

“Do you know what this is?”

“Oh.. oh my god, you... you... this is... how did...”

Her hand strokes my cheek.

“Don’t ask. It wasn’t easy. Finding it took months, you know.”

“This is... I’m... but I’m not even... I’ve read
about these, online. A new one costs over...
over a thousand dollars. Vala, how did —”

She plants a soft kiss on my lips. I can feel my tears on my cheeks.

“Do you want to know what it says?”

“Please...”

When she looks away, I touch my tongue to my lips. I taste fresh berries.

“Hold on, let me find the... here it is. I couldn’t possibly memorize this. Mm.

‘Fukeba fuke

hana wa sunda zou

aki no kaze’

This says some meaning is lost in English,

but that it’s roughly:

‘Blow if you will,

fall wind; the flowers’

time has passed.’”

“That’s... I... I want to say ‘beautiful’, but...
this is... a death poem, right?”

She slides closer. Wraps her hands around my waist.

“From eighteen seventy one. Do you want to hear the story?”

“... Please.”

Her hair smells like moonflower, fragrant only at night. A secret.

“Ok. I’m not very good at this, you know.

Don’t expect your momma’s bedtime stories.”

“Oh, come on. Tell me.”

Her fingers seek out mine, pulling them to my middle.

“Fine, fine. Alright, so in eighteen sixty eight, eleven French sailors

caused a panic at the sea port of Sakai, Japan. It was an accident,
but the local Samurai were testy — a lot of fighting had happened
lately between Japan and the West. They shot the sailors.”

“Were the sailors trying to buy kitchen knives?”

She sighs. Pinches the skin on the back of my hand.

It feels good, but I don’t tell her that.

“No, stupid. Anyway. The French captain was angry, of course. He made

such a fuss that the Japanese not only paid him dearly, but agreed
to sentence the twenty samurai to death. This was enough for the
captain, who was invited to witness the execution. It would be the
first time a European saw *seppuku* in person.”

“So, they stabbed themselves with kitchen knives?”

Her voice is soothing. Comforting. I close my eyes.

“I’m about ready to stab *you* with this kitchen knife. No, they used *tantos*,

like good samurai. At least, I’m assuming. *Anyway*. The captain
watched as the first eleven samurai gutted themselves one by one.
But he couldn’t take it. Too gross, I guess. So he pardoned the
remaining nine, and they called it even.”

“... Huh. Eleven? I guess he tried to stomach it,
until they were ‘even’?”

She pulls me closer. Rests her chin on my shoulder.

“Probably. Manly man bullshit. This knife, though. It belonged to one of the

remaining nine. The samurai’s father, he was a famous smith at

this point. He had made the knife as a wedding gift. A few years after the Sakai incident, despite being pardoned, the samurai quietly excused himself to a private room. After writing that poem, he used the knife for *seppuku*. His wife found him some hours later, along with the poem. Years after, his father engraved the words in the knife, and gave it to his grandson to pass down.”

“This... this knife was... in his intestines?
That’s... this is incredible. I need to
go cook with this *right now*.”

*I smile, but my throat is swelling. I choke back more tears,
but they pour down my faces, anyway.*

“Oh, you baby. It’s not *that* sad. Pretty cool, actually. I wonder
if you can taste his liver.”

“I... it’s just... this is so... expensive,
and... I’m not even... I’m just...”

My stomach twists. Who am I, to deserve this gift? This person?

“You will. Promise me, you will. You’ll go to culinary, and you’ll be
the best damn cook in the country. None of that housewife
bullshit. A bonafide chef.”

“I... this...
...
... okay. As long as... you promise.
Promise you’ll see me through.
Promise you’ll be there when I graduate.”

*I wait. I hope for an instant response.
It doesn’t come, and I start to cry harder.
And then, she laughs.*

“Of course I will. Who else is gonna eat your crappy cooking?
Mr. Sparkles?”

* * *

Rebekkah stood slowly. Stepped back toward the counter. Dabbed her eyes on her shirt.

She never had found out what this blade cost, or how Vala had found it. Her own present, from yesterday, couldn't even compare. She knew Vala would love it, but her forty dollar trinket was no match for this gift.

Eyeing her sushi, she smiled. It was beautiful, but still not enough.

Dessert. A few weeks ago, she had learned how to make Vala's favorite dessert.

She would make it, and it would be perfect.