

EQUILIBRIUM

The prologue to this prequel is in LUCIDITY (available via our online catalog). The following are preview chapters. We hope to complete the novel as quickly as we can, in between our commercial deadlines. Some chapters are also being released via our Patreon. The illustrated novel will be published electronically and in hardcopy as soon as it completes.

Chapter 1

“You’ve been quiet for a while,” Katsuya finally said.

David’s hands were still wrapped around his mug, although his coffee had already cooled. He only nodded, got up from the sofa and walked to the kitchen to pour it out. Katsuya sipped tea from his cup and listened to David rummage through the refrigerator, glass bottles clanking as one was wrestled out from its paper carrier. When David came back to the living room again, he was already drinking from it.

“Maybe after a few beers, I can articulate this rather confusing ball of...something churning in my gut.”

David sat back down and took another long pull from the bottle.

“Are you angry?” Katsuya asked.

David shrugged. “Not quite yet. That will come later, I’m sure.”

A few minutes of silence went by. After finishing the beer, David left again to fetch another one.

“What are *you* going to do?” David asked when he returned, sitting back down with the new bottle. “Let’s start there.”

“I’m not sure.”

“I suppose I would have been furious if you hadn’t told me about this.”

“Because that would be a form of cheating?”

“No,” David said, shaking his head. “Not in the traditional sense, anyway. More like you didn’t trust me to approve of this and so you did what you wanted to do without a word to me.”

“Would you have approved? Now that I am showing you this and asking you?”

David tore his eyes away from the open box displaying the perfectly polished silver band shining brilliantly under the bright dining room light. His frown deepened. “No,” David said simply. “Not because I don’t trust you, but because I know him and what he’s capable of.”

Katsuya set his cup on its saucer on the table and leaned back. He was intrigued, though he tried not to show it. David was upset and was straining to keep his voice and temper in check.

“Are you angry that he gave me this invitation?”

“Yes,” David said. “I know he’s interested because he understood you meant something to me. I’d like to think I’m a very permissive and understanding boyfriend who has implicit trust in whomever I’m with. You are not my property, but at the same time I don’t like the feeling of having someone poach into what I feel is my territory.”

“Then you feel this has more to do with him wanting to upset you, than his taking an interest in me.”

David shrugged.

“Possibly,” he said. “It’s within reason that someone like him gets more out of fucking with me mentally than with you physically.”

“And it would have been more offensive if he had negotiated...” Katsuya said, gesturing toward the collar, “with you instead of with me.”

“Of course it would,” David said. “But that point is moot since he sent that thing to you only hours after he met you.”

David pulled a *LIFE* magazine from the center of the end table and set his bottle on top of it.

“That collar is worn so the others understand that he is the only one who’s allowed to touch you and play with you. It’s a property marker and a contract you enter into with him as soon as you put it on,” David said. He leaned back in his seat. “I do think you still have an idealized perception of what you saw that night. Some people want to use others. Some people want to be used by others. M’s is just a very pretty place where power exchanges happen and then they all go home hours later to get ready for their 9 to 5 grinds the next day. No baggage. Just an interesting memory with a few bruises to go with it.”

“Isn’t that what it is supposed to be? A temporary fantasy?”

“For a lot of them, yes. But for some people...they are attracted to this lifestyle because they are physiologically drawn to inflicting pain. Sadists in the truest sense. They find meaning in breaking something down just so they can put it back together to resemble something *they* want, and they know how to make you believe that is also what *you* want.”

“So M is a sadist.”

“He is that,” David said. “The worst kind. He not only draws great pleasure from other people’s pain...”

David’s voice faded. There was a frustrated look on his face as he struggled with words that wouldn’t come. Finally, he gave a resigned sigh and his voice lowered to match his exasperation.

“I can’t state enough how dangerous this is,” David said. “Deep in my bones I know the more emphatic I am that you shouldn’t be involved in this, the more attracted you are to it. I get it. The more you aren’t allowed to have something, the more you want it. But, I’d like to think I understand both of you enough to know the consequences of two equal forces colliding.”

There was a pause. David reached for his beer, but didn’t drink it. He watched the droplets of condensation on the side of the bottle collect on his finger, before he spoke again.

“Actually, not equal. He will ruin you.”

“David – “ Katsuya began. He felt an immediate need to defend himself, although he wasn’t certain why. Then he couldn’t continue. He knew David was being honest and likely, he was also right.

“This isn’t a game to him,” David said. “One of two things happens after he’s done. Either you embrace the experience and turn out to be like my ex -- someone who gave up her own identity and can only thrive when you give her one, or-- ”

“I would like to think that I would turn out that way, if I had inclinations of that need to begin with,” Katsuya interrupted.

“Fair enough,” David said. “What if it's just easier? And you come to that understanding through him?”

“Then that would have been my nature all along.”

“Doesn’t mean it’ll be better. We fight inclinations all the time to be who we want to be.”

Katsuya nodded. “And the second outcome?”

“Or you’ll be broken. Into so many pieces that I don’t think you will ever be whole again.”

“So you are convinced that he will win.”

“Yes,” David said and drank. He emptied half of the bottle and returned it atop the magazine. “And this isn’t a contest.”

Katsuya got up and moved to kneel next to David. He wound his arms around David’s neck and pressed him against his chest. “I’m sorry I’m worrying you,” he said.

David’s arms circled Katsuya’s waist and they held each other like that quietly for a long time, but Katsuya knew that the tension wasn’t gone and David wasn’t soothed by the gesture. David’s body was still taut – the arms that were around Katsuya were wound too tightly.

“I think you haven’t considered a third outcome,” Katsuya said, and cleared the locks of hair from David’s forehead and kissed it. “That I might possibly be the exception and not the norm.”

“There isn’t a third outcome,” David said, looking up at Katsuya. “Please believe me.”

Katsuya forced a smile on his face and pressed his forehead against David’s.

“Don’t underestimate me, David,” he said. “Everyone always does.”

guiltpleasure.com