Warmth

by phantomhive (phantom_hive)

Summary

What will happen when you have only moved in and your neighbor already asked a favor from you?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

Jumping into the world of solo living could be scary, or could be exhilarating, but having the combination of both had made Chinen feel a sweet gush of independence running through him.

His first morning alone was rather too peaceful unlike the mornings he spent at home with his family. He was able to roll in his bed, open the curtains, and drink a hot mug of cocoa in pure bliss of quietude. He turned on the television and settled with watching the news while wrapping his comforter around for some extra warmth aside from drink that was already providing him the internal heat he needed.

However, it was not long until his solitude ended, his doorbell rang- it sounded exceptionally rushed and important and this befuddled him to a great extent. He did not know anyone from the building yet except from his landlord and he was certain they had completely sorted out everything before he had moved in.

Through the peephole, Chinen tiptoed a little to see the person violating his doorbell in the early morning. It did not stop until he finally opened the door.

It was a man with a baby girl in his arms. Chinen blinked at them, he did not even bother greeting him a “good morning” but rather, he bowed and apologized in advance.

“I’m sorry. Her nanny called in sick and I have to go to work soon. We’re the family next door
The baby started getting upset, as if knowing that she’s going to be separated from her daddy real soon, she cried until it filled and echoed through the whole corridor.

“I just heard that there’s a new neighbor and this is going to be too much for our first meeting but, can I leave my daughter with you? Just until I get back by six pm?” Her daddy wore a suit and Chinen assumed he must have been working in a big company. He seemed to be in a hurry and his eyes were brimming with request for help.

Nevertheless, the baby had already caught Chinen’s attention even before she proved him of her good respiration and the two bottom front teeth that had already peeked through her pink gums. However, he wanted her to stop before she even hurt her throat. “Sure.” Chinen did not have the heart to reject the baby nor the baby’s father so he extended his arms and aptly, the baby was brought to his arms.

“Here’s the baby bag, it’s got everything you’ll need. I'm sorry, I promise I’ll repay you for this kindness later.” He said and glanced at the silver watch he wore. “I really have to go.” He leaned to kiss his daughter who kept crying and continued to do so because it was obvious that she never wanted to part from his father.

“I’ll be back by six.” Were his last words until he completely banished and left Chinen alone with the baby girl. He could not pinpoint what it was that he sensed around the man, but wasn't it cold?

Inside, he sat down on his couch and propped the baby, who did not even seem a year old, over his shoulder and rubbed soothing circles against her back. He realized he did not even know her name and decided to call her the first word that came into his mind.

“Shhh, luv.” He whispered through her ear as he kept caressing her, and after some time, she had finally calmed down.

Chinen sat her in his lap, taking in a closer look at her. She was not crying anymore but her eyes were still moist and her rounded orbs were fixated towards Chinen’s sharp, yet gentle ones. None of them tried to look away but when she finally tore her gaze, she dropped her body against Chinen’s bosom and immediately, she prodded one of her chubby fingers in her mouth. Leaning down to kiss her crown gently for easing down, Chinen was able to inhale the scent of something floral mixed with a little bit of fruity and guessed it was her kind of baby shampoo.

"Your father seems so busy, Luv. Does he leave you alone often? How about your mother? Is she working too?” It is not as if Luv would answer him, but he felt like he needed to get the question out from his mouth and he's determined to know the answer later.

He nuzzled his nose against Luv's thin, soft hair, humming a lullaby whilst letting the television play in the background. She snuggled closer letting the rhythm of Chinen's chest give her the essential solace in the new environment. Soon enough, like what babies always do, Luv dozed off in his arms. Looking at how angelic and peaceful her sleeping face was, Chinen’s own body suddenly craved to hit the bed as well. So, he transferred them both to his room, his white sheets still a little on the crisp side but nonetheless, softer than the first time he had removed it from the packaging.

Chinen gently and ever so slowly lowered the sleeping baby in the middle of the mattress. He secured her from the dangers of the edge by making a pillow fortress on that side and positioned himself on the other. Propping his elbow for support as he rest his head on his palm, he watched the baby’s chest rise up and down in a healthy pattern and even placed a hand on top of her belly.
He did not know how long he had already stared at Luv but he could have sworn he *almost* memorized her features by now. *What a beautiful baby.*

He woke up with a start as he felt a hungry wet suck on his chin for he had not notice he’d drifted off to slumber as well. As he opened his eyes, he found Luv slumped against his side just enough for her to reach her newly discovered pacifier and her small hand fisted his shirt for additional support.

“Hey” He chuckled, sitting up and lifting Luv up in the air. “You must be hungry? Yes? Of course, you must be!” Chinen grinned and when he lowered Luv to his level, he gave her a raspberry blow on the belly, definitely tickling her as she bursted into fits of laughter.

“Hmm let’s see what your father left us with.” After wearing his full-rim black eyeglasses, Chinen got up from the bed with Luv to check whatever the baby bag contained. It had bottles, two for that matter and already half-filled with water, baby formula, diapers, baby wipes and a set of extra clothes. “There are no snacks here for you, Luv. There’s only milk. I wonder how old you are.” Taking out one of the bottles and the powdered milk, he walked over the kitchen to prepare her milk. The baby girl in his arms whined a little and stretched her trunk forward to reach for the bottle as Chinen moved his wrist in a twisting motion to incorporate the formula thoroughly.

“I’m certain you are now allowed to eat real food. Here you go.” She grabbed the bottle from Chinen and immediately gobbled it. “Good girl.” Her new babysitter praised her and this made her lean her head towards the crevice of his neck. She is staring to love her new companion and Chinen was starting to adore her a little bit too much as well now.

“Have you tried anything other than formula milk? Do you still feed from your mother?” Chinen continued to ask even when he had the common sense that babies of her age could not talk yet, no matter old she was.

“I’m guessing you’re 6 months?” they moved back to the couch and he let her finish her meal in peace. He did not speak but he cuddled her, kissed her here and there until the bottle produced the sound of ‘empty’. “Burp?” He held him against his chest, her chin resting on his shoulder. He swayed his body from side to side and began to pat the baby’s back gently, not stopping until he heard the cute sound coming from her rounded mouth.

“There you go.” He grinned, however, was replaced with a little pout when he realized he would not be able to do any chores if he could not leave the baby alone. He did not have a baby seat and he most certainly did not want to leave her in any of his furniture unattended or maybe, he can clear the space in his tiny living room and let her play in the carpet? However, what would keep her distracted while he made lunch? Just then, Luv captured his eyeglasses and plucked it right away from his face, clouding his vision for a while but accommodated from the loss nevertheless.

“Oh no no, Luv. That is not a toy.” Chinen said, feeling scared for his eyeglasses at how the baby handled it. He tried to take it away from her but she only grasped on it tighter, determined to have her way with it. Chinen sighed and guessed it’s fine, so as long as it kept her happy. Luv played with it for a while and Chinen just watched her, making sure that his glasses remained in one, unbroken piece. Then, she took one of the temples in her mouth and began to chew on it earnestly.

Chinen chuckled, “You must be teething and your father did not put any teether in the bag. Would you like to use your pacifier instead?” He fished out the pacifier from the bag and attempted to exchange it with his glasses but the baby girl only turned her head away from it, still gnawing at the object in her hand.

“We don’t even know how dirty my glasses are, Luv. Come on, your father might kill me if you
get something from it.” Again, he tried to snatch away the specs but Luv launched an ultimate weapon, she whimpered and her lips began to quiver and if Chinen did not let her get away with it, she was going to transform into a full-blown crying and screaming machine. He felt as though he was the biggest villain of Japan. So he decided to just keep the things to how they were- his eyeglasses with the baby and the pacifier back inside the bag. It is not as if babies do not suck or chew on anything they get their hands on, right?

Lunch completely forgotten, Chinen did not notice how time flew by quickly when he was enjoying his time playing with Luv. The doorbell rang again, this time it was unhurried and patient. Chinen collected Luv against his arms to open the door and was pleased to see the father of the baby back.

“Oh hi.” Chinen greeted rather enthusiastically while the man only responded in a low-pitched voice. “Hi.” The baby girl in his arms reached for her daddy as soon as she saw him and he took him happily albeit not being generous for a smile.

“I’ll take her home. I’m really sorry for the trouble.” True, his eyes were apologetic but Chinen did not need him to apologize. He was more than fond of the baby so it was not anything near trouble; it was actually his pleasure to look after such a cute bubbly kid.

“No, don’t think you’ve troubled me, Luv is such a good girl.” He said and started to coo at her, “Weren’t you? Yes! You are such a good girl!” He grinned and she bounced happily in his father’s arms.

“Luv?”

“Yes, that’s what I call her- Oh, the baby bag!” Remembering the existence of it, Chinen made quick trip inside to grab it and hand it back to his neighbor.

“Her name is Riku.” Yamada said, slinging the bag over his shoulder. Chinen nodded in acknowledgement and moved his attention back to the baby girl

“Riku? Shall I call you that from now on? Goodbye Riku-chan, let’s play again some other time okay?” He said, stroking her belly with his index finger. Instead of making the baby girl smile, she started crying. Surprised, Chinen retracted his hand and looked at her, she was reaching for him again as if wanting to go back in his arms.

“Let’s go home, Riku.” However, Riku only cried louder, arms still extended towards her new companion.

“Maybe, I could bring her home. I mean carry her to your place so she can calm down a bit. I’m sure once she’s there you can get her distracted with her toys.” Chinen suggested and within second, Riku was passed to him, and within seconds in his arms, she stopped crying and buried her face along Chinen’s neck.

“You’re weird, Luv. I haven’t even taken a bath yet. I must smell, don’t I?” Chinen tapped her bottom as she wrapped her tiny arms around his neck.

Yamada watched them with amusement; it was the first time for him to see his baby girl act in such a way since she had never been so difficult to separate with her nanny. But then again, Yamada had never heard her nanny talk to her like this before. No one has ever done. Not even him. And not even her mother.

“Let’s go.” Yamada led the way to their home and he could still hear his neighbor talking to his
baby girl something about ‘eyeglasses’. Well, the boy was wearing one, so they must be talking about that.

The inside was warm and cozy, and Chinen thought that the mats covering the whole living room with a big bunny carpet in the middle was really cute. Below the TV hanging on the wall were boxes of shelves, each with pastel pink organizers that maybe stored her toys and some other stuff. A little more of indulging himself with the interior, Chinen let his eyes roam around the whole place, there he noticed that some of the sharp corners of some furniture were yet to be protected.

“You can stay over for dinner.” Yamada said.

“May I?”

“Sure.”

“Make yourself at home, I’ll try to whip something easy.”

“I think Riku-chan is close to falling asleep, what’s her dinner?”

“I’ll prepare her milk.”

“Just milk?”


“How old is she?”

“She just turned 7 months.”

“7 months?!” Chinen shrieked. “She's old enough to eat pureed potatoes or carrots!”

“I have carrots in the fridge.”

“No, she seems too tired from all the playing this afternoon, she might not be able to stay awake until it's cooked. Mangoes? Bananas? Do you have them?”

“Bananas, yes.”

“Good, let's mash some of that for her.”

Chinen spotted the highchair by the living room and settled Luv in it. Luv was not thrilled to be apart from Chinen and a pout that formed on her lips while she reached for him was too evident for Chinen to ignore. He scanned for the nearest toy in sight and found a rattle lying by the top of the shelf to entertain the baby but she most certainly did not care about it when her face contorted into stance of someone about to cry.

“But you're going to eat, Riku-chan.”

“You can turn on the TV.” Yamada said in a distance but it was loud and clear to Chinen's ear as he strongly opposed the idea of early exposure to any technology or any of that sort.

He frowned and asked, “Maybe a toy that produces different sounds, does she have one of those?” Even without permission, Chinen proceeded to take a peek of what's inside each organizer and successfully found one of which he had in mind.
“How about this one?” Chinen placed it on top of her table, only for it get shoved away. The baby was not having any of it, she only wanted to be held and she was not happy of being denied by the much needed contact. When Chinen did not take her out from her highchair any time soon, she started crying, one that was painful to hear, like she had been deprived of something so important. So Chinen picked her and brought her back to the kitchen.

“Shhh Riku-chan.”

“The banana is ready.” Yamada announced, placing the bowl of mashed fruit atop the table. Chinen sat them down on one of the brown, wooden chairs and pulls the bowl of banana in front of them.

“You’re getting cranky, Luv. Sleepy? You need to eat your banana first though.” When Chinen mentioned the word “Luv”, the baby girl mellowed down and snuggled closer to the warmth she was starting to get accustomed to.

“Oh this is her first time, right?” Chinen asked for the sake of assurance while he ran a finger to wipe the tears off of her face.

“Yes.”

“Then you should feed her!” Chinen exclaimed happily.

“Oh, uhm right. Maybe I should.”

“Did you hear that, Luv? You're father is going to feed you solid for the first time!”

Yamada took her from Chinen and sat her on his lap, not forgetting to tie her pink bib around. He spooned some of the pureè but before he was able to feed her successfully, Chinen butted in.

“Maybe you can have the spoon touch her mouth first, let her smell it and taste it.” Yamada did as he was told and soon enough, Riku parted her mouth to take the whole that was on the spoon. However, it was not even a second until she spat it out, majority of it dribbling on her chin.

“Don’t worry, that's normal.” Yamada tried once more and again, some of it got past her mouth but most of it escaped, some already falling to her bib. On the third try though, she was finally eating it. Soon enough, she got the hang of it and was even reaching for the bowl.

“Good girl.” Yamada said with the same low voice he used earlier and kissed her daughter's head for a job well done on her first introduction to food.

“You said she had a nanny, did she not feed her like this before?”

“Not that I know of. She's an old lady with no husband. I'm guessing we're both poor in handling a baby then.”

“Poor? I don't think you are. And I haven't seen her nanny so I couldn't really say anything about her. How about her mother? What time does she come home?”

At the mention of the baby's mother, Yamada's face suddenly morphed into something unreadable, but Chinen knew it was a question he should not have asked. That was why when the other did not answer, he did not push it any further.

Chinen chuckled which made the father look at him, “Look at her eyelids. It's falling. If she's done, you can clean her up and bring her to sleep.”
“Yeah.”

The father and daughter tandem disappeared for a while, leaving Chinen alone in the kitchen. He did not bring his phone with him and he felt a little fidgety being abandoned that it made him stand up and look through the frames that were hanging on the wall and some that were standing on a narrow table top. They were mostly of Riku-chan. She had this frame where her photos started from the day she were born until the 6th month, each were labeled accordingly. On the wall and in the middle was the largest frame, it was his neighbor and his baby but he noticed that not a single photo included a mother and Chinen got the “lightbulb”.

“Hey. She's asleep.” Chinen heard the voice from behind, making him turn around.

“That’s because she did not sleep the whole afternoon, she drank two bottles of milk though. I think she's a little on the petite side for her age.”

“Now that you mentioned, changing her food did not occur to me.”

“That’s okay. New parents are acceptable to be oblivious to the new role. What's important is you're doing your best at it.”

“I am. I'm trying.”

“I’m sure you are.” Chinen smiled and then, no one spoke for a while, an awkward tension hanging in the air.

“Hm, maybe I should go.”

“No, please stay for dinner. Will you mind waiting for a few minutes, it'll be enough for me to get the pasta ready.”

“I don't.” He shook his head, feeling his stomach complaining already at the lack of food to digest.

“Mm this is really good, but then again, I did not have anything for the whole day so you'll have to let me taste it again when I'm not starving.” He laughed a bit, but his remark rather made the other wince slightly with guilt.

“I’m sorry. I'll cook for you again next time. I haven't thanked you enough yet.”

“And here I thought you'd only keep apologizing. Please don't. I loved looking after her, she's an adorable kid.”

“How are you good at this?”

“What do you mean?”

“You seem to be well-versed with baby world.”

“Ah that, I spent my whole internship at an orphanage. It was a very good experience.”

“Orphanage?”

“Yeah, I just got my degree on Early Childhood Education and Care.”

Yamada's brows met in the middle. Come to think of it, his new neighbor looked really young.
“How old are you?” he asked.

“I'm 22. How about you?”

“29. 30 soon.”

“Mm..” Chinen nodded slowly, like trying to take in the age of this man opposite him who looked nothing like close to thirty.

“Do you have a job now?”

“I haven't tried looking around yet.”

“If I ask you to be Riku-chan's new nanny, will you take on the job?”

“I wouldn't mind really. I'm sure I won't be getting a job instantly, so while I'm scattering out my resume online, I'd happily watch over her.” Chinen replied with a smile, finishing the last of his pasta before standing up and taking his plate to the sink.

“Are you done?” He pointed at the empty plate of his neighbor.

“Just leave them there. I'll do the dishes later.”

“You already cooked, and you must be exhausted too. I'll do it.”

“No, please. You're a visitor.”

“Not quite anymore since I've already agreed to be taking care of Luv. I'm going to be regular here from now on.”

“Then, let's do it together.”

“Or maybe you should wash up and get ready for bed as well. This is going to be quick and I'll just leave when I'm done.” Yamada was ready to answer back but Chinen stopped him from doing so.

“No more talking. Just go because I'll only keep insisting and we're not going to finish.”

“Fine. But wait for me before you go.” Yamada surrendered and disappeared for the second time, but at least this time, Chinen had something to do. He took his time washing the dishes however, his neighbor was not yet back and he can still hear the shower running. He decided to occupy the couch and stretch his limbs for while, releasing his stiff joints and muscles which was all his body needed until succumbing to sleep as well.

And after a while, he felt his body being lifted but he was too sleepy to even crack an eye open. He shifted closer to the warmth though, it was like the one he had in the morning, but this time it smelled sweeter and wonderful and a new beginning.

“What's your name?” It sounded faint but Chinen used the last ounce of his energy to reply.

“Yuri.”

“I’m Ryosuke.” Was the last thing he heard.

*He's really looking forward to waking up in the morning.*
End Notes

Please tell me what you seriously think about this story so I'll know if I'm going to continue the series or I can just leave it as it is ^^

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