will.” Clair was almost invisible behind the stacks of paper and he stood to look over them at Giobanni and Clair. “It wasn’t luck that got Takanowa this contract. Taking apart Shop Echigo’s existing files and re-building them was a job for experts and,” he gave them a sweet, twisted smile, “Company Vita only employs the best. Judoh doesn’t need to know the depths of depravity sunk to by its oh-so-popular Chief of the City Safety Management Agency... but *I* do.”

As Mauro’s mouth opened to object, Clair’s eyes slid to him and held his gaze for a long, frosty moment. The old man’s mouth closed abruptly and Clair shifted his attention back to Giobanni.

“What’s the return?” Giobanni turned away from the computer to face the other two directly. “It’s not as though we can blackmail the man – most of the city knows that he had *something* to do with nearly overthrowing the city.”

“Knowledge is power, Giobanni,” Clair reminded him softly, smile vanishing abruptly. “You don’t just *recover* from a power trip like the one he was on. I want to know what *he* thought he was doing and why he isn’t dead or, at the very least, locked up someplace. No one is *that* valuable.”

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There was something in the curve of Daisuke’s smile, a twist of shadow that said, ‘I remember’. He hid it well, casual and open – laughing as if he had nothing in the world to hide. Easy, that’s what Daisuke was, easy and trustworthy; an open book for the world to read.

Shun knew better. Daisuke’s shadow was so easy to see, if you knew where to look, and as obvious as the bullet around his neck. Shun smiled every time he saw it, pleased by its presence and by the fact that it was only he who saw it. Daisuke was his... and even the machine that tailed him so faithfully could not see the things Daisuke hid within that smile.

The machine.... Yes, there were any number of ways that it would prove itself useful.

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Clair had a folder open in his hands, examining the schematics and highly technical read-outs with a jaundiced eye. “It’s enthralling,” he said, obviously bored. “What the fuck does it mean?”

The technician who had brought the file stood as far away from Clair as he could get. Given the relatively small dimensions of the elevator in which they were standing, it wasn’t anywhere near far enough. Giobanni’s looming presence wasn’t helping the man’s composure and it took him two, stuttering starts to begin speaking. “According to the Telemate design protocols....”

He stopped, abruptly, as Clair gave him a look of utter boredom. “In ten words or less.”

After a moment’s struggle, the technician managed, “There’s a subprogram designed to record everything the Telemate partner does.”

“That’s eleven,” Clair told him absently, frowning. “It’s also something I would have suspected. Why did it take a twenty page report for that?”

“Because someone was downloading those files about once a week,” the technician told him, trying to wedge himself even further into the corner of the elevator without being too obvious about it. “And there are sections that were then deleted from the machine’s memory.”

He had Clair’s complete attention then, and immediately wished he hadn’t.

"Does this," Clair demanded, holding up the folder between them, "have a list of the missing sections?"

"I... yes. Yes, it does. Um, table 15.4, I think. Near the back."

"Thank you." Clair smiled at the technician, closing the folder and tucking it beneath one arm. "You've been... very helpful."

As Clair and Giobanni left the elevator, the hapless technician sagged back against the wall, breathing a sigh of relief. Clair hadn't had anyone shot *lately* but then, one example of that sort tended to linger very effectively.

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They rarely looked directly at each other, a habit begun after their first real fight.

"College?" Shun stared at Daisuke, eyebrows climbing up into his hair. "What for?"

Daisuke shrugged, perched on the edge of Shun's desk, one foot resting on the arm of his brother's chair. "To learn. It's what you do at college."

"Why?" Shun leaned back in his chair, frowning. "You don't need it. Your scores have been excellent throughout your schooling and it's not as though you *need* a degree."

"Maybe not." Daisuke shrugged again. "I want it. Just sign the papers and I'll be out of your hair for another few years."

"No."

It was Daisuke's turn to look mildly disbelieving. "Why not?"

"I don't need a reason." Shun pushed the paperwork back toward Daisuke. "The answer is no."

Daisuke stared at him in disbelief that was rapidly turning to anger. He gathered up the admissions papers, hurt still visible at the back of the anger. "Fine. I'll take care of this myself."

"Daisuke." Shun's voice was deceptively calm. "You misunderstand. You are not going to college."

"You can't stop me." Daisuke's voice was almost friendly, but the anger was obvious in his face and eyes. "You don't get to tell me how to run my life."

"You will do as you're told." Shun looked away, dismissing his troublesome brother and already reaching for the files piled on his desk. A moment later, Shun was sprawled half out of his chair as Daisuke neatly shoved it nearly out from under him. He didn't manage to find his balance before Daisuke is standing half over him and aiming a punishing right to his elder brother's jaw. A crash and thud had Shun on the floor, Daisuke standing over him.

“You *piss* me off,” he snarled. “There’s no reason why I shouldn’t go to college and I *will*.”

“There is a reason.” Shun’s hand went to his jaw, feeling it gingerly. His glasses were several feet away and he left them there, shoving himself up onto one elbow to glare up at Daisuke.

“And that is?”

One of Shun’s feet lashed out, neatly hooking Daisuke’s legs from beneath him. There was a brief struggle, but Shun ended up on top, one knee on the small of Daisuke’s back and with a firm grip on both of his brother’s arms. Leaning forward, he spoke directly into Daisuke’s ear. “You aren’t going because I *said* you aren’t going and that is reason enough.”

Daisuke said nothing, jaw set, cheek pressed against the carpet.

“I said no. Do you understand me?”

“I understand.”

Shun had let him up and watched him go, not realizing until he received the first report from the men he had assigned to keep watch on Daisuke that his brother was going to be slightly more difficult to handle than anticipated. He did not speak to Daisuke for six months, returning all of his brother’s attempts at correspondence unopened.

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“This isn’t going anywhere good.”

Giobanni looked up from the folders where he was comparing times and dates – seated comfortably cross-legged on the floor of Clair’s bedroom. “What’ve you got there?”

“A letter from our good friend Daisuke to his elder brother, written while at college.” Clair was lying stretched out on his back across his bed, head not far from Giobanni’s. “It’s one that Chief Aurora lowered himself enough to answer, apparently, after six months of silence. His answer to his brother’s questions as to his silence is, ‘Be at my office by six – and this time, do as you’re told.’”

With a wince, Giobanni held up a hand, accepting the letter from Clair in order to examine it himself. “That sounds unpleasantly familiar, doesn’t it?”

Clair made a non-committal noise, staring sightlessly up at the ceiling. Familiar wasn’t the half of it and he could feel a jagged, painful twisting in his gut every time he dug just a little deeper into Shun Aurora’s fragmented files. There was something here and *Daisuke* was helping to protect it – which made Clair only more determined to dig it out.

“You can see the scars,” Clair murmured, drawing an uneasy look from Giobanni, who twisted to watch his employer. “They’re all over him... and he doesn’t *hate*. I want to know what happened, Giobanni.” Sitting up abruptly, Clair bit at the ring through his lower lip. “I want to know *why*.”

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There'd been no dawning realization, no sudden shock of surprise or moment of startled understanding. Shun's decision regarding what to do about his troublesome younger brother had been a slow and careful process, each possibility examined and dissected until he was certain that he had the correct answer.

Daisuke might be difficult to control, but he wasn't hard to figure out.

What Daisuke wanted and needed most was to be wanted and needed in return and Shun was becoming a master at convincing people he had what they wanted. When Daisuke showed up at his office, smiling that shadowed smile, Shun was ready for him.

"I only want what's best for you, Daisuke," with a look of solemn sadness. "You could be doing things with your life... I suppose it was a vain attempt to keep you from following in father's footsteps."

It had been *easy*, and Daisuke had softened almost immediately. All that Shun had needed was the touch of a hand as he removed his glasses to press at his eyes.

"Daisuke," looking up as he reached to touch his brother. "You're the only one I can trust..."

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"... they've found those missing bits of Telemate data and a little bit more." Giobanni put the phone back on the cradle and stared down at it.

"And?" Clair turned away from the stack of reports on his desk, eyebrows going up.

"I don't think you ought to see them."

Clair gave him a dangerous look. "Why not?"

"You won't like it." Giobanni was still looking at the phone, an expression of displeasure on his face. "... but it explains a lot."

**

Offering Daisuke vulnerability had been a double-edged sword. Shun managed a careful balance between carefully shuttered neediness flavored with sorrow and doubt and the cold distance of someone afraid to be hurt again. When he reached out, Daisuke was there, wanting to help his elder brother heal, willing to be the single, badly wanted prop that Shun would never admit he truly needed.

When Shun 'broke', he was careful to be certain that Daisuke was at a low point as well. It was so *easy*... a look of vulnerability, an abortive explanation and an almost clumsy kiss. Shun was laughing somewhere inside as Daisuke responded, obviously willing to give Shun whatever it was that he needed in an attempt to bring his elder brother out of his shell and help him to 'heal'.

Guilt was such an easy thing to fake, forcing distance between them in an obvious attempt to 'protect' Daisuke – which of course, his brother would not allow.

By the end of the year, Shun had enjoyed his brother in almost every conceivable way and Daisuke, idealistic, giving Daisuke, was convinced that this was what Shun needed to stay sane.

The most difficult part was hiding his laughing satisfaction against sweat-streaked skin as he buried himself in the straining body sprawled across his desk. As long as Daisuke thought that Shun *needed* him, there wasn't anything he couldn't be convinced to do. Most deliciously, he could often be influenced to believe that whatever Shun had wanted was his *own* idea and would then gently convince Shun that it was what *he* needed.

Sometimes, Shun could almost believe that he already had what he wanted and that the rest could be allowed to simply fall by the wayside – at least for the moment. There was always the chance, however, that Daisuke would follow in their mother's footsteps and that was something that was not to be borne. The Celestials would not be allowed to set their hooks into Daisuke and Shun would see to it that they were all destroyed, if that was what it took.

His determination was honed to an unforgiving edge with every encounter, the delicious heat of Daisuke's body and the way it bent so easily to give Shun whatever he asked of it....

They still fought and Shun still won, but Daisuke understood it now as a part of Shun's guilt and unhappiness and he always, always forgave.

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"No wonder he's not locked up someplace." Clair's voice was disgusted as he hurled a report down on the desk. "He's got something on just about everyone in the government."

"A nice little coincidence that the few he didn't have incriminating evidence on were all killed in the slaughter when the army took over the City Management." Giobanni's voice said that he didn't think it was a coincidence at all. "There's no good way to root him out of there. Some of these men will defend him to death, simply to keep their secrets from getting out."

Clair scowled, fingers tapping against the desk. "Let us not forget the devoted Phia, she of the easily-deceived heart. I wonder how long he'd been working on *her*?"

"From the start, probably." The stack of paperwork had decreased dramatically as they'd neatly disposed of the things which had no direct bearing on Shun Aurora as Shop Echigo, but there was still a small box of gleaming discs resting at the edge of Clair's desk – as yet untouched. Giobanni eyed it warily, noting that Clair was looking in the same direction.

"There are any number of ways we can deal with that man," Clair began, an unholy light in his eyes and a nasty smile twisting his lips. "But in order to choose the most... *appropriate*, I need a little more information."

"Clair." Giobanni took a step forward, reaching for the box, but Clair was faster.

Taking the disks, he held them up to the light, watching rainbow color dance through the clear plastic of the box. "I want to know."

Giobanni watched him uneasily, hearing the words Clair left unspoken. There was still too much left unresolved between Daisuke and Clair... and Clair was searching for an excuse to dispose of the man behind Mitchal and Ian's death without Daisuke ever finding out who had murdered his brother. Chances being slender, what Clair was looking for now was an excuse – and Giobanni was certain that he was about to find what he was looking for.

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There was something obscene about opening the sealed files labeled 'Daisuke Aurora' and finding one the first item in the directory to be nothing less than explicit porn. That wasn't what kept Clair riveted to the computer, eyes wide and shocked.

Shun was screwing his little brother in more ways than the merely physical and what held Clair's somewhat nauseated attention was the fact that Daisuke... Daisuke *knew* it. Hair darkened with sweat, muscles straining and teeth sunk into his lip to keep from crying out... even if Shun couldn't see it, Clair *could* and he was torn between reluctant admiration for the double-game and that same vertigo-induced nausea.

He went through each file, watching Shun losing himself in the act of using Daisuke's body over and over again. Daisuke sprawled wantonly across Shun's lap behind his desk, Daisuke on his knees at Shun's feet – clever mouth kept busy with Shun's hands locked in his hair, Daisuke bent forward over that same desk, hands clenched and knuckles whitened by his grip on the edge....

"Here are your scars, then... some of them." Clair focused on Shun, then – Shun who never kissed his brother's mouth or looked into his eyes, Shun who left bruises and pretended to be horrified by his lack of control, Shun who never removed any clothing, but insisted that Daisuke be naked.

Control and obsession, a game between the two of them without any clear rules save that it would involve no outsiders, and it was a game that Clair knew very well indeed; had been playing, in fact, far longer than either of the Aurora brothers. When he finished with the video files, he combed slowly and carefully through the rest of it.

Progress reports, information on his movements, on his associates, on his co-workers, files on J and what had been done to the machine both publicly and privately, the missing Telemate files – all of which corresponded to the dates on Shun's extensive collection of very personal porn and a large number of other files, obviously collected by people in Echigo's employ. Yes, Shun Aurora had been keeping a very close eye on his brother in more ways than one and even Clair was surprised at how *many* people had been watching Daisuke without all of them ending up tripping over each other.

Giobanni appeared with Clair's breakfast before he'd finished the file, unsurprised to find Vampire still awake and scowling thoughtfully at the data. Saying nothing, he set the meal down on Clair's bed and simply waited.

"Daisuke could have ended it, should've ended *him*, but didn't." Clair had one of the video files playing to one side as he flipped through the various documents. "Why? What could

possibly possess him to play along, especially after he learned what his precious older brother was really up to? He had to know that Shun was *using* him.”

“Perhaps being used was better than being cast aside completely.”

Clair paused, eyes darting to the video. Shun had chosen the placement for his camera very carefully and never let himself get between the camera and the body of his brother. Daisuke was so obviously on display in every single file, Daisuke and his reactions to what was being done to his body, skin flushed and lungs heaving.

He remembered what it was like to try to catch the attention of someone who didn’t care, to love someone unconditionally and, when the day came that you realized that you were nothing more than a tool? It tore and burned and *broke* something inside you, but somehow, you couldn’t stop. You couldn’t stop loving, you couldn’t stop wanting to force them to look at you, to *see* you, because you can’t hate truly someone who doesn’t even know that you’re real.

Giobanni knew exactly what was running through Clair’s mind and stayed silent as Clair sank back in his chair, expression shifting from one of shock to calculated fury.

“I want to see the rest of it,” he pronounced finally, eyes slowly lighting with the manic gleam that spelled horror for some unlucky soul. “*All* of it. Then... you and I are going to pay a call on Shun Aurora.”

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There’d been more to Shun’s apparent capitulation than had been reported to the new City Management. The lies he had spun about being a tool of his uncle were believed, especially with Daisuke and J to back them up. Without Daisuke’s presence, the only checks on his behavior would be J and Phia... and it had been aptly proven that there were ways around both.

“You’re going to leave me?” Shun’s smile had been incredulous.

“I need to get away.” Daisuke, for a change, hadn’t been smiling at all. “... I’ll be back, Shun. Don’t fuck this up.”

“When?”

Daisuke scowled. “Don’t worry about it.”

“When?” Shun’s smile now had a twist that could’ve rivaled Clair at his most unhinged. “I need to know, Daisuke.”

“So you can prepare for it?” Daisuke’s smile was suddenly, blindingly back. “No. I’ll be back... and you’d better have everything in order for when I do.”

“What would you do if...?” Shun’s amusement vanished suddenly as if it had been wiped away. A taller, darker figure was suddenly standing behind Daisuke, watching Shun with a passionless, red stare.

“I won’t have to do anything,” Daisuke assured him, well aware of the killer at his back.
“Because you’re not going to cause any more trouble, Shun.”

Stepping forward, Daisuke hooked an arm around his brother’s neck, leaning into him.
“Watch yourself, Shun... and maybe, someday, no one else will have to.”

**

There was something endlessly infuriating about knowing that Boma was out there, somewhere, *watching*... and that Shun could do absolutely nothing about it. Phia was loyal to him, but she was also still loyal to Shogun and Shogun kept an eye out for the mass-murderer who wore the head of a black wolf.

Boma was loyal only to Daisuke and, to a lesser extent, J. There was no leverage to be gained there, and not a man in the city, however desperate, would agree to take on the wolf man and Shun had no illusions about managing to do the job himself.

Every day, Shun could feel the growing fury and frustration. Despite the lack of bars and chains, Daisuke had chosen what was possibly the most infuriating prison of all. Shun’s apparent freedom chafed in ways he hadn’t thought possible and the only time he’d picked up the phone in an attempt to make contact with one of Echigo’s still hidden resources, Boma had simply *appeared*, standing on the other side of his desk.

No word had been spoken, no gesture had been made, but Shun replaced the handset on the cradle very gently before the party at the other end could answer and nothing had come of it.

It was Phia who had bruises now, dark marks that he apologized for making and which she assured him did not matter. She was a poor substitute, however, for Daisuke... Daisuke who didn’t remember their mother clearly enough to know that he wore her smile – the smile that Shun couldn’t bear to look at.

He’d taken to pacing, an attempt to relieve the pent-up energy, wondering when Daisuke would come back, thinking about what he could do to *eliminate* that smile, making sure that Daisuke would never wear it again. It was too late to save Daisuke from the corruption of their shared blood – after all, it had been Daisuke who had betrayed him. But perhaps, just perhaps, he could find a way....

“Shun Aurora?” The voice was soft, almost pleasant, and should not have been speaking inside Shun’s locked office.

Whirling, Shun took in not one but two visitors – familiar faces that he’d never encountered in person. He recovered quickly, nodding distantly to the intruders. “I don’t recall hearing you knock.”

“We thought we’d let ourselves in.” Giobanni smiled, a baring of teeth that was anything but friendly. “Didn’t feel like waiting around until you had an opening in your busy schedule.”

According to the clock on the wall, it was well after working hours – an old habit that Shun had not bothered to break. It had given him an excuse to still be here when Daisuke came to

check up on him. “What do you want?”

It was Clair who answered, moving across the room with that strange, almost dancing walk that made him look as if he were under the influence of some sort of illicit drug. “Therapy,” he told Shun, eyes wide and almost dreamy. “Maybe the exorcism of a few, personal demons.”

Shun took a step backward, toward his desk and the gun he still kept there, but a faint click brought his attention to Giobanni, who already had a gun in his hand. “We know your tricks,” Giobanni assured him grimly. “Stand where you are.”

Something glinted in Clair’s hand, but the angle of his body and his approach to Shun hid what it was.

“You won’t get away with killing me,” Shun was quick to point out. Behind the shield of his glasses, his eyes gleamed, “And Daisuke would never forgive you.”

It was a phrase that might, just might, have prompted Boma to act in his favor. Daisuke would not be happy if his elder brother *died* after all. There was no miraculous appearance, however, and Shun was forced to realize that he would be facing this alone.

“I couldn’t care less about your precious little brother’s forgiveness,” Clair hissed, face twisting into a snarl. “He *let* you fuck him up and whatever comes of that is his own problem.” He didn’t stop moving, however, stopping just out of arm’s reach. After a moment, he forced himself back into a semblance of calm. “No... I’m not going to kill you, much as it would be a favor to all of Judoh. I have something much more *appropriate* in mind.”

Shun took a fast step back, only to run into his desk, having to reach back to support himself. Giobanni took a matching step forward, gun steady. “Hold still,” he advised grimly. “Otherwise, this’ll hurt a lot more.”

Before he could brace himself, Shun found out what Giobanni meant. Clair snatched for his hand, pulling it toward him and sliding a needle into the vein on the back of his hand. “Go ahead and move,” he dared the taller man, eyes gleaming. “I don’t care how much this hurts.”

“What is that?” Shun’s voice was a snarl, bravado to hide a sudden fear.

Clair smiled grimly, making certain the syringe was empty of its viscous green contents before withdrawing it. “A little something that I shared with your brother, once... I’m curious to see what it’ll do to *you*.”

The world was comprised of clashing shades of grey, wrenching and pulling in every direction. There was a high-pitched, shivering whine in the air, tugging at every nerve and twisting painfully. Everything had been sucked away to be replaced with this painful, chaotic emptiness and the sound of sanity being stripped away....

Clair and Giobanni watched Shun sink to the floor of his office, eyes vacant and hands twitching – Giobanni with a grim displeasure and Clair...?

“Let’s see what demons we can stir up in your mind, Shun Aurora.” He sank to his heels, syringe dangling from his fingers. “What sort of nightmares we can make you live?”

Nightmares....

Shun’s nightmares were things of horror and blood, explosions and abandonment. He’d been using Daisuke as an outlet, as a target, as a *shield* for so long that without him, everything was thin and strained. Phia was a substitute, of sorts, but she could never know, she could never *understand*.

Daisuke’s smile, so familiar, so understanding, so painful and Shun wanted to cut it off. Sew those upturned lips closed so that they would never smile again and only Shun would remember what it had been....

Giobanni was too far away to hear Shun’s restless murmuring, but Clair was not and Giobanni watched the grip on the delicate syringe beginning to tighten dangerously.

“But Daisuke’s gone,” and Clair’s soft voice was almost soothing, in sharp contrast to the wild expression on his face. “What will you do now that he’s out of your reach?”

The grey-slashed emptiness was suddenly wider, vaster, as if unseen barriers had been ripped away leaving him completely adrift and without direction.

Daisuke was coming back, he had to come back. He’d promised....

“You betrayed him,” Clair leaned forward to remove the glasses that were twisted on Shun’s face, folding them neatly into one twitching hand. “You hurt him. You lied to him. You used him. You tried to have him killed... Daisuke won’t be back. He’s learned his lesson.”

The whining shriek built to a scream and grey was fading to smeared red streaks, blood tingeing the void as denial warred with certainty.

With a sudden, vicious smile, Clair whispered, “Gone, just like your mother... because you drove him away.”

By the time Giobanni followed Clair out of the City Management offices, a large crowd had gathered. The flash of cameras contrasted oddly with the large spotlights being set up by uniformed policemen outside the gentle pools of light cast by the streetlamps. Two or three of Clair’s other men were loitering in the vicinity and drifted over to join Vampire and his bodyguard as they paused to look over at the circus.

“Oi! Leonelli!”

Clair turned, giving an idle wave to the approaching Ken Edmundo. “There seems to be some sort of disturbance. Shouldn’t you be supervising or something?”

Edmundo glared at him, still slightly sensitive as to his recent re-instatement into the police force. “Don’t pull that crap with me. Shun Aurora took a nosedive out of his own office and

you want me to think you had nothing to do with it?”

“On the contrary.” Clair leaned forward, slipping a hand into Edmundo’s coat pocket. “I want you to *know* that I did it.”

The weight of something, thankfully not heavy enough to be a grenade, settled into the detective’s coat. Edmundo took a rapid step back, hand going immediately to his pocket, and Clair simply smiled. Giving Edmundo a careless wave, Clair turned and walked away.

“Was that wise?” Giobanni kept his voice low as he followed at Clair’s heels.

“Probably not,” Clair admitted, smiling broadly. “But there won’t be any prosecution – not after he takes a good look at that file, even edited as it is. It’ll be ‘suicide due to remorse while of unsound mind’ if I had to make a guess.”

“And the drugs?”

Clair laughed, throwing out his arms and spinning to face the taller man. “The good detective owes a lot to Daisuke Aurora... trust me, Giobanni... it will never come up.”

“What *about* Daisuke?” Giobanni frowned down at Clair, only to be rewarded with another radiant, slightly unhinged smile.

“Daisuke’s smart,” Clair responded, laughing softly. “He won’t ask any inconvenient questions. Not once the detective gets hold of him.” The smile turned dark. “After all, I might *answer* them for him.”

**

The last moments of Shun Aurora’s life were crystal clear, like photographs on a bright, cloudless day. He had thrown himself out of the window of his office, plummeting the hundreds of feet to the ground, that much was true enough... but he’d been pushed.

You don’t have to actually lay a hand on someone to drive them to self-destruction and Clair Leonelli was a past master at the art of twisting other people to his own ends – winding them up until something inside simply came apart from the ever-building tension.

Clair waited until consciousness returned to Shun’s eyes and the ability to feel pain told him that he’d crushed his own glasses, driving metal and glass into his hand. He’d waited until Shun had pulled himself dizzily to his feet, staring with a raw, ugly fury at the young man perched on the edge of his desk.

It had only taken a handful of words to yank the fragile pieces of sanity from Shun’s bleeding grasp, and there had been a bright, vicious satisfaction to every word.

“He’s gone to find your mother.” No need to elaborate as to who ‘he’ was and Clair clicked the ring through his lower lip with his teeth, pleased with his choice of goad.

Shock, pain, fury and denial painted a snarl across Shun’s face, but there was enough left of Clair’s drug in his system to keep him from finding any sort of balance. Shun needed control

and what hadn't been wrested from him already hovered tantalizingly out of his reach.

That wasn't what had ended his life, however, no.... Shun never had been able to accept defeat.

Clair's smug triumph had been strong enough almost to be tasted in the air as he leaned forward, eyes gleaming and locked on Shun as he waited for the inevitable. "The Celestials have him now - and they will never allow him to return."

The explosion of glass had been almost beautiful, breaking as Shun threw himself at it, thick window helpfully burst by a bullet from Giobanni's gun. For an instant, he'd been above the city, seeing it spread out in a huge circle of brilliant lights beneath as if welcoming him home.

'Daisuke's City....'

Perhaps this was how it had been meant to be.

And then nothing at all.

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