

A Frothy Mess

XAVIER

I came spinning out of the final turn, neck and neck with the spiky asshole in the Mustang. We evened out into the straightaway, our engines revving as we pushed our cars to their limits.

I spared him a glance and found that he was looking in my direction, a wild grin on his sweat-drenched face.

I flipped him the bird as I pushed *Izanami* into the next gear.

Eat my dust, asshole.

I pulled away from him, taking off like a rocket ship down the empty Tokyo streets and across the finish line.

I came to a screeching stop, spinning a couple donuts for good measure.

“Show off,” Azusa laughed into my earpiece.

I hopped out of the car, emerging victorious from a cloud of smoke, the smell of burnt rubber and gasoline thick in the air.

Cameras flashed.

People cheered.

I felt alive.

For the past couple of months, I’d been a loser. A bum. A pathetic excuse for a man.

How long had it been since I was a winner?

I pumped my fist into the air, roaring with dominance. I looked around me at all the adoring faces, the cheers and applause.

I could get used to this.

Azusa bolted out from the crowd and practically pounced on me. She wrapped her arms around my neck, her legs around my waist as she giggled breathlessly into my ear.

She pulled back to look at me, her face inches from mine. She was grinning from ear to ear, and said something excitedly in her native tongue.

“English!” I demanded.

“You fucking did it!” she yelled above the crowd. “That was some slick driving, hot shot!”

She leaned into me, resting her chin on my shoulder. I could feel her breasts press into my chest.

“Oi, Sasuke!” she yelled at the porcupine prick getting out of the Mustang. “Fuck you, bitch!”

Shinji materialized from the crowd holding something behind his back. Azusa untangled herself from me, and glared suspiciously at Shinji. He smiled mischievously.

“Shinji ...” she warned.

Shinji revealed the biggest bottle of champagne I’d ever seen.

“Don’t you dare,” she hissed.

“YEEAAAAHHHH!” Shinji cried, popping the bottle and showering Azusa and me with champagne. A bunch of other girls holding bottles joined in, and the next few moments were a blur of stinging eyes and foamy showers.

I laughed as I was bathed in the celebration, feeling lighter than I had in months. Azusa screamed and laughed at my side, her arm entwined with mine.

When the champagne ran dry, she stepped away from me, wringing the alcohol out of her hair. I couldn’t help but admire her dripping body. When she licked her lips free of champagne, I found myself thinking that I wouldn’t mind a taste either.

I shook my head.

What the fuck am I thinking?

Shinji threw his arms around both of us.

“You know what we need to do now?”

“Take a shower?” Azusa smacked him in the gut.

“No! Hit the club, baby!” Shinji waved around a fat stack of cash.

“Well, we aren’t taking my car there,” Azusa said. “No way are we getting my seats sticky.”

I slammed back another shot, the tequila burning as it went down. The slice of lime was on the table in front of me, but I resisted the urge to reach for it.

“Go on,” Azusa yelled over the music. “I know you want to.”

“Nope,” I yelled back. The bar offered their own special brand of tequila, and there was a challenge to take it without a chaser. It tasted fucking awful and my throat was scorched, but I wouldn’t cave.

Azusa dared me that I couldn’t do it, so obviously I had to prove her wrong.

“I don’t even feel it,” I lied.

“So tough,” Azusa swooned sarcastically. She took a shot of her own and winked before sucking on a slice of lime.

“Hey!” I protested.

“I’d rather be smart than tough,” she teased.

She stuck her tongue out at me before melting into the dancefloor, her eyes daring me to follow her.

Cheeky little brat.

I pushed into the crowd, chasing her through a maze of writhing bodies. The music shook my bones, the alcohol adding to my high from the race. I finally caught up to her, grabbing her wrist before she could twist away.

She spun back into my chest, her body winding to the beat. I danced with her, my hands mapping out the shape of her curves.

Alarm bells rang in my mind, but they were dulled by the substances in me. My world shrunk, my only focus the feeling of her body on mine.

I felt excitement building in my pants. I prayed she couldn’t feel my raging hard-on.

But clearly, she did.

She smiled coyly up at me, unafraid of the extra attention. She spun around and pressed her ass into my hardness, reaching above her head to wind her arms around my neck. She ground herself into me, and I groaned as I pushed myself closer.

Her hands drifted down from my neck, reaching behind her to grope at my cock...

Angela.

I froze, my breath catching in my throat. My loving wife’s face flashed into my mind.

Fucking shit, what the fuck am I doing?

I pulled away from Azusa, escaping as quickly as I could out of the club and into the night. I sucked in a deep breath, the fresh air freezing cold in my lungs.

I needed to clear my head.

Just a few minutes to set myself straight.

The craziness of the night was catching up to me.

I slapped myself a few times for good measure, the sting making my teeth rattle.

Get your act together Xavier, I scolded myself.

“I didn’t know American boys were so shy.”

I looked up to find Azusa staring at me, her hands on her hips. Judging by her reddened cheeks, she was drunk, too.

She sauntered toward me with a gait that looked feral. She was a tigress on the prowl, circling her prey.

My heart pounded in my chest.

“Azusa, listen,” I began, trying to explain myself.

But before I could react, before I could even blink, she cut me off.

Her lips pressed against mine.

ANGELA

“I’m having twins.”

Dad’s beer slipped out from between his fingers, making a foamy mess across the kitchen floor.

“Jeez, Dad,” I said, getting up to grab a paper towel.

He stopped me from standing, putting his hands on my shoulders.

“Are you messing with me?” he asked.

I shook my head and guided his hands down to my stomach. I was wearing a big, wooly sweater that hid my figure, so he couldn’t tell at a first glance.

His eyes bulged out almost as much as the bump in my belly, which was growing larger each day.

I watched as he got all misty-eyed. A huge smile spread across his face, the crow’s feet around his eyes deepening. I’d never truly realized how old dad was getting, but now, looking at the wrinkles on his skin and the lines around his eyes, it was painfully clear.

I started tearing up as well, and he hugged me tightly, careful not to squish my stomach.

“Oh, sweet pea. I’m so happy.” His voice cracked, full of emotion.

I half-laughed, half-sobbed.

“Me too, dad.”

I felt a huge weight disappear from my shoulders. I didn’t realize how much keeping this from my dad was affecting me.

He took a step back.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner? You’ve got a big bump there.”

My face fell.

“L...I don’t know,” I said truthfully.

Maybe it was because I was so stressed out with my situation at home. Xavier’s life was a mess, and now it looked like our marriage was, too.

I wanted to give Dad the news from a place of pure happiness and excitement, but it felt like if I told him before everything was sorted out, it would have tainted things somehow.

Like the news would be less special.

I waited and waited for some word from Xavier, but the weeks flew by without so much as a text.

I felt the hole in my chest crack and expand, threatening to swallow me entirely. I gritted my teeth, forcing myself to hold it together.

I would *not* break down in front of Dad.

“I think I just wanted to sort out my feelings first. I’m sorry.”

He just shook his head and smiled.

“As long as everything’s okay.” He paused and looked at me with searching eyes. His assurance sounded more like a question.

“The beer’s spreading,” I said, dodging the question.

“Sit down, I’ll get it,” he said. “You’re gonna be a mommy, after all.”

I sat down, watching as he wiped up the mess.

I couldn’t help but smile as I heard him grumble and groan, cracking his back as he cleaned. Dad tried not to spoil us too often, but when he did, it always felt really special.

Even though he tried to be stricter with his kids, he was putty in the hands of the love his life.

“What was mom like when she was pregnant with me?” I asked.

Dad chuckled, sitting down with a groan. He wasn’t doing his back or knees any favors playing housekeeper.

“Oh, she was something else. Emotions up and down more often than a seesaw. Loving one second, then a crying mess the next.” Dad had a faraway look in his eyes, a small smile on his lips.

Those symptoms sounded eerily familiar.

“Believe it or not, your mom made me look like the level-headed one.”

“You’re definitely exaggerating,” I said, not biting.

“Oh, come on, I’m *not that* impulsive.”

I had to laugh.

“I wish she was still here,” I said.

“Same here, kid.”

I cradled my stomach, imagining the two lives growing inside of me. It might have just been my imagination, but I could almost feel Mom’s arms around me, a warmth that I leaned into and took comfort in.

We moved to the living room, settling into the couch. I looked around at the old carpets, the wooden wall panels, the scratches on the wall that marked how tall my brothers and I were each year growing up.

I’d lived here my whole life. This is where I’d become the woman I was today.

And Dad had raised me mostly by himself.

My mind flashed to Xavier. I imagined him walking away into the distance, taking all the light in my world with him.

“What was it like being a single parent?” I asked suddenly.

I felt Dad tense up beside me.

“Why? Am I going to need to get my shotgun out of the shed?” he asked.

“No!” I yelped, unsure if he was being serious or joking. And he said that Mom made *him* look level-headed? “I was just thinking about how great our lives were growing up. You had to deal with three of us, after all.

Dad relaxed, though he didn’t look completely convinced.

“It’s tough, sweet pea. You don’t have any time to yourself, and you don’t really know what you’re doing. You don’t have your partner with you to help out or keep you in check.”

He reached around for the leg rest, and the old couch groaned and creaked in protest as he found the lever. Dad and this couch were almost synonymous in my mind.

“You kinda just stumble from day to day, dealing with each headache as it comes up. You try to plan, but none of it ever goes right. You’re always tired, always unsure, and always second-guessing yourself.” Dad smiled, suddenly looking a decade younger.

“But it’s all worth it. Seeing you three grow up in front of me has been the best gift I’ve ever had, and my only regret is your mom couldn’t be here to see it with me.”

“I’m sure mom’s watching from somewhere,” I said, wiping a tear away. Dad pretended to fiddle with the couch as he not-so-discreetly wiped his eyes, too.

“Yeah, I know.”

He threw his arm around me, and I leaned into him.

“Are you sure everything is alright? You know you can tell me anything.”

For a second, I contemplated telling Dad all about what was going on with Xavier and me. Maybe he could tell me something that would help.

Or maybe he’d actually grab his two-gauge out from the shed and blow Xavier’s brains out.

“I’m sure,” I lied. “Everything’s great, Dad.”

I settled into the couch beside him, but my mind was on the other side of the world.

A dark premonition cast a shadow over my heart. Something bad was coming. I didn’t know what, but I could feel it.

I squeezed my eyes shut.

I hope I’m wrong.