

Services Rendered

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by [Truth](#)

Summary

A lifetime of service is sometimes its own reward.

Notes

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Attention apparently fixed on the decorative clock that marked the time in the dark paneled office of Company Vita's plush casino, Vampire was staring at nothing all. Tuning out the droning voices, he was mentally examining the business of the past year, turning and twisting them as he sought to follow a specific chain of events from inception to conclusion.

Unfortunately, he would have to go much further back than a simple review of the past year to truly reach the beginning of this particular sequence of events and Clair was reluctant to do so. The past was the past and some things should remain forgotten. Clair drummed his fingers gently on the blotter that took up a great portion of his desk and frowned thoughtfully at nothing, weighing the benefits of this course of remembrance versus the inevitable emotional upheaval.

Clair had taken to spending a great deal of his time lately thinking – as opposed to plotting, calculating or scheming. Giobanni had noticed and Clair had noticed Giobanni noticing and really, there was nothing constructive to be accomplished this way. His fingers brushed the neat stack of papers on the edge of his blotter and he glanced down.

Clair rose abruptly, giving the heavy leather chair a shove with his foot, sending it rolling back and nearly colliding with the terribly tasteful potted plant that shaded the corner of his office. “I’m going out,” he declared.

“Vampire!”

He ignored the commotion his comment caused, sauntering past the small delegation that had spent the fifteen minutes on a pain-staking and incredibly boring presentation that was still scheduled to waste forty-five minutes of his valuable time.

“Vampire.” Giobanni’s much softer remonstrance caused Clair to pause.

Turning, he gave the group a dismissive glare, teeth closing for an instant on the ring through his lower lip. “You’re wasting my time,” Clair told them flatly. “The city contracts you seem to be depending on for the success of this venture have a deadline of three days from now and, from what you’ve shown me thus far, you’re still two *months* from being prepared to make a bid.”

There was a moment of shocked silence and Clair took advantage of it to make his exit, Giobanni on his heels. Mauro would deal with the idiots – that was a part of what Clair paid him for, after all.

Outside his office stood two men in dark suits and they fell into step behind Giobanni as Clair stalked past them. Clair ignored them entirely. You couldn’t trust *anyone*, a lesson he’d learned at the cost of a pair of lives he still regretted, and since that day all of his bodyguards had been carefully chosen to be anonymous, faceless and disposable.

All save the one who’d been there all along.

Clair would hold the inability to strip Shun Aurora's skin from his body against Daisuke for the rest of his life – or at least his brother's life. Noreiga's death had helped bring a little closure, but he could never, *would* never forgive 'Shop Echigo'. Daisuke might have swallowed his brother's sins, but he wasn't the one who'd died; and Clair could almost see Mitchal and Ian sometimes, out of the corner of his eye.

Clair's mood was sinking fast as he stalked down the hallway and he slapped at Giobanni's hand as his bodyguard attempted to press the button for the elevator, stabbing vindictively at the button himself.

As protocol dictated, the two bodyguards stepped into the car first and Clair reached in to press several buttons before stepping back, watching with dark amusement as the two men ceased their scan of the car just in time for the doors to close.

"I've changed my mind," he told Giobanni, not looking over his shoulder at the older man. "We're staying in."

Giobanni sighed, and Clair knew exactly which expression of disapproval he was wearing, but said nothing – which was exactly what Clair needed at the moment. Silence. He'd had enough going through his mind over the past few days that chatter was the last thing that he wanted. Giobanni always knew what Clair wanted... and Clair was learning how to anticipate the reverse.

'*You can't trust anyone.*' The thought had been nagging at him for some time now, and he shoved at the door that led into the emergency stairwell without looking back. Giobanni would be at his heels, impassive and alert... and his silent presence was beginning to irritate Clair.

Two sets of footsteps sounded in the closed stairwell – Clair's lighter steps with their slouching, lack of rhythm and Giobanni's regular tread. The obvious correlation did little for Clair's peace of mind and by the time they reached the floor that held Company Vita's guest suites, it had become a struggle not to grind his teeth.

Giobanni knew better than to reach forward to open the door and that only served, irrationally, to put the cap on Clair's foul mood. Throwing the door open, he reached back, fingers unerringly closing around Giobanni's tie, and *dragged* his much larger bodyguard into the room; kicking the door closed behind them.

Before Giobanni could do more than bring his hands up to keep from being inadvertently strangled, Clair had released him. "Do you know," he asked, leaning back and setting his shoulders against the door, "what Mauro brought me this morning?"

There was a brief pause as Giobanni collected himself, straightening his tie and running one hand through the single stripe of hair left on his shaved head. Clair hadn't bothered to turn on the lights and despite the high windows, the room was relatively dark. With a sigh, Giobanni pulled off his sunglasses. "It's the fifteenth... recommendations for the next meeting?"

"They want me to authorize their recommendation for Iwanami's replacement." Clair's voice was even, almost conversational. "It's been three months and someone has to run his share of

the business. They came up with three names – two of them barely competent and one of them power-hungry on top of it.”

Giobanni waited for the rest of it and, when Clair remained silent, offered, “The choice should be an easy one, then.”

“The third name,” Clair told him flatly, “was yours.”

“No.”

Clair’s eyebrows went up as the almost involuntary denial hung in the air between them and his voice was soft and lethal. “You knew about this?”

“I... no.” Giobanni squared his shoulders, jaw setting.

Eying him thoughtfully, Clair finally nodded. “I thought not. They’ve been very... *insistent* about finding some reward for your loyalty.” He snorted. “As if they can make up for what came before by elevating you.”

“They want to separate us.” Giobanni’s voice was carefully neutral.

Clair laughed softly. “The thought had occurred to me, Giobanni.” His eyes were wide and somewhat manic as he stared at the much taller man. “Will they succeed?”

The question was a cruel one, especially considering the fact that Clair had been withdrawn, not catatonic, during the time that Giobanni had hidden them.

‘You can shine! ... and I’ll shine under that light.’

Giobanni clenched his jaw, knowing full well that Clair was testing him. “There is nothing they can offer me that I do not already have.”

“But I *can*, is that it?” Clair took a step forward, reaching again for Giobanni’s tie.

There was no resistance from the taller man, although he tensed. Clair’s little fits and starts could be more than they seemed and it was never wise to react before you knew exactly where he was going. “Clair....”

“He knows my name.” Clair was mocking now, but he was also tense – sliding his fingers slowly up Giobanni’s tie. “Are you planning to spend the rest of your life in my shadow? You’re going to grow to resent me, sooner or later... it might be better if you took this offer.”

“That’s not funny.” Giobanni reached up to catch at Clair’s hand, but Clair blocked the attempt with his free hand, expression suddenly angry.

“Isn’t it?”

“I’m a *bodyguard*, not some kind of crime boss.” Giobanni wasn’t far from losing his temper himself. “Someone like Ian....”

Clair let go of him abruptly, turning away. Right hand clenching into a fist, he stared down at the ring on his hand. A moment later, he drove his fist into the door, grimacing at the pain. “*Fuck* that.” With his back to Giobanni, he slowly straightened, cradling his hand to his chest. “Ian’s dead, Giobanni. First Ian, then Mitchal and now?”

“I will not leave you.” Giobanni took a half step forward reaching forward to touch Clair... and paused, resisting the impulse.

Pain had been watching Clair in the Judoh graveyard, seeing him retreat to a place somewhere inside that Giobanni couldn’t touch – couldn’t even *see*. Giobanni had stayed with him then, guarded him, hidden him and been willing to die for him. Clair knew what Giobanni had done and when Giobanni had left him, going out to die... *that* had woken him as nothing else had.

“And if I were to send you away?” Clair’s voice was perfectly even, his eyes still locked on the faint mark of blood on the heavy door where he’d spit his knuckles. “If I were to tell you to go, that I had no further use for you?”

“I would call you a liar.” Giobanni’s sudden surge of anger had him reaching for Clair’s shoulder again, this time dragging the younger man around to face him. “Don’t you *dare* pull that shit on me, Clair.”

The expression that Clair turned on him was several shades removed from the despairing, empty look that the tone of his voice had promised, holding instead an angry, bitter passion. “Or what?” His smile held a brittle edge. “You’ll *leave* me?”

There was a sharp twist of sadomasochism in Clair’s mood and he knew that Giobanni was defenseless against it. Clair *expected* to be kicked while he was down, *anticipated* the knife in the back and, at some level, had never recovered from the ‘training’ that his father had forced upon him. Vampire had broken his son, shattered the small boy into a thousand, glittering pieces that accurately reflected what his father had wanted to see.

The advantage to having known someone for most of your life is that, in some ways, they become very easy to predict. Clair produced a crooked smile as he found himself staring at Giobanni down the barrel of the other man’s gun. “I could shoot you now,” Giobanni told him, the words raw and jagged. “The result would be the same.”

“Betrayal for betrayal, is that it?” Clair’s eyebrows soared as he reached forward, closing his hand over the barrel of the gun, palm against the muzzle. “As long as I have you standing behind me to take the knife aimed for my back, all’s well?”

“You aren’t going to send me away.” Giobanni’s arm was steady and the gun did not waver, despite Clair’s grip on the end of the barrel. “And I think I deserve better than being the object of one of your damn *games*.”

“I didn’t choose *this* game,” Clair told him, fingers idly stroking the barrel of the gun as he looked at Giobanni, slowly calming. “I have to throw them some bone on this, Giobanni. What would you like me to tell them?”

“That I am *your* man,” Giobanni informed him bitterly. “Can you even remember a time before your father brought me to you?”

Clair’s fingers ceased their movement and he frowned at Giobanni over the gun. “You want me to tell them that you’re a possession?” A slow, wicked smile spread across his face. “That won’t go over very well.”

Of course it wouldn’t. Most of them were counting on forcing Clair’s hand through insisting that he obviously reward loyalty – leaving an opening for them to force their own favorites up the ladder toward the highest rungs of the hierarchy. They were not enjoying his resistance and despite their renewed vows of loyalty, recent betrayal was still far too fresh for Vampire to trust them, or for them to trust him. Claiming that he *owned* Giobanni, however, would spike at least one of their arguments, although it would open him up for other attacks, no doubt.

“Very well.” Clair carelessly shoved Giobanni’s gun to one side, although he kept a loose grip on the barrel. “You can’t be promoted because you were a gift from my father. We can make up some sort of contract and have Mauro falsify the documentation. However....”

Giobanni eyed him warily, the sting of having the center of his life threatened still somewhat raw. “However?”

“There will have to be some sort of reward.” Clair was obviously headed toward the high end of one of his mood swings, and the light in his eyes was wicked. “No one could deny that you’ve performed above and beyond the call of duty, Giobanni.”

It was a taunt and Giobanni refused to rise to the bait. “It is unnecessary.”

“Service is its own reward?” Clair gave a cynical laugh. “That’s not good enough.” He gave Giobanni a thoughtful, assessing look. “It would have to be something that *they* can’t give you.”

“Clair.” There was a clear warning in Giobanni’s voice now, but Clair ignored it.

“I have just the thing.”

Despite long familiarity with Clair’s fits and starts, cruel brilliance disguised by erratic shifts in mood and tone, Giobanni was still taken by surprise. Clair’s hand left the gun and flashed upward with surprising speed. Fingers slid against Giobanni’s skin as Clair worked them beneath the edge of his starched collar, hand closing around the knot of his tie and *pulled*. Allowing himself to be dragged downward, the feel of sharp teeth closing on his lower lip had his eyes widening.

After a moment, Clair spoke, the ring through his lip brushing against Giobanni’s mouth. “It’s supposed to be a reward, Giobanni. Try to act pleased.”

“Clair....” Giobanni still had the gun in one hand, the other rising to press against Clair’s shoulder.

Clair bit his lip again. "Tell me," he murmured, leaning forward to speak directly into Giobanni's ear, "that you don't want this."

It wasn't something Giobanni had ever allowed himself to consider and Clair knew it. Giobanni had dedicated himself to Clair, utterly and completely and, while aware of Clair's occasional and sometimes outrageous experimentation, had taken pains never to be aware of too much - or to judge. It was dangerous for Clair to indulge himself too often and they both knew it. This, however, was crossing lines - shattering barriers, and it would be smartest, safest, for Giobanni to back away.

Giobanni said nothing, fingers tightening on Clair's shoulder, and Clair smiled at his silence. With an almost gentle bend of his head, Clair set his teeth into the lobe of Giobanni's ear. "For services rendered," he murmured, pulling back to give Giobanni that same wicked smile, fingers already working at the knot of his tie. A deceptive statement if ever there was one. "You can put the gun away." He let the tie slither easily through his fingers, knowing that Giobanni would not deny him this - and that the other man still trusted him to choose the right path for them both. "I won't let you go."

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