

## Scapegoat

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13142454) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13142454>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Explicit</a>
Archive Warnings:	<a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a> , <a href="#">Rape/Non-Con</a> , <a href="#">Underage</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Trigun</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Legato Bluesummers/Millions Knives</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Legato Bluesummers</a> , <a href="#">Millions Knives</a> , <a href="#">Vash the Stampede</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Underage Prostitution</a> , <a href="#">Underage Rape/Non-con</a> , <a href="#">Both of which are just in the opening scene and not meant to be erotic at all</a> , <a href="#">Violence and ugliness probably exceed canon</a> , <a href="#">Dark</a> , <a href="#">But with a sorta-happy ending</a> , <a href="#">Weird Biology</a> , <a href="#">Plants</a> , <a href="#">Canon - Anime</a> , <a href="#">implied BDSM</a> , <a href="#">unrequited incest</a> , <a href="#">I'm sure I'm forgetting something</a> , <a href="#">Pre-Canon</a> , <a href="#">Post-Canon</a> , <a href="#">With a smidge of episode 24</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-12-25 Words: 16,880 Chapters: 2/2

# Scapegoat

by [eliddell](#)

## Summary

Legato Bluesummers and his peculiar relationship with Millions Knives.

## Notes

This is a repost of a pair of really old 'fics from 2001. Since they occur sequentially in the same universe and the second one never did have a title, I'm folding them in together. Other than a few minor edits to the first part, I'm presenting them here exactly as they were when I posted them to MadCitML, complete with pointless song lyric quotes at the beginning and end. (What can I say? I was younger then. And no, these are not songfics.)

2001 was long before the Trigun Maximum manga was completed, and a couple of years before any of the manga had been translated into English, so this follows the anime canon only. In particular, Legato's manga origin story wasn't known to me then, although there are a few eerie parallels visible. I guess there's just no way that someone like him could have come from a pleasant background.

Part of the original author's note from 2001 follows. I have yet to repost the "EvilNeffy" story here, so don't worry if you have no idea what that's about.

### **Author's Notes:**

First of all, this story really, really disturbs me, and not in an ecchi, EvilNeffy sort of way, either. Neither my narrator nor his seme are very nice people.

Secondly, as the above indicates, this is yaoi. Furthermore, one of the early scenes contains nonconsensual oral sex. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Thirdly, the song lyric quoted at the beginning really has nothing to do with Trigun—it just seemed to fit, so I put it there.

Fourthly, I suspect that some things in here may be choppy or poorly explained. Mea culpa.

Fifthly, Trigun belongs to a whole bunch of people, none of whom is me.

[...] And I refuse to get into an argument regarding whether [Legato's] hair is blue or black.

## (Legato)

me wo dojite.  
kodomotachi wa eien wo shinjiterukedo,  
genjitsu wa ikarechimatta yoru ni karera wo kuruwaseru.  
shitteruyo. motometeita mono subete wa kyokou.

Just close your eyes.  
Children believe in eternity, but  
in actuality, the insane night drives them all mad.  
I know already. The things that you wish for. It's all just your imagination.

—'Scapegoat', by Minami Ozaki (Romanization/Translation: Evol Siren)

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The blow snapped my head back against the wall, and for a moment, everything that I saw turned to red and black.

"What were you doing in here, Rat? you're supposed to be out on the floor, working. I don't like little boys that don't work."

I hung my head and refused to look up. It wouldn't have helped, anyway. He always hated it when I talked back.

"Maybe I should just stop feeding you, eh? I'm sure you'll be out of here before you starve to death. Fact is, I don't know how you've lasted as long as you have."

The truth was that I shouldn't have. The clients didn't like boys with hair under their arms or between their legs or on their faces or chests, boys whose voices had begun to deepen, boys that were on the verge of becoming men. I'd been ruthlessly plucking hairs out every morning for quite a while now, and talking as little as possible and in as squeaky a voice as I could manage, knowing that none of us boys ever left this place alive, but I knew I wasn't going to last much longer.

I was already dead.

The thought filled me with a curious feeling of peace. I was already dead, and dead people, at least as far as I had ever been able to tell, didn't feel pain. *Only a little longer and I'll stop hurting for good.*

"But maybe if you make me feel good, I'll forget all about it for a little while."

Recognizing that as a cue, I dropped to my knees and opened my mouth, waiting patiently for him to fumble his pants open and bracing myself for the familiar, sour, unwashed taste of his cock. I'd been doing this for too long to even feel disgusted about it anymore. It was just

another one of the unpleasant things that I had to do sometimes, and at least it didn't hurt too much.

I licked the inside of my upper lip and repressed a wince as I realized that my teeth had cut into me when he'd backhanded me. Great. So this was going to sting, on top of everything else.

I managed not to gag as he thrust into me, instead forcing myself to suck on him, tonguing his shaft in the way that I knew he preferred.

"Mmmm. Oh, you're good at that, Rat. Perhaps I ought to geld you and keep you, what do you say?"

I tensed for a moment, then relaxed. *He doesn't really mean it. Less work for him just to kill me. Please, let him kill me!*

He was fucking my mouth now, hard enough to almost make me gag. *Think of something else*, I told myself. What was happening out in the main room?

I could hear people moving around out there. There were clients, then. At least, oh, a dozen, some of whom were probably only here to look at us boys and talk with their friends. Scraps of conversation drifted through the flimsy wooden wall of the storeroom.

"And I said to her, "*Honey*—""

"Yeah, the cost of bulk water has gone up by two c-cents per litre in Augusta. I think they're having trouble with their wells—"

"Hey, you can't bring that in here! All weapons are to be left at the door, just like the sign says."

The bark of a gun cut off all the other sounds, leaving an abrupt silence behind as it faded. My so-called guardian's cock wilted in my mouth, and he pulled it out, fumbling with his trousers again, stuffing himself back inside so that he could look at least half-dignified, and then running out into the main room.

More gunshots. Five more. It was so quiet outside that I could hear the sound of the brass being ejected as I swished saliva around inside my mouth and then spat, trying to get rid of the sour taste that still lingered there.

More shots, and more, until I lost count. Were they all from the same gun? I couldn't tell, but I had the strange feeling that it was so.

I crawled on my hands and knees over to the storeroom door and cautiously, slowly, stuck my head out at what would have been about knee height.

Blood. The floor was awash in crimson, bodies scattered all over. Nearest to me, three of the other boys, Red and Dick and Whisper, lay together in a pile. The man who had called himself my guardian lay on his back just beyond them, shirttails still untucked and a fold of

greyish cloth from his underwear caught in his fly. No doubt that had been hidden from him by the potbelly hanging over his waistband as he zipped himself up.

There were others—other boys, two or three of the other adult staff, several clients, most of whom I didn't recognize. Someone on the far side of the room wasn't quite dead yet, because I could hear him whimper now and again.

Only one person was still on his feet. He stood with his back to me, a smoking gun dangling loosely from his right hand. He had short hair that was very pale blonde—almost white—and he was wearing the weirdest clothes I had ever seen, some sort of one piece suit that covered his entire body.

He took a step toward the door, then another. Leaving me alone with the corpses. Leaving me alive. *No!* What had I done to deserve to live? What had I done to deserve more pain?

That thought propelled me up onto my feet and forward into the room. "Master, please . . ." I'd been calling every adult male I knew *master* for so long that the form of address came naturally, and it may have been fortunate for me that it did.

He turned, eyebrows raised. Young, unexpectedly handsome, smiling in a way that I suppose would have frightened someone who wanted to live, eyes like pools of cold blue water with an unexpected undertow at the bottom, that could drag you in and then never let you out again . . .

I swallowed. "Master, please," I repeated. "Kill me."

He laughed. "Interesting. I don't think I've ever met such obliging garbage before. In fact, I do believe that you're the first human in almost a hundred years to puzzle me. Do you really want to die that badly?"

"Yes, master."

"Why?"

"Because living hurts."

"Obliging, *intelligent* garbage." His smile widened, and he slid the gun back into the holster that hung at his hip. I bit my lip, refusing to cry. It was better not to beg or plead, or even look too eager, if you wanted something, because if they knew just how *badly* you wanted, they would find an excuse not to give it to you. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"Is . . ." My voice came out sounding hoarse. I cleared my throat and tried again. "Is there something I can do for you, master?" Perhaps I could strike a bargain with him, if there was something that he wanted that I could provide. I'd noticed already that there was a bulge just below the waist of his coverall. Perhaps he was the sort of man who got . . . excited . . . by violence. I'd known more than a few. Generally I was the one that they were violent towards, though.

"Something *you* could do for *me*?" It looked like he was about to start laughing again.

I smiled encouragingly and walked toward him with a smooth gliding motion designed to draw attention to my working clothes . . . or rather, the lack thereof. "It looks to me like that has to be uncomfortable, master," I said, touching that bulge delicately with a fingertip. "Why don't you let me take care of it for you?"

"Let me get this straight. you're offering to have sex with me if I agree to blow your brains out?"

"Yes, master."

Now he did laugh. "And here I didn't think there was anything a human could do that would surprise me. Well, I always did wonder what this sex stuff was all about. Go ahead. If I like what you do, I'll see that you die quickly and painlessly. Otherwise, I'll shoot you in the gut and leave you here to bleed to death."

"Yes, master." *At last.* One more distasteful task, and it would be over for good.

It took me a little while to figure out how to open up that suit of his, and he just stood there and smirked all the while, instead of helping. Then at last I had it unsealed from his throat all the way down to his crotch. He had a nice body, young and lithe and firmly muscled without even a hint of sagging around the waist, and as I nuzzled his groin, I discovered that he smelled pleasantly clean. *Maybe this won't be so bad . . .*

I kissed the tip of his cock, noticing as I did so that he was watching me. Perhaps he was getting a bit impatient? Immediately, I took him all the way into my mouth, and was rewarded with a soft growling sound. He tasted strange, not like anyone I'd ever done before, but it wasn't unpleasant. *This really isn't so bad.* Tentatively, I began to suck, feeling the first drop or two of his semen burning on my tongue. *Not long now.*

He growled more loudly as he came, flooding my mouth with seed that burned like cold fire. I swallowed, feeling the odd sensation of it tracing a path all the way down to my stomach. *Who is he? For that matter, what is he?*

I swallowed again, and licked his softening member clean, but the cold burning didn't stop, although it did center itself in one place in particular—the cut inside my mouth that I'd gotten when my late "guardian" had smashed me against the storeroom wall. It numbed the slight stinging pain of the injury, for which I was grateful.

I felt suddenly dizzy. *What's happening to me?* I wondered as my vision began to blur around the edges. I looked blearily up at the stranger. he'd gotten the front of his garment sealed about halfway up again. *Please,* I thought.

*Do it now.*

He stopped fiddling with his clothes and pulled his gun again, cocking it and pointing it at my head. Then he stopped and lowered it again, staring at me with a thoughtful expression on his face.

I glanced down at my hands. They were shaking, and the cold burning feeling was beginning to spread through my head. I felt very strange.

*Kill me!*

"No. Not yet."

He slung me over his shoulder like a sack of grain and carried me out of the rundown tavern-cum-whorehouse where I'd spent the past eight years of my life. The last things I remember about that night are the cold of the night air and the warmth of his shoulder against my stomach as I fought the urge to be sick.

Then the cold burning dug deeper inside me, and I was falling into icy blackness.

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I was cold when I woke up, too, lying on my back on a metal examination table without so much as a sheet to conceal my nakedness. I immediately sat up, drawing my knees up to my chin and wrapping my arms around them to try to hold in a little body heat.

My arms . . .

I stared with disquiet at a hand that was bigger than the ones I remembered, at a forearm lightly furred with black hair. Slowly, I realized that there was hair under my arms, too, and at my groin, and on my face. That last disgusted me beyond measure. I had to get rid of it. There had been this one client who had . . . *No, don't think about that. Concentrate. Need to find a razor.*

I uncurled myself a little and looked around the room. Metal walls, metal floor and ceiling, some sort of . . . console? . . . built into the far wall, with little lights blinking on and off all over its surface. *Is this a ship?*

I slid my legs over the edge of my makeshift bed, only then realizing that there were several bits of complex machinery that I didn't understand hooked up to it somehow, and began to pad around the room. There was a sink in an alcove off to the side, with a mirror above it, but there was nothing else there that could serve my purpose, so I kept on looking.

There was a sheathed knife lying on the console. Well, I probably wouldn't find anything better. I took it back to the alcove, and, after half an hour or so, I had several new shallow cuts on my face and across my throat, and there were a bunch of black hairs and bits of stubble lying in the sink. I rinsed them down the drain, then cupped my hands to gather enough water to sluice over my face.

I looked at myself in the mirror, pensively stroking my more-or-less smooth chin. Who was that stranger looking back at me? Blue-black hair straggled across his forehead and half-hid his left eye. The right eye, the visible one, was that same striking amber-gold colour that had always made me so popular with several of the clients. My hair, my eyes . . . but not my face as I remembered it. Still very beautiful, but the bones were harsher now, the eyes deeper-set . . . it was a man's face, not a boy's. The body below it . . . I ran my hands down my chest. Mature. Young, but mature. Hard and lean. A bit like the blonde man's body.

*How long was I asleep?*

"About half a year, give or take."

I spun, knife in hand. He was leaning against the frame of a door that I hadn't been able to figure out how to open, looking at me.

«Oh, please. Put that down.» He smirked at me, and it was only then that I realized that his mouth wasn't moving. «You couldn't possibly take me.» Seeing the gun that still hung, holstered, at his hip, I was inclined to agree.

"Master." I went down on one knee, bowing my head, laying the knife on the floor beside me. My voice had changed too, deepened, but my attention just then was focused on him, not myself.

«Not like that. Speak out loud to me from now on, and I'll cut your tongue out to remind you not to. Focus your thoughts. Even garbage like you should be capable of learning that much.»

I concentrated. «Master.»

«Better. Do you understand what's happened to you?»

«No, master.»

«I suppose that would have been too much to hope for. Even genetically improved garbage can't be all that bright. Do you have a name?»

«Legato, master. Legato Bluesummers.» When I strained to reach the memory, I could just barely recall someone calling me that. A woman's voice, I thought. I'd been very small. At the brothel, it had been quickly shortened from Legato to Legat to Lat to Rat, but I had clung to the original, although I didn't really understand why.

«Legato,» the blonde man repeated. «And I'm called Knives.»

*Knives.* A good name for one so deadly. It suited him.

«Stand up and let me get a look at you.»

I obeyed immediately, letting my hands dangle loosely at my sides, having had no modesty to preserve since I was a small child.

Knives examined me closely, his gloved hands poking and prodding at various parts of my body. «Hmmm. I wasn't sure you were going to recover—thought you might end up a vegetable, in fact—the neural scans were pretty inconclusive—but you seem to be all right. I'm going to have to run more tests, to see if I can figure out how much of you is still human, and how much is now . . . like me. Tell me, Legato, do you still want to die?»

«Yes, master. More than anything.»

«Good boy.» He patted my head. «Well, you will, I promise. One day. I must wipe out all the humans if my brother and I are to create our paradise, and you are still human enough. But I want to keep you with me for a while. I want you to help me kill them. Would you like that, Legato?»

«I . . . don't know, master.» The thought of wiping out people like the clients was good. It felt right. But I wasn't sure I liked the thought of killing other boys, other victims.

Knives' smirk was gone. «Think, garbage. You said yourself that living hurts. Isn't it better for them not to be in pain?»

The confusion inside me ebbed away, replaced with purpose. Yes, of course. When you thought about it, it was just so blindingly obvious that I didn't know how I'd missed it. *Of course* they would be happier dead. *Everyone* was happier dead.

«Now . . . We made a bargain. Do you remember that?»

«You promised that, if I pleased you, you would kill me quickly and painlessly,» I replied promptly.

«Yes. But you know, Legato, bargains are easy things to forget. you're going to have to make sure that I remember just how good you can make me feel.»

«Of course, master.»

It was easier to get the front of Knives' coverall open this time. Inside it, he was limp. Well, I'd had to deal with that a few times before, with clients who were too shocked or anxious or disturbed somehow to get it up promptly. I squeezed his cock gently until it began to harden, then fell to my knees and began to nuzzle and lick. I still liked the way he tasted and smelled, and as I continued my ministrations, I began to feel a warmth and a tightness in my own groin. It was almost as though I could feel a phantom mouth teasing at my crotch, doing the same sorts of things to me as I was doing to Knives . . .

*Is that it? Am I feeling what you're feeling right now? Oh . . .*

His semen wasn't like cold fire anymore. Instead, it made my mouth feel all warm and tingly, and satisfied a craving that I hadn't known I'd been feeling until it started to flow down my throat. And as I tasted it, white heat flowered between my legs, an unexpected and incredibly pleasant sensation. My hand darted downward, and I touched myself, feeling for an exquisite moment the strangeness of a hard, pulsing penis attached to my own body. Then it was over, and I felt myself begin to sag as though I were a puppet whose strings had just been cut.

«Clean this up. There are sponges in one of the drawers under the sink.»

Knives pulled his clothes back into place and left without another word, leaving me kneeling there, staring at the puddle of white fluid on the metal floor, right between the spots where his feet had been planted.

I smiled slowly and went to get a sponge.

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Knives wasn't a kind master, but he wasn't really cruel, either. It was more like he just didn't take notice of me at all except when he needed me for something. He trained and educated me in a haphazard sort of way, pointing me at books and audio recordings and files of information that he felt that I should read or listen to or view, and then left me to puzzle out for myself whether or not there was anything else that I needed to read or listen to or view first, in order to make sense out of the information. Fortunately, someone—my mother? I couldn't quite remember—had taught me the rudiments of reading when I was still very young, and while it was time-consuming at first, I did manage to puzzle my way through most of the texts I was assigned. I don't think Knives would have kept me on if he'd had to teach me how to read.

He did teach me a few hands-on physical skills, like how to shoot and how to use a knife, in sketchy lessons that I had to practice and perfect on my own. Other than that, he hardly ever touched me for anything except sex.

Sex . . .

Feeling Knives touch my body always drove me wild. On the day that I first convinced him to penetrate me anally, I broke down and cried—not because it hurt, but because it felt so very *good* and I'd been wanting him to do it for months. I craved the feeling of his body inside mine, fantasized about it, *needed* it as I had never needed anything in my life before.

And there was more. Over time, I came to crave, not only his touch, but his approval, his good will, the smile that tugged at a corner of his mouth when we discovered that I had developed an accent patterned after some of the old recordings that I had been listening to, the brief flicker of almost-warmth in those cold blue eyes when I said that *yes*, I understood now, that I had read his notes on my miraculous transformation and made some sense out of them—that I knew that there had been some bizarre, unbelievable reaction that had made his sperm go viral in my bloodstream and start rewriting parts of my DNA, turning me into something that was still part human, but also part other. Part Plant.

Like him.

Years slipped past that way. I'm not sure how many. Knives' notes had included the fact that, after the brief but intense growth spurt that had pushed me from early adolescence into adulthood, my aging rate had slowed dramatically, by a factor of something like seven to ten times. I wasn't immortal the way a Plant would be, but I had several good centuries in front of me before I got too old to be useful to Knives.

I know that he tried to duplicate me, to create an army of loyal demi-Plants to act as his assistants, but the fluke that transformed me never happened again. That was one of only two things that I ever saw make him really angry.

The other was his brother, Vash.

The love-hate relationship between the two men was oddly intense, at least on Knives' side. I never really understood it, possibly because I never had a brother of my own. I don't know when I started to get jealous of it. It might have been when Knives took me on that first

outing to test the skills of slaughter that I had learned. We walked into a particular office building in a small town near the crashed ship where we made our home, and systematically slaughtered everyone inside, finishing up in the president's office on the top floor. I used my gun with precision, making every shot count, and Knives gave me a wicked, approving smile as we surveyed the final scene of slaughter together, looking at each other over the three bodies piled together in the middle of the floor.

I don't remember which of us it was that first began to laugh. I do know that it was Knives that grabbed my arms and kissed me roughly, his teeth gnawing at my lower lip until we could both taste blood as well as smelling it and seeing it all around us.

Mere seconds later, I was bent forward across the desk with my pants down, writhing as he pounded into me, our joining lubricated with the last vital essence of the woman who had once owned this office. It was hard, fast, furious sex, lasting only a minute or two, both of us desperate for release.

Knives' growls as he came were normally inarticulate, but this time, I thought I detected a word as he spilled his essence into me. A name.

*"Vash!"*

I couldn't be sure, because it was a bare split second later that my world exploded into the white light and heat that was an orgasm, but I was somehow left feeling both shamed and jealous.

Yes, perhaps it was that late in our relationship that I started to hate Vash and the way he was treating my master. Or perhaps it began the first time I ever heard that hated name, and saw Knives' expression soften, as he spoke it, into a warmth that he would never, ever offer me. I don't know. I don't remember. And I don't care.

It wasn't long after that that Knives heard that Vash was asking about someone in July, and set off to confront his brother. Alone. I didn't quite dare ask to go with him. He was still my master, and I lived in daily fear that he would break his word, turn me away without fulfilling our bargain.

*«Legato!»*

The cry burst into my mind late one night, while I was trying to concentrate on a book about geology. That was the sort of reading that Knives had begun setting for me by then—geology, biochemistry, physics, astronomy, medicine, engineering. Normally, I devoured it all with a will, but my master's absence had made me uneasy.

The scream, and the instant of burning pain all across the front of my body that accompanied it, sent me running for the door. I was barely able to force myself to grab traveling clothes and food and a full canteen and lock everything up behind me before setting off for July at the best pace that I could manage.

Knives needed me.

It took me three days to reach the city, three days during which I heard nothing out of my master at all. To be honest, I didn't know how I had heard him the first time. Normally, we couldn't contact each other when we were more than ten miles or so apart. Perhaps agony and desperation had given his message more strength than usual.

I was worried, but not unduly so. Knives was tough. He was a Plant. He would survive whatever had happened to him.

I didn't dare let myself think that what I'd heard might have been his dying cry . . . and if it had been, why would he have screamed my name and not his beloved brother's?

I really did hate Vash.

I expected to find a city at the other end of my journey. Instead, I found a pile of rubble and more than a million human beings fighting each other for what little food and water remained there in the ruins. I had to shoot three people just to keep them from stealing my canteen, but every time I laid another body on the ground, the survivors backed away from me as though I had encased myself in a force field. Eventually, word seemed to get around, and there were no more attempts to take my water from me. At another time I might have killed them anyway, but I was here now for Knives, not for them.

I found him at the very center of the destruction, as I had somehow known I would. I sensed it when I was near him. I even knew which slabs of rubble to lift out of the way, straining, feeling as though my shoulders were going to be dragged out of their sockets by the weight.

«Master? Are you there? Master?»

«*Le . . . ga . . . to . . .*»

I scrambled frantically through the loose brick, uncovering an arm, and then realizing that it wasn't attached to anything, although it was oddly free of decay for a severed limb that had been lying here exposed to the weather for three days.

Deeper. Another arm. I dug some more, uncovered a body that was still breathing despite having been crushed under that weight of rubble, recognizing it despite the blistered and blackened skin.

«*Wa . . . ter.*»

I uncapped my canteen and tilted it, letting the precious liquid drip between those blistered lips. «There isn't much left,» I warned him, «and I doubt we can get more here. Will you be able to walk, master?»

«I think so.» Knives' tongue slid out to lick a bead of water off his lip. «Vash hit me hard, but not *that* hard. It'll be a few months before I'm entirely back to normal, though.»

I weighed the canteen as I recapped it. Little more than half full, and it would take us longer to get home than it had for me to get here. Knives was sitting up now, but he was moving stiffly, and I could feel little jabs of his pain being transmitted to me. He wouldn't be able to

move fast, and his eyes . . . I still have nightmares about what the blast had done to his eyes. He was effectively blind. I would have to lead him.

We needed help.

And we would find none anywhere in the ravening mob that filled the city. I knew that. We'd be lucky to get back out again with our supplies intact.

I helped Knives to his feet. He looked terrible, his chest blackened, clothes burnt away, other parts of his body blistered . . . How could Vash, whom he claimed to *love*, do such a thing to him? What kind of monster *was* my master's brother?

«The arm.» Knives pointed a shaking finger at the severed appendage that I had first uncovered. «Vash's arm. Bring it.»

I stuffed it into my pack. *Vash's arm*. Well, at least my master's pain had not gone completely unavenged.

We limped together down a pile of rubble and up the other side. At the bottom of the second hill, one of the humans approached us, eyes very obviously on my canteen.

«Get back,» I ordered him, then drew in a breath to try again a moment later, when I realized that I had projected my mind at him as I would have done with Knives, instead of speaking aloud. But to my surprise, the man's eyes glazed over, and he backed away until he fetched up against the remains of a wall, and even then he was still trying to walk backwards.

Seized by a suspicion, I ordered him, «Act like a chicken.»

He bent his elbows, planted his hands in his armpits, and began to cluck, eyes still glazed.

Knives and I left town in the company of four sturdy young human males. They helped me half-carry my master along until, one by one, they dropped dead from lack of food and water and rest. *Weak*, I thought as I kicked one fresh corpse in the ribs. *Hopelessly weak*. Knives was still on his feet despite his injuries, and neither he nor I had had more than a swallow or two of water since leaving July, and yet it was the humans who were dropping like flies. Granted, I hadn't offered them my canteen, but nevertheless . . .

The fourth survived until we reached our home, and I released him from my spell just before I keyed the door open. He immediately collapsed to his knees, and then to his stomach, clawing at his throat in an agony of thirst.

"You understand that being alive means being in pain now, don't you?" I asked him. "Good."

I shot that nameless human in the gut and left him there to bleed to death. It seemed fitting, somehow. He hadn't amused me.

I took Knives to the old infirmary and began the time-consuming task of hooking him up to diagnostic machines that didn't always quite work properly on his unhuman body.

«Vash's arm,» he told me as I worked. «Put it in the stasis box for now. When I've recovered, there's something I'm going to want you to do with it.»

---

Six months later, I was the one in the infirmary, lying on the familiar metal examination table and feeling the painless vibration of the bone saw that was finishing the work of severing my left arm.

*Somehow, when you told me that you wanted to keep Vash's arm, this wasn't quite what I envisioned you doing with it.*

He'd been smiling that strange smile at his as he looked down at me where I was cuffed to the bed, my body aching pleasantly from the first sex I'd had in weeks. He hadn't wanted to touch me until he was completely, scarlessly, healed.

*—Only you can take Vash's place for me, Legato, even for just a little while. That's why I need you to do this. Your cells are enough like ours that there's no chance of tissue rejection, and it will help us track him, help us keep an eye on him. Depending on how well it works, it might even make you a bit more like us. Wouldn't you like that?*

What could I have said but yes? The only thing I wanted in life was to make myself less human. More like Knives. More worthy of him.

I felt bone grate against bone as the machines fitted Vash's arm into place against my stump. Then they began the tedious work of putting me back together again. Each layer of tissue, each muscle, each tendon, had to be individually fused together in the correct order, or I was going to be crippled.

At last, at last, the machines bonded the skin together, leaving an angry red mark behind to divide my pale skin from Vash's, essentially the same colour but slightly more tanned. I willed the hand to form a fist. The fingers twitched as though they'd forgotten exactly what it was like to be under the command of a brain, then gave in and followed the order I'd given them.

I worked with that arm as the machines released the restraints that had held me motionless against the table and deactivated the devices that had numbed the relevant part of my body. It obeyed promptly, as though it had always been where it was. As the machines took my old arm away to be disposed of, I laid both my hands in my lap. Almost the same, the right a little paler and wider, with black hairs on the back, while the new left was slightly tanned and narrower and furred with near-invisible blonde.

«How do you feel?» Knives wandered into my field of vision and perched on a stool beside the table on which I sat.

«No different, really, master.»

«Oh? Here, take this. In your left hand.»

I hesitated, then accepted the heavy black pistol that rode at his hip. I'd never touched it before. When he'd taught me how to shoot, he had used a different gun.

Knives' eyes narrowed, and the cover popped off what I'd thought was a block of solid metal mounted over the barrel. Inside was something like a rod made of concentrated light.

My new hand felt very strange. I stared, fascinated, as its flesh merged with the metal of the gun. I could feel it changing into something that—

A nova of agony erupted in my upper arm, and I bit my lip to muffle a cry of protest. The transformation had reached the red mark that divided my flesh from the bit of Vash that my master and I had just recycled, and my own cells couldn't quite manage to do what Vash's were doing, although I could feel them trying. I clutched at my arm with my other hand and tried not to scream as the pain of the incomplete transformation went on and on and on.

«Enough.» I'd never been quite so happy to feel Knives' voice, not even when I had dug him out of the rubble. My arm was suddenly just an arm again, and the gun was just a gun, and my master pried it gently from between my fingers. «We'll try again in a couple of weeks. Perhaps that worthless half-human body of yours can be taught a few new tricks, although I suspect that bonding properly with a weapon will always be beyond you.»

Damn Vash, anyway. If he were going to lose an arm, he could at least have had the decency to lose the *entire* arm and part of the shoulder, too.

«Mmmm.» Knives' fingers were playing lightly over my knuckles, over my left wrist, exploring my new arm. Suddenly, he reached up and unsealed his clothing, guiding my left hand to his crotch. «Here, Legato. Touch me with my brother's hand. Be Vash for me, this once.»

Obediently, I squeezed and massaged his hardness, feeling a familiar echo between my own legs, but my thoughts were dark.

*Damn you, Vash.*

---

It was after that that Knives began to send me out, now and again, to search for his brother. It was slow, careful work. I had to visit every town, every village on the planet, and even though I needed less food and less rest than a human would, that still took a very long time.

I saw him first in the city of December, halfway around the world from home, after more than a decade of searching. Except that I didn't know that it was him. The only pictures of Vash that Knives had been able to show me dated from when they had been children together, and although he had described the changes, told me about Vash's preferred clothing and hairstyle and the gun that he would be carrying, I still couldn't believe that the guy in the red coat who was scarfing down donuts in front of a vendor's stall in the market could possibly be *him*. He looked . . . so very human. But still, he was the first person I had met with the right kind of hair and coat and gun, so I followed him for a while, just so that I could be certain that he *wasn't* Vash.

That was the biggest mistake I had made since I had met up with Knives. I should have known. I would have, if I had been paying attention, because the very moment I spotted him, I experienced the strange tingly feeling that was all the tiny hairs on my left arm simultaneously standing up on end. But it wasn't until I had seen him face down eight thugs in a bar and take them all out *without killing them* that I understood that this was really *him*. The sixty million double-dollar man. The Humanoid Typhoon.

My nemesis.

Vash the Stampede.

I stayed in the bar for long enough to watch him get plastered and pass out on the floor, then left by the back door.

This was my master's brother? This horrible, weak creature was the only being on the planet that Knives genuinely loved?

*My hands are shaking. When did that start?* I slid them into the pockets of my coat, where I let them clench into fists. *Why, Knives, why? Why do you love someone who's so unworthy of you, while I . . .*

I wanted to tear Vash apart. I wanted to rip all of his limbs off, one by one, and substitute them for my own, until I *became* him, became not-human, and Knives would look at *me* with that warmth in his eyes that he normally reserved for memories of his brother . . .

"Hey, pretty boy! Get outta here! This is a private party!"

I had been so distracted by my own thoughts that I hadn't even realized that I wasn't alone in the alleyway. Two men, and a woman . . . no, a girl . . . one of them holding her while the other unfastened his pants.

"Hey, I'm talking to you! Are you listening to me? We ain't gonna share, understand me?"

I smiled. *Eager to die, are you? Well, that is the natural order of things, after all.*

"I want you to take out your gun," I said, both aloud and with my mind, to the man who was fumbling with his trousers. "I want you to point it at your head. And now you're going to pull the trigger."

Blood and brains and fragments of skull and bits of hair splattered all over the other man and the girl, both of whom were too frightened to move. I admired the artistic effect for a moment before I turned my concentration to the second man.

«Let her go. Don't try to talk.»

He released the girl and took a step back, mouth working silently. His trousers were soaked. Apparently, his fear had made his bladder let go. *How very human. And how crude.*

«Now reach inside your chest and crush your heart.» It was a manoeuvre I had only tried once before, with a gang of bandits that I'd met outside the ruins of July, but it had worked

just beautifully then, and it did so now, also. I enjoyed the look of total panic in the man's eyes as his body moved against his will and snuffed his life out. *Don't worry. you'll feel better soon.*

I considered the girl, who was staring at me, eyes wide. She was about the same age as I had been when I had first met Knives. *No*, I decided, acting on some inexplicable instinct. *Not her. Not yet.*

I walked past her without another glance, ignoring her pleas to *wait*, to *stay*, as she found her voice. I had no further interest in her.

I filled my canteen at the nearest fountain and then headed for the edge of town. Now that I knew where Vash was, I should be able to track him easily enough, and Knives had to know.

It wasn't until I was several miles out of town that I realized I was being followed by someone—a mounted someone. A pursuer on foot I would have ignored, since there was no way that a human could maintain the punishing pace that I set for myself for more than a day or so, but this was a slightly different situation.

I stopped in my tracks and turned, waiting for the stranger to catch up.

As she got closer, I realized that this wasn't a stranger after all. It was that girl from the alley.

She stopped her mount a yard or so away from me. I waited.

"I wanted to say thank you," she said at last.

"I didn't kill those men for you." Idly, I considered my options. Should I kill her or ignore her, send her back to town or paralyze her on the spot to die of hunger and thirst? The possibilities were endless.

"Still, you probably saved my life. I'm Dominique."

"Legato Bluesummers. If you have nothing further to say to me, I have somewhere else that I need to be." I turned away from her and began walking again.

Somehow, I wasn't at all surprised when she nudged her mount forward to follow me. Inwardly, I shrugged. She was nothing to me either way. Eventually she'd get tired of this, and go somewhere else, especially if I continued ignoring her.

I was wrong. Wrong for the second time in less than eight hours. She followed me all the way back to Knives' stronghold, and when I told my master about her persistence, he decided that we might have a use for her after all.

Dominique the Cyclops, first of the Gung-Ho Guns. I developed her eye myself. A simple enough device, once you understood the principles.

Eventually, others joined her. Chapel. Midvalley. Grey. My creations, just as I was Knives' creation. My servants, just as I was his servant. My loyal human henchmen.

They're all dead now, of course. They were never meant to survive tangling with Vash the Stampede.

But still, they were such very useful tools, and so easily manipulated . . . I remember the look on Dominique's face when she first saw me with Knives, first realized that he was more than just my master, and that I would never cleave to her. It twisted her so nicely, showed her for the first time that life really *is* pain.

She was too blind to see that Knives didn't really care about me any more than I cared about her, that all he ever saw me as was a body that would carry out his plans and serve as a willing receptacle for his lust.

He has always reserved his love, his caring, for one person only, and that person isn't me.

Damn you, Vash.

Knives loves you so deeply, and you don't even realize it. And for that, you're going to suffer.

You're still hesitating, aren't you? Come on, shoot that gun. I promised Knives that you would suffer for what you did to him, for all the pain that you've caused him. Life is pain, I know that—in fact, I spend my time showing that particular dimension of the truth to others—but why do you have to cause him more suffering? He doesn't deserve it. Why weren't you there for him when he needed you, Vash? Why did you make him turn to someone who could never be more than a very distant second-best to him?

He's a great man, a wonderful man. He just wants what's best for us all. Doesn't the thought of a place without pain or suffering attract you at all? That's all he ever wanted to create. That's what I wanted to *help* him create, but it wasn't my help that he wanted.

It was yours.

And you failed him.

Come on, damn you. Pull that trigger. Learn the true meaning of life. Or shall I teach it to those girls instead? Yes, let's have that villager over there, the big one, kick them again. Ah, you don't like that, do you? Your finger's beginning to tighten. Good.

He promised me, you see. Promised me an end to all the pain. It wasn't until recently that I realized that that end could only come at your hands. Knives seems to take a bizarre interest in keeping me alive, and you're his brother, his mirror, like and yet opposite. You were the one who had to become my death.

Come on, damn you, *shoot*. End my pain. Or shall I use one of your friends to provide you with a little incentive? The one with the shorter, darker hair, perhaps? Or the other one? Which one do you worry about the most?

Yes, that's the way. Go on. Kill me, and then go to him. He needs your he—

# (Knives)

## Chapter Notes

Original author's note from 2001—note that this was originally posted as a separate story, several months after the original *Scapegoat*:

I really would have been quite happy to go the rest of my life without learning what Millions Knives thinks of as a happy ending. This takes place in the same universe as "Scapegoat", but after the end of the Trigun television series. I am not responsible for Knives' opinions, actions, or sexual practices. He and Vash and Meryl and Millie and Legato aren't even mine—they belong to a bunch of other people, including (but not limited to) Yasuhiro Nightow. This story contains explicit yaoi, among other things.

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Outside the window, sand was piling up against the wall of the house, blown in by the wind.

I paced.

"You look like that video clip that Rem showed us once—the caged tiger. Do you remember?"

«What do you expect?» I snapped back, refusing my brother an answer to his question. «I *am* in a cage.»

"Knives—"

«Shut up, Vash.» Why couldn't he understand? He'd defeated me—my weak, sentimental brother had *defeated* me—and then hadn't even had the decency to kill me. Instead he and those human girls who followed him around had brought me here, to this abandoned, ramshackle building in the middle of nowhere, and had been keeping me under effective house arrest ever since. Oh, I could have run away, on foot across the desert, without any supplies or any idea of where I was going, but I was smart enough to know that that would be suicide, especially since the gunshot wounds he'd given me still pained me. I had to wait patiently for his vigilance to relax. The moment he left their water supply unguarded, or I had some idea of where the nearest town was, I would be gone.

I could feel him standing there, watching me. Pretending to ignore him, I made two more circuits of the room, but my feet were slowing now, and I came to a stop by the window.

The landscape outside was desolate—dunes and more dunes, as far as the eye could see. Typical of this world, this barren, blasted wasteland to which I had consigned the last of the human race all those years ago.

*If you had to do it all over again, would you?*

I wasn't sure anymore. I wasn't sure of *anything* anymore. Vash had destroyed my world.

*I was supposed to be the stronger one.*

But I wasn't.

And that galled me.

"You're not a prisoner here." He had come up beside me and put his hand on my shoulder. I shivered, but couldn't quite bring myself to flinch away. This was what I had wanted for all those years, wasn't it? Him by my side?

«Don't give me that. You don't trust me. You'd have to be the worst kind of fool in order to do so. I still believe that what I was trying to do was right, Vash. Despite everything.»

"Then you really haven't learned anything over the past hundred and thirty years."

«What is there to learn? Humans are vicious animals who kill their own young. They're abominations and they should be wiped out.»

"Oh? And yet you hired a bunch of them to do your dirty work for you."

«That was different.»

"How? Because they were crazy?"

«Because they were mine,» I corrected sharply. «Legato and I created them for a purpose. They were his idea, really, but I can't say that they didn't do their jobs well.»

"Are you telling me that you actually took advice from a *human*? Funny, I thought you considered that beneath you."

«He wasn't just a human! He was—»

And there I stopped, hands slowly clenching into fists, seeing, not the desert outside the window, but a dark-haired, golden-eyed ghost. *Legato* . . .

"So you admit that they aren't all worthless after all."

I smiled, and Vash took his hand off my shoulder and moved half a step back, evidently not liking my expression.

«He wasn't just a human,» I repeated. «He was part Plant. Like us. And he wanted nothing more than to leave his humanity behind forever, but I was never able to figure out how to complete what I had accidentally begun.»

"Knives . . ."

«I might as well tell you the story, I suppose,» I added, leaning on the windowsill. «Perhaps you'll have some insight that I didn't.»

It tumbled out in a rambling monologue of events and thoughts and hopes and fears that encompassed fully a third of my life. The boy who had stood calmly in front of me and demanded his own death. The man he had become. Our peculiar relationship, described in a few spare words that wouldn't tell my soft-hearted and slightly prudish brother more than he really wanted to know.

"You miss him, don't you?" Vash asked when I was finally done. "Even though he was more of a . . . a pet . . . to you than a person."

I shrugged. «It's possible to feel affection for a pet. Even I'm willing to admit that.» I deliberately didn't answer the question he had asked, not quite willing to lie to my brother, but at the same time, not willing to admit my weakness.

Of *course* I missed him. Especially when I woke up late at night with an itch in my cock, one that I could never relieve for long by scratching it myself. Vash might have been able to help me there, but I knew better than even to suggest it. The very idea would completely disgust him, just as the way he rutted with that little human bitch of his disgusted me.

Silence, both within and without, for a long moment, then, "If you haven't been able to figure out what made Legato different from the other humans that you tried to . . . alter . . . maybe what you need is more data on other Plants. Maybe it wasn't Legato himself that was significant, but the way that he combined with you."

I grunted. «And how would you suggest that I pursue such a line of research? The only other Plant that I have access to is you, and we have no equipment here.»

"Actually, I was going to suggest that we take a little trip. To Inepril. I saved their city by preventing a Plant explosion a while back, so they shouldn't object to us poking around a bit."

«Why?» I didn't bother to elaborate, certain that he would understand the question I was asking.

"Because you need something to do. It isn't healthy for you to be cooped up in here all the time, just staring out the window."

I laughed. I just couldn't help it.

«How can you trust me not to blow the city up? Or even just run away from you?»

"You could have blown up that city any time in the past several decades, Knives. You had the Angel Arm and you knew how to use it. I wonder if you really want to slaughter all of humanity as badly as you think you do."

«I was waiting to get you back. It isn't much of a paradise if you have to live in it alone.»

"Exactly."

I turned to face him. He was smiling gently at me. I wasn't sure if it was because he thought he had said something profound, or because he thought *I* had.

I waited for him to answer my second question, then frowned as I realized that I had already answered it for him, in a way.

Snarling, I turned away from him, but I could feel the warmth of his hand as he laid it on my shoulder again.

"It's going to take me a little while to get everything ready, but we'll leave in three days."

---

I did try to behave myself. The lingering pain from the shots I'd taken in the shoulders and thighs was an excellent reminder of why I didn't want to annoy Vash. But after three weeks of travel with those two human girls that my brother insisted on bringing along, I just couldn't take it anymore.

We were eating lunch in a run-down, inexpensive restaurant of the type that Vash seemed to favour when some unkempt, overweight human, moving too fast in the confined space, slammed into the side of my chair and almost knocked me over.

"Hey, sorry, man!"

He tried to move away, but I had him by the wrist.

"'Sorry' isn't good enough." I said it in a soft, flat voice as I pushed my chair back and stood up, never letting him go. "You're going to regret that you did that."

"Knives . . ."

I ignored my brother, concentrating all my attention on the man who had run into me. He was pale now, and I could smell the sour scent of sweat as I smiled at him.

"You're going to take hours to die," I crooned, and tightened my grip on him savagely. Everyone was staring at us, and the crack of breaking bone was loud in the sudden silence.

"That's enough, Knives."

"Shut up," I snarled, barely hearing the soft click of someone off to my left cocking a gun. I didn't want to let go of my intended victim, so instead I exerted my considerable strength and swung us both around as a shot was fired.

The man whose wrist I was holding made a soft, terrible sound as the bullet tore through his shoulder and his greyish shirt began to turn crimson. The bullet missed me, but the force of the shot spattered the side of my face with blood.

"I said, that's *enough*!" Iron hands gripped my upper arms, pulling me away. I cursed and fought, but it wasn't enough—Vash had the better leverage. "Knives, what in *hell* did you think you were just doing?"

"You wouldn't understand." My victim had passed out on the floor, with blood pooling under his shoulder. Such a beautiful image. Hypnotic, almost. I swiped the edge of my hand across my face, then licked it clean, enjoying the tang of copper and salt.

I had committed my first act of murder in order to precipitate the destruction of humanity, but I had continued to kill in the bloodiest and most brutal fashion possible because I had discovered that I enjoyed it. It excited me. It aroused me, although that was as much pain as pleasure now, when I had no one to relieve the tension for me.

I paid no attention to Vash's subsequent conversation with the restaurant's owner. Such matters were beneath my notice. But I did watch my brother, imagining the lean, scarred body that his clothing concealed. To touch, to be touched . . . that was all I wanted now, and it frustrated me that I couldn't force him to come to me.

---

I should have felt satisfied when I went to bed that night. I had defied Vash and had a chance to release my violent impulses, and had received nothing worse than a lecture as a result. Furthermore, I was alone. Those few minutes before Vash came to bed were, I had discovered over the past few weeks, the only time they would let me have to myself. As usual, we had taken a two-room suite in the ratty, run-down hotel, and they were talking out in the main room, leaving me to my own devices because I couldn't get out of the bedroom or even talk to anyone without going past them first.

Of course, those few minutes were also the only time I had in which to get any sleep. Vash snored, and the early-morning donut deliveries that he insisted on normally woke me shortly after I had managed to get to sleep despite the noise he was making.

"Damnit, Vash, how can you say that! He's . . . not normal."

The voice wasn't particularly loud, but then the door was flimsy, and my hearing is more than human-acute. There are a few disadvantages to being a superior being.

"Neither am I, Meryl."

"That isn't what I meant. You're . . . different . . . but Knives is dangerous. I don't know how you've managed to share a room with him for this long without getting yourself killed, or . . . worse."

"Worse? What are you saying?"

"After the fight today. Didn't you notice? He was . . ." Her voice became softer for a moment, too soft for me to make out what she was saying, although I was now straining to do so. "And he was looking at you."

"You can't be serious. He's my brother, Meryl. He could never do such a thing."

"I'm not so sure. Why have you kept him with us so long, anyway? He's a vicious, inhuman *monster* who wants nothing better than to kill everyone around him, except maybe you . . . and I'm not even too sure about that. I don't want him near the baby, Vash."

*Baby?* Oh, that was just too much. I knew he'd been fucking her, but a hybrid child? Disgusting concept, even if it turned out to be possible.

"I'd say that was Millie's decision to make, and not yours or mine."

"Millie has enough on her shoulders right now. It's just so difficult to believe that he left her pregnant . . ."

I relaxed. *Not* Vash's child after all, but the child of his bitch's friend and that student of Chapel's . . . Wolfwood? Was that the name?

"But I still wish that you'd . . . do something . . . about Knives."

"What would you suggest? I'm not going to kill him, and I doubt I could lock him up securely enough to keep him out of the way for more than a few years. I keep hoping that if I show him enough, if I make it clear to him that humans are people and deserve to be saved . . ."

"Vash, he's psychotic."

"I don't think so. Driven, yes. Frightened, yes. But crazy? No."

I shoved the corner of my pillow into the corner of my mouth to smother my laughter. *Ah, Vash, Vash. I don't think I'm crazy, but by your standards, I'm totally and completely out of my mind. I commit what you consider to be the most heinous of sins, the taking of lives, without a second thought, and I enjoy it. I enjoy being evil. And if that isn't madness, I don't know what is.*

---

It took us almost two months to get to Inepril. Vash and I could have covered the distance alone in half the time, even on foot, but his women needed more food and water and rest than any Plant. I spent a lot of time pacing and staring out into the desert. Now it was my hip, bare of its accustomed weapon, that itched, and not my groin. Vash had the gun hidden in his false arm, at least, and the girls each had their firearms, but I had nothing, not even a club. And I wasn't fool enough to ask them to give me anything, either.

The relief produced by our arrival at the city was short-lived. It had been a long, long time since I had been in the presence of such a sheer mass of humanity. It made my skin crawl. The streets were so crowded that a lot of them actually *brushed against* me, and I had to dig my nails into my palms until they bled to stop myself from grabbing someone's gun and committing mass murder. Unless you counted Legato, the last human that I had voluntarily permitted to touch me was Rem, and that had been mostly for Vash's sake.

*The Plant. Remember, you need to see the Plant.*

Vash shared a room with me again at the hotel he chose. It was clear that the people of Inepril hadn't forgotten him—our lodgings were free, and any restaurant that we walked into with him set its best in front of us without asking and without demanding any payment in return. But it took him three days to secure us admittance to the Plant—not because he wasn't trusted, but because the only people who could give us permission were out of town or

otherwise unavailable—and during that time, I came close to beating him senseless more than once, not that he didn't always behave like he was senseless to begin with.

*Is this really what I wanted for all those years?* I wondered, staring morosely out the window just as the sun was rising one morning, woken by a combination of the noises that Vash was making and a raging erection that I couldn't even assuage by touching myself, for fear that Vash would notice the sticky wetness on the sheets afterwards and comment. *Did I really want Vash back, or did I just want an imitation Vash, an obedient little doll that behaved the way I thought it should behave?*

I had no answers for myself. I was still sitting there when Vash stirred and woke.

"You know, Knives, you're beginning to worry me."

«Oh? I can't imagine why.»

"It's like you've lost all your enthusiasm for life . . ."

«Really? Maybe it was realizing that what I thought I wanted from life just didn't quite fit.» More than I had really meant to say, but . . .

"What do you mean?"

«I thought I wanted my brother back, but I'm fairly sure now that the man I thought was my brother never existed.»

"I'm sorry."

I gave him a bleak smile. «And that's exactly the problem. You're *sorry*. Just like a damned human. I don't know you anymore, Vash. I thought I did, but I don't.»

"And I don't think I ever knew you at all." The comment seemed to be addressed more to the far wall than to me.

«Then we're even.» Except that he had everything he wanted, and I had nothing that I wanted anymore . . . «Why didn't you just kill me? Legato proved to you that you were capable of it, and this world would be a much safer place without a Knives in it, don't you think?»

"Rem made me promise to look after you. It didn't seem to me that killing you would fulfill that promise."

I snorted. «Rem Saverem. Even from beyond the grave, she can't help but interfere in my affairs.»

"She was as much of a mother to you as she was to me."

«No, she wasn't.» Had he really been that blind? «You were her favorite, Vash. She loved you. I was just part of the package.

«I didn't have any parents. I was conceived in a test tube and born from a tank. *We were made to be tools, damn you!* And by helping the humans, you're playing right along with that.»

"Knives . . . You're wrong."

«Oh, am I? You'll see, Vash. One day, you'll see.»

"I really doubt that. Now, if you don't mind, I need to get dressed before Millie and Meryl come looking for us."

The atmosphere between us remained strained for quite a while after that. We spoke as little as possible. Even when I was examining the Plants, using the equipment in the control rooms to run scans that I doubt that the humans had ever dreamed were possible and decanting the results into a data storage module that I had appropriated, Vash was barely willing to look at me, much less talk to me, and I had nothing at all to say to him until the time came for us to leave Inepril. I needed to go home, back to the crashed ship that I had turned into a fortress, and while I hated to have to beg him for the privilege, I would if that was the only way.

He agreed more readily than I had expected, and we booked rooms on a sand steamer headed in about the right direction. I didn't know where he had gotten the money, and didn't feel inclined to ask. His girls didn't seem all that happy with the idea, either, but they went along with it for some strange, human reason that I'm sure seemed rational to them.

The human-built mechanical conveyance was noisy and dirty and stank of too many of those miserable creatures packed in too close a proximity to one another, but at least it cut our travel time in half. It was barely three weeks later that we descended from it at a small town halfway between the old site of July and the more recent site of Augusta. The trek out into the desert took four more days, lengthened by the fact that we were taking humans out into an area where there was no water or shelter and allowances had to be made.

"You lived *here*?"

I sighed in exasperation as I keyed the automatic defenses off. "We lived here." My voice sounded rusty from disuse. I couldn't remember the last time I had spoken aloud, but unlike Vash, this human bitch couldn't hear me any other way.

Familiar metal corridors, familiar soft lighting. I relaxed just a hair as the feeling of *home* washed over me.

"Take any rooms you like in this area," I told the others. "They're all vacant now."

"Where are you going?" Vash asked. I could see the two women looking the same question at me, although they didn't quite dare voice it.

"To get some rest." Before any of them could say anything, I stepped through a door and slapped the control twice, for quick closure and lock, leaving them on the other side.

When I reached my destination, I gently lowered the battered, temperamental old data storage unit that I had brought from Inepril onto one of the padded seats in the control room, then

stripped off my clothes and flung them over the other.

As always, sliding into the Plant tank eased me in a way that I couldn't describe, as though I was an amphibious creature finally returning to the water where I had been spawned. I smiled slightly as I floated down into the lurid blue fluid.

There were no amphibians on this world. None at all. By my choice.

Whether Vash liked it or not, I and I alone had chosen the destiny of all the Earth species that had been transplanted to this world, because I had chosen the world itself. Had chosen the destiny of all those species save humanity, which had a bad habit of choosing its own path without asking permission first . . .

I woke twelve hours later, feeling refreshed, the bullet holes in my shoulders and thighs finally no longer aching, the scars gone. I took a quick shower and then seated myself, still naked, at one of the computer terminals to read in the data I had brought with me. Normally that would have been an automatic procedure, but the equipment was very old now and had to be carefully monitored. I couldn't even remember when the external reader had last been used. I thought Legato had needed it for one of his botanical projects, but that had been a while ago . . .

Restlessness got the better of me after a while, and I rose to pace, my feet eventually carrying me out into the corridor and down it to a certain room. Like all those in this place, the door opened to my touch, although I had given him permission, years ago, to lock it against me if he wished.

The bed was still rumpled, and a gun lay half-dissected on the desk with its cleaning kit beside it, near a battered sketchpad that had begun to yellow around the edges. A dog-eared book—really a hardcopy printout of something from the computer—lay open on the bedside table, beside a pair of handcuffs. The walls were bare of any ornamentation except a handful of sketches. Most of them were of me, some of them involving poses that would have made Vash blush. The closet held nothing but a couple of bodysuits, and the survival gear that would normally have cluttered one corner was gone. It looked empty, but really, it had always been empty. Always.

I padded over to the desk and picked up the sketchbook. The first few pictures were like the ones on the walls—that is, mostly of me and mostly erotic. *Very* erotic, enough so to make me wish fervently that the man who had drawn them was here now, instead of lying in an unmarked grave somewhere out in the general direction of Augusta . . . assuming that anyone had even bothered to bury him. Vash would have, but I doubted he'd been in any condition to dispose of the body, and if it had been left to the girls or the townsfolk, they might have done anything from just let the desert take him to hacking him to pieces and displaying his head on a pole in front of their town hall . . .

"I never knew you were such a talented artist."

«Not me,» I replied. «Legato. Were you working on the security system all night?»

"Pretty much," Vash admitted casually, glancing around the room. "You did a good job of setting it up, and it wasn't easy to break into. Huh. Whoever would have thought that a guy like Legato Bluesummers had such an interesting hidden abil—" It must have registered on him about then exactly what was *in* those pictures, because he blushed bright red and looked down—and then just as quickly looked up again. "Uh, Knives . . . Is there a reason why you're wandering around naked?"

«Yes. Specifically, because I didn't feel like getting dressed. What's the matter, Vash? Am I making you uncomfortable?» Ah, he was cute when he blushed that way. So cute that he made me ache for the touch of skin on skin . . .

I took a step forward, forcing my brother back, leaning in towards him so that my arms were braced against the wall on either side of him.

"Uh, I think I'd better be going now, so if you'll just—*Mmph!*"

I took my time, biting at his lower lip and exploring his mouth with my tongue, grinding my crotch against his all the while.

«Knives, you crazed pervert, what do you think you're *doing?*»

«Well, normally it's a preliminary to fucking someone's brains out, b—*Aaaah!*»

Just as I felt him begin to respond to my touch, his knee came up and I folded over it with a hoarse, agonized cry. I remained there, bent at the waist and clutching at myself, as he walked to the door that separated the control area from the rest of the ship.

"I *really* never knew you at all, did I?" There was an odd note of wonder in his voice. "I knew you were capable of murder, even genocide, but somehow I never thought you would stoop to rape, or to incest, or to . . ." He was blushing again. I could see it even through the tears of pain that clouded my eyes.

«I think the word you're looking for is probably "sodomy",» I told him, «and it's actually quite a bit of fun. You ought to try it sometime.» I smiled despite my agony when I saw that I was making him uncomfortable again, then quickly sobered. «Vash, I wouldn't have done that to anyone else. Only to you. Because I can feel us drifting farther apart with every moment that we spend together, and I want to close the gap. I want to be close to you again.» Lie? Truth? I wasn't sure myself. All I knew for certain was that my body was hungry, and that I could never satisfy that hunger with anyone but another Plant. I'd kill myself before I'd commit the kind of bestiality that Vash was indulging in.

"Even if I believed you were sincere, it wouldn't make you any less of a . . . oh, never mind."

*So you've decided that I'm a monster, too,* I thought as the door slid shut behind him. *Why am I not surprised? Humans always make monsters of things they can't understand, and you've become almost entirely human, haven't you, Vash?*

*I understand now. I've lost you for good.*

*I'm alone.*

---

They were gone when I left the tank again twelve hours later, once more refreshed and healed. I wasn't sorry to see the last of them, although I was curious as to why Vash had been willing to leave me here alone. Oh, well. It wasn't as though I was going to go anywhere. I was home now, and I had work to do. It would be relaxing not to have any humans around.

Or so I thought.

After a few days, I found myself tiptoeing around the ship, as though I was afraid of waking some beast that slumbered deep inside its bowels. I forced myself to curb that behaviour whenever I noticed it, but a few hours later, I'd just find myself doing it again.

The truth was that the ship just felt empty without Legato there. I'd gotten used to hearing his footsteps in the hallways, of finding him standing there behind me in the doorway at odd moments, that empty little smile of his changing to a satisfied half-smirk as I rose to my feet and went to join him. Granted, he had been absent for long periods before, but somehow I found the knowledge that he was never coming back oppressive.

I took to wandering the empty outer ring of the ship, stopping now and again to stare out a window into the desert. I was becoming addicted to that barren landscape in some bizarre, subtle way that I couldn't fully articulate. Maybe it was just because it reflected the way that I felt.

*I was ready to kill Vash. Why does it matter so much that he hates me now?*

I threw myself into my research. Data on six Plants: myself, Vash, and the four from Inepril. Data on almost two dozen unsuccessful human conversion attempts. Data on Legato. Almost at once, I had found several points of correlation between my and Legato's DNA that weren't common to any of the other humans or Plants except Vash, but I still wasn't sure why, or even if, those were significant. Tests on the remaining tissue and blood samples from Legato, and on my own tissue, blood, and semen. And, at very long last, success. Isolation and extraction of the genes that differed between Plant and human, effective reconstruction of the pseudoviral vector that had allowed some of them to cross over into Legato's system.

After I'd used the computer to write up my results, I found myself staring at a blank screen, but instead seeing a delicate, gossamer web spread against green, green grass.

*I thought I was killing spiders to save butterflies, when what I was really doing was murdering caterpillars . . .*

*No. Some of them are still spiders. Steve was.* I had to hold on to that. I just hadn't been careful enough. I'd murdered spiders and caterpillars and, yes, even a few butterflies, indiscriminately. *And I'm not going to make that mistake again.*

I'd told Vash that there was no point in living in an empty paradise, and the world I sought to create had just gained a few more inhabitants. That was all.

*What's wrong with me? Are these . . . tears?* I couldn't remember ever having cried before. It just wasn't my way.

*Legato. Remember, all those years ago, when you were reluctant to exterminate all of humanity and I talked you into it? Well, it looks like you were right after all.*

I still wanted to be rid of them, of the garbage, but I understood now that wholesale destruction wasn't the answer. I would have to examine them, person by person, winnow through them until I knew which of them deserved to enter the chrysalis and be transformed, and which deserved only oblivion. It would take a long, long time, but then, I *had* a long, long time.

"Knives."

I whirled. «Damnit, Vash, don't *do* that to me! How long have you been here?»

"Just a few minutes. Look, I—"

«For that matter, *why* are you here?» I added. «I thought you'd washed your hands of me.»

"There's something that I have to show you."

«Well, then, go on.»

"It's in a town about three hundred iles from here. Please, Knives, it's important."

I gave him a suspicious look . . . but Vash had never lied to me, any more than I had ever really lied to him. We might hold diametrically opposite beliefs, but we shared that one odd hang-up.

«I'll go throw a travelling kit together, but this had better be good.»

---

The closer we got to that town, the lower my hopes fell, and they hit rock bottom as we actually started up the dusty main street. The place was too small even to have its own Plant, and it was an utter mess.

Vash had never lied to me, true, but he was often mistaken about my wants and needs. If it turned out that that was what had happened this time, I decided that I would take him by the nape of the neck and bash his head against a wall until the crumbling bricks disintegrated.

We turned down a side street, little more than an alleyway, really, and my hopes started to get out their rock blasting equipment. Vash led me to a small house, just as crumbly and tumbledown as all the others we had passed, and knocked on the door.

"We don't want any!"

"Uh, Miss? It's me."

The door opened just a crack. "Well, so it is. You're here to see him, I imagine. Come on inside."

She was old, and stooped, and her grey hair was escaping from its bun. She wore a dress of something that looked like sackcloth and an apron that had probably once been white. I tried to decide whether she qualified as a caterpillar or as a spider, and ended up coming to the conclusion that she was just pathetic, too weak and useless to even be worth killing.

"He's in the kitchen," she said, gesturing in the direction of a doorway from which the door itself had long ago been removed, leaving rusty holes in the frame where the hinges had been attached. Beyond the door, a figure with dark hair sat slumped over a table, and there was something familiar about his half-hidden profile.

«Legato?»

He didn't stir.

I pushed past Vash and the woman to put my hand on his shoulder. At last he raised his head, turning it toward me, and I felt a snarl of rage distort my face.

The scarring was horrendous. There was a patch the size of my hand, starting behind his right ear, where there was no hair at all, just lumpy tissue that varied in colour between dead white and angry red. His eyes were cloudy, unseeing, and without depth, as though two tarnished gold coins had been placed in their sockets. I had only an instant to form those impressions, though, before he lunged to his feet with a soft cry, overturning his chair. Before I knew it, he had his arms around my neck and was nuzzling at my shoulder. His body against mine seemed to be all bony angles. He'd lost a lot of flesh.

Behind me, Vash cleared his throat. "I don't know how much of him is still in there. He doesn't talk, and I get the impression that he doesn't understand us. But I thought you should know."

"How did he come to be here?" I stroked Legato's head gently, probing carefully at the scar tissue. There seemed to be a chunk of skull missing underneath it. And part of the brain as well? It was a miracle that he was even alive.

"He just came wandering out of the desert one day," the old woman said. "Staggering along like a drunk with part of his head blown away. Don't know how he was managing to walk. Doctor couldn't do much for him, and I figured I could at least make him comfortable while he died. Never expected him to live this long, or heal as much as he has."

I shook my head. *You always believed that you wanted to die, and yet you fought so very hard to live. Well, I suppose that animal instinct can get the better of any of us. And . . . I think I'm glad.*

I kissed him lightly on the forehead. To my surprise and delight, his head tilted up and his mouth fastened hungrily on mine. At least that much of my old—lover? Not quite, but he had been more than a toy or a pet, whatever Vash might think—was left in this battered shell.

«Careful, Knives, you're shocking her.»

«Tell that to Legato,» I retorted, but I lifted my head away, tightening my embrace as my action elicited a little whimper of disappointment.

"He's coming with me when we leave," I added aloud.

«Are you sure? He isn't much better than a vegetable, and you're going to have to look after him. According to what she told me the first time I was here, this is only the second time that he's displayed anything resembling independent volition since he arrived.»

«What did he do the first time?» I asked, curious.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Vash's hand creep up toward his throat. «He, uh, tried to strangle me. Took two people to pull him off.»

I laughed, and the old woman gave me a strange look. «Oh, yes, that's Legato all right. Some of his mind must still be intact. It's just that it's having a hard time reconnecting to the real world. If I can repair the physical damage, then maybe . . .»

«Don't get your hopes up. No one has ever found a way to regenerate neural tissue, remember? Even on Earth, they never figured out how to make that happen.»

«Plant neural tissue *does* regenerate, Vash,» I corrected. «At least, given the proper conditions. If it didn't, I would be blind today—you messed me up pretty thoroughly, back in July.»

He blinked. «Then . . . you found the answers that you were looking for.»

«I found the answers that I was looking for,» I agreed, «and I'm sure that, if Legato were in his right mind right now, he'd be begging me to use him as the first test subject.»

«I don't know . . .»

«Well, I do,» I snapped back at him. «I'm going to help him, whether you like it or not!»

Vash sniffled loudly. «That's . . . the last thing I ever expected to hear you say . . .»

«Don't read too much into it. Legato is *mine*, and that's all there is to it. I'd be a fool to discard a perfectly good tool just because it's suffered some minor, repairable damage.»

«Whatever you say, Knives.» His smile was tremulous, watery, but very much a Vash smile. «Whatever you say.»

---

I was all for starting for home right away, but Vash refused, and I didn't think it was really a very good idea to argue with him. Instead, he bespoke us rooms in the town's only hotel. Two rooms. Legato would be with me, and Vash would be alone, where his snoring couldn't get on my nerves.

It took me longer than I had expected to bed the empty shell of the man who had once been my most fervent follower down on one of the narrow, dusty mattresses. As Vash had warned, Legato seemed to have no will of his own left, although his reflexes were still more or less functioning, or at least he could eat for himself, and manage the ludicrous loose clothes that the woman who had been looking after him had dressed him in. As soon as I had finished with him, I fell into the other bed myself, my mind racing so with worry and anticipation and other things that I didn't understand that I didn't expect to ever get to sleep. But I must have, because I woke in the middle of the night to the most delicious sensation.

Someone was licking me. Intimately. Panting, already close to the edge, I flipped the blankets back, knowing exactly who I would find, but needing to prove it to myself.

A dark head bobbed at my crotch, tongue twining around my painful erection in exactly the way that I most preferred. Further down, something hard and sticky-wet at the tip brushed against my ankle. *Legato*. I sighed and gave myself over to the sensations that only he had ever been able to conjure for me.

"Rrrrr . . ." I allowed myself a soft, throaty growl of pleasure as I strained upward, pressing myself deeper into his mouth. Through slitted eyes, I could see him stroking himself, the movements familiar but still erotic. "*RrrrrRRRRR!*"

We came at the same instant. It had always been that way for us. Legato sucked at me hungrily as I spurted, intent on getting every last drop of my seed. He seemed reluctant to release me from his mouth, but when he finally did, he collapsed across my legs with a soft sigh, the puppet's strings cut at last. I wriggled out from underneath him, instead drawing him up beside me, so that we lay spooned together in the narrow bed.

Before his injury, we had always parted ways at the end of the evening, and I was surprised that sleeping with him felt so good. I woke feeling almost as refreshed as if I had just come from the tank, languidly rather than aching and urgently aroused. I kissed Legato gently as his clouded, empty eyes blinked open. I had never been gentle with him before, either, and he didn't seem to know quite what to make of it.

"Hey, Knives, we—what the hell?!" Vash's eyes were as round as saucers.

«I think you mean "what the fuck",» I replied dryly. «He crawled into my bed last night.»

"And you didn't try to stop him?"

«Why should I have? It was what we both wanted.»

Vash shook his head. "You're sick." But the words had no bite to them.

«It still amazes me,» I stated, smiling. «By your standards, I'm little short of a devil. I kill humans, I *enjoy* killing humans . . . and yet it's what I do in bed that worries you. Perhaps you should work on your priorities a little, dear brother.»

"It all worries me, but I don't suppose that I'll ever get you to understand that. Still, you haven't been killing humans in front of me . . ."

«Whereas I *have* been flaunting my sex life? Maybe I just want to show you what it was that you were refusing when I cornered you on board my ship.» And I laughed as he shuddered and changed the subject.

"Look, I want to leave in half an hour. Will you two be ready?"

---

The trip home wasn't difficult, except for the fact that Legato refused to let me out of his sight. I couldn't even empty my bladder without him following me over to whatever pile of brush I chose to relieve myself against. In some ways that was a blessing in disguise, though, because it meant that we didn't need to worry about him wandering off and getting lost. And a few days later, we were standing in the shadow of my ship.

«Vash, why did you come this far with us?» I asked as the metal doors slid open to welcome us home.

"I thought you might need some help with your friend, although I was obviously a bit of a third wheel there."

«And?» I prompted.

He sighed. "And I want to know whether whatever it is that you've cooked up to change him the rest of the way into a Plant really works or not."

«For any particular reason, or are you just curious on general principles?»

"Nothing that I want to talk to you about." He sounded almost . . . sullen. Odd. It was a tone of voice that I rarely heard from him.

I smirked. "In that case, I'm glad you dropped by. See you in another thirty years or so. I'll send you a postcard when I get around to it."

"It's Meryl." Barely more than a whisper, as though he didn't want to admit what he was about to say even to himself. "I'm getting really . . . attached . . . to her, and it would be nice to know that we have . . . options."

«Vash . . . Oh, all right. Stay for a while if you like. I'll find you when we're done.»

I seriously considered soldering the inner doors shut for the duration, but in the end, I decided not to. It would just be an invitation for Vash to damage them beyond repair if he really wanted to see me.

In the old infirmary, I selected a heavy syringe and sat down on the examination table. Maybe, in time, I would figure out how to synthesize the genes I needed, but at the moment it was still easier to isolate them from my blood. Legato, unbidden, sat down beside me as I rolled up my sleeve. I smiled at him and stroked his thigh for a moment before plunging the needle in.

I was feeling a little light-headed by the time I was ready to begin the delicate extraction and synthesis process, but Legato, still sitting blank-eyed on the examination table, was a

constant reminder of why I didn't want to wait. *Oh, well, the computers do most of the work, anyway . . .*

Hours later, sweat beaded my upper lip and I had a small vial of clear liquid, which I weighed in the palm of my hand for a moment. *Either it works, or it doesn't.*

I sat back down, took Legato's hand, and rolled up his sleeve. A few seconds later, it was done, and he was staring in apparent fascination at the tiny bead of blood welling from the hole that the needle had left. There was only one thing left to do.

I led him down the hall to a room behind the control room and helped him strip. Then I urged him into the Plant tank. He didn't want to go at first, apparently retaining some memory that it had once been off-limits to him, but I persisted, and he eventually gave in.

I stood watching him for a moment. The circulation currents inside the tank were playing with his hair, swirling it around as though he was caught in a slow-motion wind, alternately hiding and revealing his eyes, and he had the faintest of smiles on his face as he stared back at me. He looked . . . I don't know how he looked, actually, but that little smile transfigured his face.

I returned to the room over and over again during the next few weeks. At first, it didn't look like he was healing at all, and I paced and swore very, very softly. But after the first few days, I could see a subtle improvement, as the scarring faded and his skull regained its proper contour. Then, one evening, as I was sitting in the control room flipping idly through the views from the security cameras, watching Vash mostly, I heard a faint voice.

«Master?»

«Legato!»

«Master, where am I? I . . . feel very strange.»

«You're home. In the Plant tank.»

«Then I'm not dead?»

«You're not dead,» I agreed. «Plants aren't supposed to die, remember? Although you certainly tried hard enough.»

«I . . . I'm not . . .»

«You are now.» *I hope*, I added to myself. «How much do you remember?»

«I was playing with Vash. Taunting him, daring him to shoot me. There was a searing pain in my head, and then . . . nothing, until I woke up here.»

«I'm not sure whether that's good or bad. Is there any pain or tenderness in the right side of your head, behind the ear?»

«No, not that I can detect.»

«I'll come and help you get out, then.»

He'd regained the muscle mass that he had lost while he had been . . . not quite there . . . but he was still weak and uncoordinated as I helped him to his feet and held him while he coughed and vomited blue liquid onto the floor. Emerging from the tank was always awkward, and yet I always found myself going back in, like an addict looking for my next fix, and I suspected that it would be the same for Legato.

«Master . . .» As the convulsions quieted, he leaned back against me, and I settled my arms more comfortably around him. My clothes were soaked, but it didn't seem to matter . . . or at least, it didn't *feel* like it mattered. «I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make such a mess.»

«It's all right.» I nuzzled the skin behind his ear, licked it lightly, and he shivered.

"Mmmm . . ." «Oh, that feels good. I've been dreaming of you every night since I left . . . well, all the nights that I remember, at least. Please. I . . . I want . . .»

I growled softly, and nipped at his ear. «And so do I, but let's go some place where we can do it in a bit more comfort.»

We staggered into his room together and tumbled onto the bed. Somehow, he managed to get my clothes off me while he was lying underneath me and I was determined to lick the nutrient fluid from the tank off every inch of his skin. He fumbled blindly in the drawer in the bedside table while I explored his body, leaving a pattern of little red marks behind where I nipped him. Having found the unlabeled tube that we kept there, he slicked my cock down while I pressed myself against his hands. Then he squirmed out from underneath me and positioned himself on his hands and knees, an achingly familiar signal of surrender.

I didn't need a second invitation. I parted his buttocks and slammed into him, hearing his soft gasp of pain and delight as I did so. He was tight, so wonderfully tight, something that I seemed to discover anew every time we came together, even now, after decades of intimate relations with him . . . I leaned forward, swiping my tongue across his shoulder, savouring the taste of his skin, which was just the same as every other time I had tasted it and yet deliciously different . . . Suddenly curious, I sucked a fold of his flesh into my mouth and bit down, growling, calling forth a throaty cry as his hips moved violently against my own. His blood still had the familiar copper-salt tang common to all human-descended creatures, but at the same time, it tasted richer than it had before, with an underlying hint of bitterness . . .

«Harder, master, please!»

I obliged him, snarling, snaking my hand around underneath him and giving his shaft a rough squeeze, working it until my fingers became sticky and wet and his back arched as his flesh tightened even more around mine. I pumped my seed into him with a full-throated roar.

We collapsed side-by-side onto the bed as we parted, panting and sweat-slick. His left hand, the one that had been Vash's, rested on my thigh. I sighed contentedly.

«It's a shame that we're going to have to get up soon, but I have to run a few final tests on you to make sure that your body has been completely converted, and then I want to chase Vash

away. He's been here too long as it is.»

Legato turned his face away from me, staring at the wall.

«What's wrong?» I asked, stroking his shoulder in a slightly awkward attempt at comfort. Why did I feel such a need to be gentle with him?

«I'm sorry, master. It's just . . . Please. Talk about anything but Vash.»

«Do you hate him so much?» I had never much cared about his feelings before, but now it seemed important, for some reason.

He shivered. «Yes, master, I do.»

«Why?»

No response.

«Why, Legato? Tell me.»

«Because you love him, and because he hurts you.» The hand resting on my thigh balled slowly into a fist, and I could see his eyelashes glittering. I stretched out my hand and touched his half-averted face. It was damp. I touched my fingers to my lips. Salt. Tears?

«I don't understand.» Why did I feel this sudden desire to smash my brother's face in? Vash's naivete irritated me at the best of times, but this feeling, this strange, intense, hot, apparently sourceless anger, unnerved me.

«Neither do I. I can't see why anyone would want to hurt you, master. Everything good that has ever happened to me in my life has been because of you. You're more important to me than anything else in the world.»

And this strange, shivery feeling? What was it?

«Vash and I have agreed to go our separate ways.» I slid one arm around Legato's waist and licked the nape of his neck, still hungry for the taste of his skin. «Neither of us can ever be what the other needs him to be. He wants to throw his lot in with the humans—even found himself a human lover. And I still want the humans gone, although I do intend to turn some of them into Plants. A handful. The ones like you, who are worthy of such an honour. The rest will die.» I smiled as I pictured a mountain of corpses in my mind. I could almost smell the blood, and taste it . . . feel it spattering, warm, against my hands and my face. Beautiful. Delicious. «We'll have to be more subtle than we have been, though. I don't want another confrontation with my dear brother. We'll just have to wait patiently until his do-gooder ways catch up with him and he gets himself killed by one of those very humans that he's trying to help.»

«Mmmm. Oh, I want to be there when he dies. I want to have sex with you over his corpse.»

The thought really should have been disgusting, but instead, it made me feel strangely aroused. «No guarantees, but I'll see what I can arrange.» My groping hand found the cuffs

on the bedside table, and I dangled them suggestively in Legato's face. «It's been a little while since we last used these, hasn't it? Why don't you roll over and stretch your arms out . . .»

---

**The End (before they get any more depraved . . . )**

---

kono ai ga kienai aisenai  
kono ai ga mienai aisenai  
I WANT YOU  
I NEED YOU  
ushinai kaketeta... I love you

This love won't burnout. I can't love.  
This love, I can't see. I can't love.  
I WANT YOU  
I NEED YOU  
I almost lost you... I LOVE YOU

—"Katsuai", by Minami Ozaki (Translation by Hiroko Woodward)

Maybe there are some things that Knives won't admit even to himself . . .

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