

Deep Breath

Submission by Gabbi

This was it.

Musashi stood in front of a full-length mirror, memorizing every detail of her last few moments as a single woman. Admittedly, her jet-black hair still felt out of place. But today, even she could admit how beautiful she looked. Her long white dress sparkled pristinely in the sunlight that peaked through the windows. In a rare but stunning instance, her hair was pulled back to reveal her face. A diamond tiara sat perched on top of her head, glistening in the light. She absentmindedly ran her tongue across the tiny hole in her bottom lip left from when she removed her lip ring. Smiling, she glanced at the beautiful diamond ring that enveloped her left ring finger.

She still remembered the day that Shuya put that ring on her finger. Never before did she think she'd be proposed to in front of thousands of people. Before she met Shuya, she'd never imagined that she would ever accept such a proposal. Before she met Shuya, she'd never imagined that she would ever accept a proposal at all. Shuya changed that. Shuya changed *her*.

"In a few hours," she thought, "I'll officially be Katsumura Musashi."

A knock at the door broke her concentration.

"Come in!"

The door opened and Sayaka entered, complete with a stunning pink dress and a camera dangling from her neck. She smiled upon seeing her friend and closed the door behind her. "You look beautiful!"

Musashi smiled and put down the bouquet of wildflowers she had been fiddling with. She let out a nervous laugh and said, "Then why do I feel so nervous?"

Sayaka removed her camera and placed it on a table before taking Musashi's hand in hers. "Don't be. Once you walk down that aisle Shuya won't be able to take his eyes off you. No one will. Just think, in a little while you'll be a married woman. He'll be completely yours."

Just the thought of being with Shuya forever made Musashi forget her worries. She sighed and looked into her friend's eyes. "Thank you for being here. You don't know what it means to me."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. It's going to be—"

Before Sayaka had a chance to finish, the door swung open to reveal Shuya, donned in his tuxedo except for his tie. "Mushi-chan, could you—?"

“KATSUMURA SHUYA, GET OUT OF HERE RIGHT THIS MINUTE!”

Shuya opened his mouth in protest, but before he could get a word in edgewise he found himself ambushed by Sayaka, who had leapt forward and flung a sheet over Shuya’s head.

“Hey, what gives?!” came Shuya’s voice from under the sheets, becoming very muffled.

“Don’t you know it’s bad luck to see the bride before the wedding?!” Sayaka yelled, keeping a firm hold on the sheet obstructing Shuya’s vision.

“Let him breathe, Sayaka!” Musashi said while trying to stifle her urge to giggle.

“Musashi, you can’t—!”

“Shuya, close your eyes.”

“Why should I?!” yelled Shuya. Or at least that’s what Musashi thought Shuya said. Sayaka’s hold on the sheet around Shuya’s head had become so tight that his words were barely audible.

“Just humor her, please?” Musashi said, no longer able to contain her laughter. “We don’t need you suffocating before we have the chance to say ‘I do.’”

Shuya let out an exasperated sigh and said, “Okay, okay, they’re closed. Can I be allowed to breathe now?”

Still looking disconcerted, Sayaka removed the sheet from Shuya’s head. His eyes were shut tightly, and he was gasping for air. His perfectly styled hair had become erratic. “If you’re quite finished attacking me, can I please have a moment with my wife-to-be?”

Sayaka began to object, but Musashi silenced her, and gestured her to leave. “Don’t let him do anything silly,” Sayaka whispered before walking past Shuya, picking up her camera, and closing the door behind her.

“Finally. Can I open my eyes now?” Shuya asked.

“Absolutely not! What was so important that it couldn’t wait?”

Shuya reached inside his pants pocket and pulled out a long strip of fabric that Musashi recognized as his bow tie. “I’ve been abandoned,” he said, obviously making every attempt to look as pathetic as possible.

“Twenty years and you still can’t tie a tie?” Musashi laughed, taking the tie from Shuya’s hand and wrapping it around his neck and under his collar.

“Well I just figured, you know, that’s what the women were for,” Shuya said, unable to retain his

serious composure and ineffectively trying to stifle his laughter at the end of his jest.

“Keep that up and *this* woman won’t be,” Musashi laughed. She put the finishing touches on Shuya’s tie and then reached above her to fix his now-messy hair. Musashi took a moment to look over her fiancé. He was so incredibly beautiful. And he was all hers. “Are you ready?”

“Well, I’m definitely ready for our post-wedding celebration,” Shuya said with a smirk.

Musashi couldn’t help but laugh. Even in a serious time like this, Shuya couldn’t help but not think with his brain. “As fun as I’m sure that will be, that wasn’t quite what I was referring to.”

“I know, I know,” Shuya said. “I *am* capable of innocent thoughts, you know.”

“Yet, apparently incapable of innocent speech,” Musashi said, unable to wipe the silly smile off her face. “Shall we try this again?”

“Well, if you insist,” Shuya said, ineffectively trying to put a look of defeat on his face.

Taking a moment to regain her serious composure, Musashi slid her hand into Shuya’s. His hand would be the last she ever held like this...and that was exactly how she wanted it.

“Are you ready?”

“Always,” Shuya said, smiling. He ran his thumb across the diamond ring on her finger.

“Shuya?”

“Hmm?”

“Open your eyes.”

“But I thought—”

“Just open them.”

Shuya slowly allowed his eyes to open. His face lit up once he saw his beautiful Musashi. Musashi smiled, tears coming to her eyes. She opened her mouth to speak, but once again the sound of someone pounding at the door interrupted her.

“Shuya, are you and Musashi engaging in unclean festivities in there?” came Akito’s voice. “You’re going to be late for your own wedding! Don’t think I’m coming in there after you!”

“I’ll be out in a minute!” Shuya said, rolling his eyes.

“Save some strength for afterwards, man!” came Miyabi’s voice.

“Thank you both for your concern!” Shuya said, glaring at the door. “I’ll be out in a minute!”

When the sound of footsteps died away, Shuya and Musashi erupted into a fit of giggles. “So nice of them to have your best interests at heart,” Musashi said through her laughter.

Shuya said nothing, simply holding her as they laughed, settling into the comfort to which they would all too well become accustomed to. Musashi closed her eyes, losing herself in the moment. “We should probably go.”

“Yeah,” Shuya said quietly, not wanting to let Musashi go.

Slowly, Musashi stepped back and took one last look at her future husband. She smiled at the thought that soon, he would truly be hers. “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” Shuya said, running his hand across Musashi’s cheek.

“If you love me *now*,” Musashi said, a sinister smile creeping across her face, “just wait until tonight.”