Harder Than It Looks
by whyzmzcal

Summary

The Sanzo ikkou are a group of private "problem solvers" who get a case involving a shady crime syndicate. Sanzo is captured, and it's up to Gojyo and Hakkai to sex him out of captivity.

Notes

This fic mentions sex slavers and violence. Written for Jedishampoo, who gave me the prompt: An "A-Team" sort of thing—the group of rescuers/killers for hire, and a particularly dangerous job that somehow leads to smut. Major thanks to my betas, despina_moon and moshesque. The title for this fic comes from The A-Team, season 2, episode 20.

Sonofabitch. The door shut behind them, lock clicking into place as Gojyo hooked his thumbs in the low waistband of his jeans and leered appreciatively at Sanzo. Sanzo ignored him, somehow managing to look simultaneously bored and annoyed—not at all like someone who had just been sold as a sex slave. Damn it, damn it, damn it! Why does this have to be so messed up?

"Well, well," Hakkai practically purred. He made it sound suggestive and predatory, and Gojyo was thrown off for a split second. It was seriously hot, and under the circumstances, Gojyo didn't think it was exactly appropriate. Or maybe it was a little too appropriate, and that was the problem. Fuck. "I think he'll do nicely, don't you?" The corner of Hakkai's mouth quirked upward briefly. Shit, he was a hell of an actor. Gojyo caught the movement in his peripheral vision, and he let a lazy grin spread its way across his face as he saw Sanzo notice it, too.
"Hell yeah, he will. And we'll do him nicely. I always do my best work with an audience, don't I, babe?" Gojyo's eyes swept the small room briefly, marking at least three partially hidden cameras: one in the corner over the bed, one over the door, and another one embedded in the wall across from the bed.

"Hmmm."

"Ch'." Sanzo's expression didn't change, but as Gojyo gave him a surreptitious look up and down, he could see Sanzo's bare toes sink deeper into the plush carpet. "So, which one of you sick assholes is it going to be?"

"Both, I think. I rather like the thought of you on your hands and knees, sucking my cock while he," Hakkai tilted his head in Gojyo's direction, "fucks that delectable ass of yours." Gojyo could almost see Hakkai rolling the word around in his mouth, shaping the syllables so they came out sounding dirty and a little dangerous. "Don't you, darling?"

Jesus, Gojyo thought. What the fuck, Hakkai? The mental image flashed in front of his eyes, and his tight designer jeans suddenly got tighter. This was all so fucked up and wrong. "Yeah," he said. His voice sounded a little rough to his own ears, but he could play it off. "That sounds good. And it's going to look good for the cameras. Go into our own private collection, hey? Just like this pretty bitch, if he plays his cards right." Gojyo gave Sanzo a slow, heated once-over, deliberately letting his gaze linger on the bare skin of Sanzo's chest and the jut of his hipbones before settling at his crotch. He might as well play it up for all it was worth since he was so dead when this was over. Fortunately, from the way Sanzo's eyes had narrowed slightly as he looked at first Hakkai and then Gojyo, it looked like he was going to have company in the afterlife. Yeah. Sanzo was going to kill them both. A lot.

"Excellent. Well, then. Shall we begin?" Hakkai took off his suit jacket and draped it neatly over the back of the room's single chair. He tugged at the knot of his tie. "Will you be cooperative, my pet, or will we need to restrain you?"

Jesus fuck and damn, Hakkai! Gojyo thought furiously. His fingers got tangled in the next buttonhole as he was undoing his shirt, and he decided to give up and just yanked the whole damn thing over his head instead. Knock it off!

"Unless you'd prefer it that way, of course," Hakkai continued softly. He sounded so kind and reasonable until you noticed the cruel edge lurking just beneath the surface of his voice. Hakkai was one scary motherfucker. Scarier than Sanzo, even.

…Well, maybe.

"I'm waiting for your answer, my pet, and I must warn you that my patience is finite." Hakkai smiled, the corners of his mouth tilting upward, but the green of his eyes remained flat and expressionless.

Yeah, okay. Hakkai was scarier than Sanzo. Scarier than pretty much everything, actually. And fuck if it wasn't hot in all sorts of Very Wrong ways.

"No." Sanzo didn't say anything else. He was taking this entirely too well, even if Gojyo took into account the fact that this was their only way out and that Sanzo might still be a little drugged.

"Lovely." Hakkai looked sideways, meeting Gojyo's eyes. Gojyo could see that he was busy plotting behind the lenses of his glasses. It made him seem more like Hakkai and less like the sick
jerk he was pretending to be to get them out of there. Gojyo'd already known that, but seeing it in Hakkai's eyes, however briefly, made him feel a little better about the whole fucked-up situation. It made him feel like they really were going to get out of this, all of them, and maybe even finish what they'd set out to do. And if they were lucky, Sanzo would only make them wish they were dead for fucking him on camera instead of killing them outright.

"On the bed, sweetheart," Gojyo said. He had his hands on his fly. Sanzo glared at him and didn't move, his eyes clearly saying, *Fuck you, pervert.* Gojyo raised an eyebrow. "I'm waiting. Don't make me ask twice." *Sorry, Sanzo, but you're the one who's getting fucked.*

"Ch'." Sanzo stalked over to the bed and sat down. It was classic Sanzo: as much a challenge as an invitation. "Fine. Let's get this over with already."

**Two weeks before mission start:**

Gojyo felt sick. He looked across the table and saw that Hakkai had gone all still and steely, the way he got when he was furious inside and plotting Very Terrible, Very Horrible Things to do to Very Terrible, Very Horrible People. Even Sanzo was quiet. And Goku, Gojyo saw, looked exactly like he felt: queasy, and maybe a little faint.

"We're taking the job, right, Sanzo? Right?" The words were out of his mouth before he could stop himself. He closed the file in front of him, trying to shut out the images of the dozens of teenagers and the things that had been done to them. *Selling kids like that for sex slaves to sadistic freaks, drugging them until they're begging the sick bastards to do that to them ... And the things they do to the few older ones, the college students. Jesus. Nobody should go through that before they die. Fuck, nobody should die like that.*

He felt himself tensing up, and he swallowed heavily.

"We gotta take the job, Sanzo," Goku said. He sounded as miserable as he looked.

"I agree." Hakkai folded his hands on the table and watched Sanzo, who was biting down on the filter of his half-smoked Marlboro.

"Sonofabitch. I'd do it for free," Gojyo said quietly, looking down at the folder.

"We're taking the job." Sanzo stubbed out the remainder of his cigarette with more force than was necessary, viciously grinding the glowing tip into the glass bottom of the ashtray. "And if that's the way you feel, idiot, you're on recon." He let the butt fall and pointed a nicotine-stained finger at Gojyo. "Hang around the neighborhoods in the snatch zone; look like you're looking for a good time, same as always. You're older than the profile says they go for, but there's still a risk here. So you're going to be the one taking it."

"That's fine with me," Gojyo said. He ignored Sanzo's raised eyebrow. Like he was going to put up a fight? Fuck, he'd have taken this job alone if he'd had to. Yeah, alone and for *free*; he'd meant that. "From what the report says, they might go a little easier on the ones who give 'em less trouble. And I can do compliant easier'n the rest of you." He pushed the folder in front of him away. "Besides, it's not like I've never fucked on a job. Or been fucked, for that matter." He glanced across the table and saw Hakkai flinch, lips parting as though to speak. Gojyo caught his eye and shook his head once, a small left-right motion that went unnoticed by the other two. "Anyway, like you said, I'm a bit old for the profile. Hot enough, yeah, but a bit old. And I'm a big boy; I can take care of myself."

"As long as you realize it's still a possibility. And since you're going to be the one on point, you're
probably going to be the one laying out the surveillance gear once we find their base of operations. I hope you still have your catsuit somewhere." The corner of Sanzo's mouth twitched—his equivalent of a smirk.

_Sanzo_ says with apparent amusement, "Evil bastard. Like he wasn't just looking at those pictures, too. Nothing ever really touches him, does it?" Gojyo flicked ash hard enough that it missed the ashtray and landed on the back of Sanzo's pale hand. "Yeah, I keep it handy. Some chicks dig it. They think it's kinky. Hell, you think it's kinky! Why else would you be finding reasons to get me in it all the time? It's whatchacallit, sublu—nah, that's not it … _sublimated_ desire!" He stretched his lips into something that mimicked a triumphant grin and slumped down in his chair, sprawling in such a way that his shirt rode up and exposed a wide strip of tanned, muscled stomach. He rubbed his hand along his jaw. "Cuz you're so sexually repressed, and with me being such a sex god and all …" Gojyo shrugged. "No wonder you like the catsuit—"

"Goddammit, Hakkai!" Sanzo barked. He stood up, making sure to dig his heel into the toe of Gojyo's boot as he did so. Gojyo jerked his foot back and sat up straight in his chair, still smiling even though he didn't mean it. _"Fucker. He's so gorgeous, and he's such a bastard. ... And if he ever got laid, he'd probably still be a bastard. Least he'd be a fucked one, though."_ Gojyo's smile edged over into "leer" territory as Sanzo bitched. He knew Sanzo hated it when he did that. _Good. Asshole._

"What the hell kind of ideas've you been giving him? Nothing's worse than a pervert with a semi-intellectual vocabulary." Sanzo glared down the table at Goku, who was suppressing a growing grin as the troubled look in his eyes began to disappear. "Except a monkey with a dictionary." Goku's grin didn't fade, and Sanzo turned back to point an accusing finger at Hakkai. "Are you playing audiobook lectures at night again?"

Hakkai tutted. "Yes, but I've been listening to physics this week—string theory, actually, so I'll thank you to leave me out of this."

"What? Nah, I've been seeing that psychology student from the job a couple of weeks ago. She talks. A lot. Even when her mouth's full, if you know what I mean." Gojyo raised an eyebrow and stabbed at the inside of his cheek with his tongue.

"Gojyo!" Hakkai frowned, and his glasses caught the light.

"Jeez, okay! Not really. I helped her study for an exam last night is all. She's doing this whole unit on repression and sublimation, and it kinda reminded me of our little group. Well, one of you in particular—shit!" Gojyo deflected the ashtray barely in time. He grimaced as ashes stuck in his hair and eyelashes. They disintegrated into a fine, silky powder under his fingertips when he tried to brush them away.

"Ch!'" Sanzo pointed at the laughing Goku. "Wait until he gets to oral fixations. And _you_," he jabbed the finger at Hakkai, "just wait until he gets to personality disorders."

Hakkai only smiled a small, tight smile—very polite, very proper—and inclined his head. "Nothing in Gojyo's newly acquired upper-division psychology knowledge is going to be news to me, Sanzo. As a result, his lucky strikes won't hit me so unexpectedly." Sanzo glared and flexed his fingers. He'd already thrown the ashtray, but Gojyo knew Sanzo knew better than to throw something at Hakkai unless he _really_ meant it. And nobody still living meant anything enough to try that.

"Goku!"

"Oh! Yeah, Sanzo?" Goku finally smothered his grin and gave Sanzo an innocent, wide-eyed look.
"Stupid laughing monkey," Sanzo muttered. "Come on. I want to start putting together a tac plan and a surveillance schedule. We're going to have to start digging to find the truth behind the jumbled stories of those two kids who managed to get away, and the sooner we get started, the sooner we crack the case and get paid. You. Filthy pervert." He snapped his fingers at Gojyo and gestured at the doorway. "Come with us."

"After you get cleaned up!" Goku yelped. "I don't want him anywhere near my machines when he's covered in ashes. Plus, he stinks."

"Shut up! You stink worse, stupid stinking monkey." Gojyo's insult was pure reflex, lacking its usual snap. "And why the hell do I have to go? I hate planning. I suck at planning!"

"You only 'suck at planning' because you hate it, Gojyo," Hakkai said quietly. He stood and gathered up the folders. "I'll be researching this new drug—going over the medical reports, calling my contacts at the research center and the university, and setting up an appointment to see our old friends in the Houtou Youkai. I might want company for that, though."

"Do you think the gangs are involved at all?" Sanzo sounded skeptical as he sidestepped Gojyo and stuck out an elbow, neatly blocking Gojyo's half-hearted attempt to smear ashes down the front of his pristine white shirt. Gojyo sighed and backed off. He dropped his hands to his waist and grabbed the hem of his t-shirt.

"Nah," Gojyo said. It came out muffled as his chin got stuck in stretchy, gray-streaked fabric. He finished yanking the shirt over his head and balled it up, looking at the ashy wad of cloth with distaste. "Jien woulda said something if the Youkai were involved. He's still tight with the inner circle, right? So he'd've heard. I think it's probably some creepy new syndicate. I mean, it's always some creepy new syndicate, isn't it? With creepy new technology, creepy new drugs …" He glanced at the folders in Hakkai's hand.

"Creepy new ways of hurting people," Goku finished softly. His grin had faded, and the troubled look was back in his eyes.

"Still," Hakkai said, tapping the table with the edge of the folders, "someone from the gangs might have heard something or perhaps found something out, even if they didn't know the information was important or were later silenced. They'd have talked to someone in the chain of command before that happened. I'll call on Jien later; he owes us a favor, and I'd like to speak with Kami-sama directly. Gojyo?"

"Yeah, sure. I was thinking about going to see him soon anyway, and you know he can never say no to his kid brother. Might not even have to call in that favor."

"Good. Make it happen." Sanzo rested his hand on the top of Goku's head briefly before heading through the doorway. Gojyo watched him go. Maybe it'd gotten to him a little bit after all? "Today, monkey and pervert," Sanzo called over his shoulder. Yeah, that's right. Sure it got to him. Gojyo brandished his middle finger at the back of Sanzo's head and followed him and Goku out of the room, Hakkai's soft chuckle close behind him.

**One week before mission start:**

Gojyo kicked the table leg with a soft, rhythmic *thump-thump-thump* that made Hakkai's cup vibrate with each impact. Hakkai picked up his tea and looked at Gojyo from over the rims of his glasses. After only a few seconds, the intensity of Hakkai's stare cut through Gojyo's inattention,
and he looked up. His foot stopped mid-swing.

"What? Oh, sorry, man." Shifting in his chair, Gojyo let his foot drop to the floor.

"Thank you, Gojyo." Hakkai took a sip of tea. "You seem unduly anxious."

"Huh? No, not really."

Another sip of tea. "Are you certain?"

"No. I mean, yeah. I mean ... Damn it." Gojyo ran his hands through his hair and stopped at the base of his skull, gripping handfuls of his hair tightly. He kept his eyes downcast, refusing to look at Hakkai.

"It's not your fault," Hakkai said softly.

"No? I was there."

"Three miles away from the park for the first one. Four and a quarter miles away from the university campus for the second one."

"And less than half a mile away from the third one, Hakkai." Great, he even sounded like he felt—completely disgusted with himself. Pathetic. Gojyo relaxed his fingers and looked up. "How long's it going to take before we find one of them stuffed in a dumpster or floating in pieces in the river like those others?"

"You can't be everywhere at once, moron. And neither can we." Gojyo started at the sound of Sanzo's voice and looked over his shoulder, tracking Sanzo as the other walked into the room. Aside from the usual insult, it almost sounded like Sanzo was trying to make him feel better. Well, hell. Maybe Sanzo felt kinda shitty about the three missing kids, too, and wasn't going to heap all the blame on Gojyo. That'd be a first.

"They seem to be much better organized than we thought," Hakkai said. He took another sip of tea, looking contemplative. "A few of the Youkai have been keeping an eye out, thanks to Jien," he nodded at Gojyo, "and they haven't seen much that was suspicious, either. I'm beginning to think that these traffickers are hunting in one place and staging their auctions well outside of the grab area. They must have more personnel than we anticipated if they're capable of spreading out their operations like that."

"And if they've kept it that quiet for that long." Sanzo yanked out a chair from under the table and dropped into it with a huff. "The Lieutenant hasn't heard anything, either. I think the cops are in on this one up to their necks. There's no telling how many of them are being hushed with payoffs or threats to their families. Goudai gave me a list of higher-ups he doesn't quite trust, and the names go all the way up to the Commissioner."

"That doesn't help at all!" Gojyo tried to keep the frustration out of his voice but knew he was failing miserably. Sanzo just ignored him. No namecalling, no shouting, not even a disdainful "Ch!' That was never a good sign. It meant there was a lot more wrong with this job than Gojyo was seeing right now. *Fuck.* "Has Goku found anything? Seen anything unusual online or caught any weird chatter?"

"No," Hakkai sighed. "I've been monitoring his watchdog programs for him since yesterday, and I haven't seen anything worth mentioning. The underground has been very quiet. Perhaps that in itself is an indication?"
"Yeah," Sanzo said. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it meditatively. "I called him a little while ago. He's coming in."

"Been at Nataku's?" Gojyo asked. Lucky little monkey, he thought. It was good that Goku had someone besides them, someone relatively untouched by the darkness they dealt with on a daily basis. And they were even kind of cute together, if you went in for that sort of "wide-eyed, youthful exuberance," as Hakkai called it.

"Needed the break," Sanzo said gruffly. He blew a stream of smoke right at Gojyo's eyes, and Gojyo frowned as he waved it away.

"Jesus, Sanzo, I don't begrudge the kid his downtime. He sees just as much shit as we do, if not more sometimes. You don't have to get all Protective Papa Bear. And anyway, you know Goku hates it when you do that."

"That's not being protective, Gojyo," said Hakkai. "'Protective' is when he brings out the gun."

"And he hates it when any of you get like that. I'm not a kid anymore." Gojyo blinked in surprise and turned around, trying to keep the sheepish look off his face. Goku was standing in the doorway, arms crossed over his chest. He sounded tired, but his eyes were bright and he looked a lot more relaxed than the rest of them. But then, being around Nataku always did that for him.

"Youngest and shortest, little monkey," Gojyo drawled. "Hell, you still don't even shave!" He leaned back in his chair and stretched in an obnoxiously unconcerned manner. "Sounds like you're a kid to me."

Goku's golden eyes narrowed. "I can still kick your ass, you red-headed perv. And I know the passcodes for all your bank accounts. Even the one in the Caymans." Gojyo choked on his own spit, spluttering as he tried vainly to think of an appropriate comeback.

"How about you both shut the fuck up?" suggested Sanzo. Ignoring Hakkai's soft "Ahem!" of displeasure, he flicked ash onto the floor. "We've got work to do."

Five days before mission start:

"Tell me you found something," Gojyo said as he took in the dozens of files and open folders spread across the table in front of Hakkai. He was so damned sick of canvassing the snatch area; fifteen miles was too many for any one man to cover. And it was too many to cover even with the extra eyes from the Youkai gang. "And tell me it's not another kid that got taken."

"Well," Hakkai said slowly, "we did find something. Or rather, with a tip from one of our Youkai contacts and some very effective, er, persuasion by Kougaishi and your brother, we now have a name."

"That's gr—hey." Gojyo's stomach fell. "Hakkai! Come on!"

"I'm sorry, Gojyo." Sounding genuinely regretful, Hakkai closed the folder in front of him and closed his eyes for a moment. He opened them again when Gojyo made an angry noise.

"That's gr—hey." Gojyo's stomach fell. "Hakkai! Come on!"

"I'm sorry, Gojyo." Sounding genuinely regretful, Hakkai closed the folder in front of him and closed his eyes for a moment. He opened them again when Gojyo made an angry noise.

"Wh—Shit. FUCK! Damn it, Hakkai, how far was I from this one?" Trying to hold in his frustration and his pointless anger at himself, Gojyo put his back to the wall and shoved his fists into his pockets. What he really wanted to do was kick something, or maybe put his fist through the wall. But he wouldn't. If he broke his hand, he'd never hear the end of it from the rest of them,
and he wouldn't be ready when they finally closed in on these sickfuckers. Hell, without him, maybe the other three wouldn't even be able to pull it off. And there was no way he was going to let that happen.

"A mile and a half. But it's from this kidnapping that we've gotten our information—our first real lead." Gojyo saw something in Hakkai's expression that might have been sympathy. Stifling the impulse to shake his head in denial, he motioned for Hakkai to continue.

"Zakuro—"

"That wack-job who worked for Kougaiji? One who thinks he's a hypnotist or something?"

"He prefers the term 'mesmerist' for some odd reason, but yes. Zakuro witnessed the kidnapping of another university student yesterday—the most recent grab. He said that he recognized two of the kidnappers as having belonged to Li Touten's crew."

"Li Touten? That fucker! When Kougaiji ran the Youkai, he chased Li Touten over the state line! Kami-sama's a shitty leader. Kou and Jien never would have let this happen!" Gojyo pulled his left hand out of his pocket and gave the wall a sharp knock. The sound it made was satisfying, punctuating his rising sense of righteous anger quite nicely.

Hakkai raised an eyebrow and looked pointedly at Gojyo's fist, like he was daring Gojyo to really lose his temper. Hakkai tended to look at Gojyo like that a lot. Hell, at least it was better than throwing shit at him, the way Sanzo usually did. Hakkai was way more … civil … about expressing his displeasure, at least at first. "I tend to agree with you, but that's neither here nor there. Our concern now is—"

"This grab, yeah, and this kid. Or the last four taken, if they're all still in the same place." Unable to contain his agitation, Gojyo softly drummed his fingertips against the wall. He watched Hakkai carefully, but Hakkai's eyebrows stayed level. Good. He needed an outlet of some kind, damn it.

"This happened yesterday, you said? Why's this the first I've heard of it? And what're we doing now?"

"It happened while you and I were out searching the known hunting grounds for the staging area. Zakuro went and told Kougaiji the second he realized what had happened, and the two of them went with Jien to—" Hakkai inspected his fingernails "—convince the kidnappers to part with a name."

"Wait, how come Jien didn't call us first? How come Kougaiji didn't call, for that matter? Maybe they couldn't have used me, but they sure as hell could have used you for the questioning, couldn't they?"

"Aha." Hakkai adjusted his glasses. "Well, Sanzo said Kougaiji mentioned something about 'intimidation versus pants-pissing fear' and 'coherent, actionable intel.' Though I believe he was paraphrasing the last; I've never heard Kougaiji use the phrase 'actionable intel.' Have you?"

"Hakkai." Gojyo knocked his knuckles against the wall again, trying to get Hakkai back on track. "So, what are we doing now?"

"Hm. Your brother and Kougaiji were able to get the name of the group that hired Li Touten's men, though that was all. It's a name that's well-known far west of here, but apparently they've started creeping eastward over the last few years. Do you recall hearing about the Minus Wave Conglomerate?"
Gojyo blanched. "You're shitting me. Please say you're shitting me."

"Not in the slightest."

"Jesus, those are some seriously powerful, seriously fucked-up people."

"Yes. Which explains how they've managed to keep things quiet. They have the hush money and the ability to carry out any and all threats without fear of discovery or reprisals."

"And they've got the fuckin' army of sickos to do their dirty work for them." Gojyo let his head fall back until it hit the wall with a *thunk*. Yeah, this particular job was really getting under his skin. He was only this fidgety—this noisy—when he was really on edge and feeling powerless. "Damn it! This means we've been looking for their base of operations in all the wrong places. We've wasted so much time! You were right; they've got to be staging their auctions and doing all their planning from outside their hunting grounds."

"But now that we know we're dealing with Minus Wave, we have a much better idea of how to attack the problem." Hakkai sounded particularly keen to get started doing just that. If the thread of eagerness in his voice hadn't given him away, the faint, feral light in his eyes that his glasses couldn't disguise would have. That was … good, actually. If Hakkai was feeling a little keyed up too, then Gojyo wasn't blowing things out of proportion. "Goku and I have already identified several of the dummy companies that Minus Wave has been using to the west and here. Right now he and Sanzo are cross-checking those names with properties and personnel within a hundred miles of the grab zone."

"Okay, yeah. So now we're just waiting on them? I mean, it doesn't matter that I cleared another six buildings on our list of prospectives anymore, does it?"

"The information is still useful. It tells us that nobody else is using those abandoned buildings for anything else we might get called in to take care of." Hakkai shifted a few folders with photos paperclipped to the inside and unearthed his laptop. Looking expectantly at Gojyo, he opened it and sat with his hands poised over the keyboard.

"Right. So the old bakery on 7th is out, but we knew that already, since it's so small. I just checked it out of habit more than anything else. And the tenement at 9th and Brewster is clear, too." Gojyo felt himself start to relax as he went through the familiar routine of reporting. Something about listening to the soft sounds of Hakkai typing, of watching the way Hakkai's fingers moved over the keys and the way his eyes moved smoothly from Gojyo's face to the laptop's monitor and back to Gojyo's face again, was almost soothing. And yeah, okay, he could admit it to himself. He could watch Hakkai's hands all day. Hakkai had beautiful hands—elegant and deadly; he would never forget that, much less admit that the knowledge of what Hakkai could do was scary and hot all at the same time.

And okay, Hakkai was just hot. Not like Sanzo; Sanzo was gorgeous. But still, Hakkai was …

"Gojyo?" Hakkai was waiting for Gojyo to continue.

"Uh, sorry." Gojyo reached into his pocket and fumbled for a cigarette and his lighter. He lit it and took a deep drag, making sure to keep his eyes on Hakkai's hands and away from the disapproving look on his face. He was some kind of asshole, to be thinking about how he sometimes fantasized about Hakkai and his hands—after all, just a minute ago he'd been totally pissed at himself for not being around when this latest kid got nabbed. "The old storage place on Bixby has a few bums squatting in some of the more beat-up units, and the Jumbo Supermart that closed down three months ago is as silent as a tomb. Nothing in there, not even spiders. It was creepy, actually. And,
uh, the half-finished condos in Swanksville are still empty but pretty well guarded."

"And is this upper or lower Swanksville?" said Hakkai drily.

"The condos off York. Sorry. Okay, last is the abandoned apartment house on 4th. That checked out, too. I mean, some small-time thugs seem to be moving in, but they're real small-time, so there's no way they can be the ones we want. And the building's got no electricity, so no security systems or anything, legit or otherwise. I don't think they even know how to steal from the grid."

"Noted, thank you." Hakkai's fingers flicked over the keyboard once more, and then he closed the laptop. Just in time, too. Gojyo could hear Sanzo walking up the hall. How the blonde managed to make even his footsteps sound pissy, Gojyo could never figure out.

"So, you and the monkey find something useful?" Gojyo asked as Sanzo entered the room. Sanzo's gaze cut over to first Gojyo and then to Hakkai.

"Yeah." He shoved a few papers at Gojyo, who had to juggle his cigarette out of the way or risk the printouts catching fire.

"Jeez, bitchy much?" Gojyo watched as Sanzo bent over the table to hand Hakkai some of the remaining papers. He might be a class-A dick and all-around piss-meister, but Sanzo had a fine ass. Gojyo nodded to himself. A really fine—damn! What was wrong with him?

"Shut up and sit down." Without looking, Sanzo hooked the leg of a chair with his foot and shoved it backward, at Gojyo. Gojyo toed the chair over and sat down, taking one last drag of his cigarette before stubbing it out and leaving the butt in the ashtray.

"Monkey comin'?" he asked.

"No. I've got him trying to dig up utilities info and satellite photos, if he can get to them. Now shut up and let me explain what we've got." Sanzo indicated a highlighted block of text a third of the way down on the first page of the printout. "While we were cross-referencing lists of dummy companies used by the Minus Wave Conglomerate out west, we found this: The MediCorp Group Holding Company."

"The MediCorp Group? As in the research laboratory connected to the university?" Hakkai asked. "I didn't think they had a hold—oh. Oh." Hakkai's glasses caught the light and flashed dangerously as he frowned down at the lines of text.

"Yeah," Sanzo said, an odd mix of disgust and satisfaction in his voice.

"Wait, that's it? But that's so stupid! How could nobody notice until now?" Gojyo flipped through the rest of the printout. He saw a couple more almost-familiar names highlighted here and there and resisted the urge to pound his head against the table.

"That's just it," Sanzo said.

"I see," Hakkai murmured. "People always gloss these things over, particularly if they're not expecting them. The heads of Minus Wave are clever. They've taken advantage of our inclinations to complacency and inattention to detail, and unless someone knew what they were looking for—which we didn't until Zakuro recognized the kidnappers and led us to the Minus Wave name—"

"Exactly. But now we know. I've had Goku run these dummy companies' properties, and we've come up with six likely locations within a hundred miles. He's looking up their energy usage and anything else he can find out: payrolls and accounts linked to those addresses, other public and
private services, you name it. They're covering their tracks pretty well, though. In addition to being smart enough to pick names that wouldn't stand out, it looks like they've gone into city and state records to change their utility information and anything else that might be helpful to someone looking to shut them down—law enforcement and the private problem-solver alike."

"So we're waiting on the satellite photos." It wasn't a question; Gojyo knew how this worked.

"Goku's cracking into the government database right now, but if there're no recent surveillance images, he says we're going to have to hijack a satellite."

"Hmm, that could prove to be tricky," Hakkai said thoughtfully. "The government keeps a close eye on all of its intelligence technology, particularly that which is in orbit. And I'm sure their security programs have improved since the last time we appropriated sat photos."

"Not all governments are so careful, Hakkai," Sanzo replied. He jerked his thumb in the direction of Goku's tech lair. "Goku says that if it's going to take too long to capture one of ours and redirect it, he can always find another government's toy and point it where we need it."

Gojyo whistled. "You know, for a stupid monkey, he shows signs of brilliance sometimes. Like a whatsis—an idiot savant."

"As opposed to just being an idiot."

Before Gojyo could rise to the bait and start an argument in earnest (but oh, it would feel so good to throw down with Sanzo instead of thinking about how he'd once again been in the wrong place when something important was happening), Hakkai cleared his throat, sharply and pointedly. Hakkai sure did that a lot around them. Good thing it worked. It'd be much worse if Hakkai had to start hitting people to get them to behave; they got more than enough of that with Sanzo's bad habit of throwing things to make a point.

"Six locations within a hundred miles. Which ones are closest? Depending on how long it takes Goku to gain access to the right images, we might be better off vetting the locations closest to us. There are—" Hakkai leaned over his printout and riffled through the pages quickly before looking back up "—three within forty-two miles of here, if I'm not mistaken."

"Right." Sanzo turned away from Hakkai to glare at Gojyo. "And shut up, pervert." His glare sharpened. "That's a pre-emptive shut up, by the way." Sanzo waited for Gojyo to say something, but Gojyo kept his mouth closed. He'd save it up for later—come up with something really good and let Sanzo have it. Maybe he'd say something about Sanzo's ass, since he'd been thinking about it a little while ago and it'd get Sanzo's panties in a real twist. Yeah, that was a good idea. "The idiot here and I will check out this warehouse on the river, this refurbished factory in the industrial park down the highway, and then this hotel, which is currently undergoing 'renovations.'"

"If it's just really general recon—no engagement—why couldn't we each take one? You, me, and Hakkai, while Goku works on his stuff? It'll go faster that way, and we can swoop in, rescue whoever's still there—" Gojyo's voice waivered guiltily, and he saw the flicker of Hakkai's eyelids that told him Hakkai'd heard it, too. But he kept on going, shifting his gaze to Sanzo's frown instead. "—clean them out, and maybe find out what happened to the other victims in the bargain that much sooner. Get closure for their families, at least."

"Didn't I just tell you to shut up? I thought of that, but if the reports from the two who escaped are even remotely accurate, there's about a seventy-two hour lag between capture and getting sold. We have something like forty-eight hours before this student is put on the market. The notice for the
auction has got to go out sometime between now and tomorrow, and if Goku's tied up with government firewalls and security codes and databases, and monitoring our little field trips to MediCorp Holding's properties …"

"Someone will need to troll the seedy underbelly of the more unusual places that get word out to the likes of Minus Wave's clientele, just in case we've missed something and the MediCorp Holding lead doesn't pan out. Now that we know who's behind this, it should be much easier to determine whom we should … Yes, all right. I see." Hakkai removed his glasses and met Sanzo's gaze. "Depending on what you do or don't discover—on what I do or don't discover—I may have to … meet with some people, Sanzo."

"Yeah, I thought of that, too. How's your Sick Fuck identity looking these days?"

Hakkai put his glasses back on. "Very sick. And still quite reputable among certain circles, I'm sorry to say. Goku and I have spent quite a bit of time making certain that we each have at least two fully-fledged identities in the system at all times, and since my less savory alter-ego still makes appearances now and again for just this purpose …" He shrugged. "Nobody will be surprised that Gonou's in the market for a 'toy.' Or that he's interested in what Minus Wave has to offer, what with the fascinating new drug they're using and how quickly it seems it would make the victim more, ah, pliable." Hakkai was looking down at his hands now, swiftly and efficiently sorting the files, photos, and loose pieces of paper into tidy stacks.

"That's a last resort, Hakkai, but you need to be ready," said Sanzo quietly. Gojyo was only half-listening. He watched Hakkai nod once, never removing his eyes from the growing piles of paper and cardstock in front of him. Sanzo turned toward Gojyo. "Gojyo, you're with me. We're going to go over the little information we've managed to get on these three buildings and work out the best approach."

"Don't want to spook them and have them clear out before we have a chance to catch them at whatever it is they're doing?" Gojyo stood, clutching the printouts tightly in his hand. He did a fine job of keeping the bitterness from his words, he thought.

"Don't want them to get spooked and take out the trash," Sanzo corrected. He looked Gojyo straight in the eye. "Not if we're going to get any of them back." Gojyo blinked. "Wait, get them—? Did Sanzo mean that? Did it really matter to Sanzo, doing more than just "the job"?"

"And we haven't got all day, moron. So hurry the fuck up!"

Yeah, sure. Like he'd ever really give a shit about anyone but himself, the job, and maybe—just maybe—Goku. Gojyo followed Sanzo out the door. Hell. If he was stuck walking behind him, at least he got a good view of the jerk's fine ass.

**Three days before mission start:**

It wasn't a very long drive, but after employing his best "sneak-fu" (Hakkai was right; skulking was a good word—very appropriate—but it just didn't fit Gojyo's image of himself) and finding nothing more hinky or salacious than a couple of porno mags in a back office and the cab of a forklift, respectively, he needed something distracting. Something that wasn't—"Goddamn traffic!" Gojyo cursed, smashing the heel of his hand against the steering wheel and simultaneously stomping on the brake. "Somebody'd better be smeared across the road if we're stopped, damn it! If this is just some stupid fender-bender or a cop having a roadside doughnut break …"
"Jeez, Gojyo! If you're gonna bitch, could you at least switch off your comm?" Goku's voice crackled in Gojyo's ear. "Sanzo's approaching the warehouse, and I don't want any unnecessary noise distracting me."

"Right, fine; sorry, monkey brains."

"Don't call me that! And s'Alright. Just … Hakkai's not back from his secret Creepy Guys meeting yet, and I've got this sat recalibration program ready to run, and—"

"Got it. Sorry, Goku. I'm switching off my mic in a sec. And I'm, uh, probably about 45 minutes out from the factory now I've hit traffic, so I guess adjust my ETA for that. I'll be listening in, though, in case Sanzo gets stuck crawling through an air duct."

A disgusted snort, barely audible through static, let Gojyo know that Sanzo was listening. "General recon only, pervert. No air ducts. Goku, I'm catching a lot of static; I think I might have a wire loose. I'm going to ditch the earpiece and go to just the phone."

"Okay, Sanzo. You'll look less suspect that way, too."

"Aww, that's too bad about the air ducts. I'd love to see you in the catsuit, Sanzo. It's been too long."

"Shut up." Sanzo's angry retort was reflexive. He was in "mission mode" now, no longer paying any real attention to Gojyo. "I'm leaving the car and moseying the half mile to the warehouse block, Goku."

"Dropping off comm," Gojyo said quietly. He reached up and flicked the switch that keyed his mic. He considered turning on the radio to check on the traffic situation or to maybe tune in to some old 80's punk music (he could pick up K-ROK out here, right?), but then he decided against it. It was sort of fun, listening to Sanzo pretend to be having a conversation and occasionally trip over a strip of abandoned train track or fall into a hidden pothole. And it never ceased to amaze him how many different ways Sanzo could say the word "fuck."

Gojyo inched forward on the highway, craning his neck and yelling out his window at the jackasses who thought that cutting him off would get them that much closer to their destination that much faster. Never mind that everyone was stuck on the same stupid road going to the same stupid nowhere. In between bouts of shouting, he could hear Sanzo murmuring to Goku and Goku responding softly. The quiet conversation would have been almost soothing if one of the speakers hadn't been bitchy-assed Sanzo and he hadn't been stuck on the Highway to Hell.

He was only half-listening when he heard Goku say, "Okay. See you back here in an hour?"

"Yeah, unless the slacker pervert is going to bow out of checking the factory because of being stuck in traffic." That snapped Gojyo out of his daze.

"I've got it!" he said quickly before remembering that he'd turned his mic off. He made a face and flipped the mic switch, repeating himself. "I've got it."

"See that you do." Gojyo could almost see Sanzo's glare over the earpiece, even though Sanzo's voice was fading in and out a bit. "I'm on my way back to the car. Taking the long route just in case there's something interesting to see that I missed on my way out here."

"Okay, Sanzo," Goku said cheerfully.

"Roger that, fearless leader," Gojyo muttered. He shut the mic off again and resumed his slow
forward progress down the highway. Two yards in five minutes. A new record! Damn it, he hated traffic. He was only half a mile from the next exit, and it'd be much faster to take the roads running through the next town and hop back on the highway. If he ever made it to the exit, that's exactly what he'd do …

"Fu—" Sanzo's voice crackled painfully through Gojyo's earpiece, sharp and short and clearer than it had been all day.

"Ow! Sonofa—" Gojyo turned his mic back on. "Jeez, Sanzo, watch where you're walking, would you?"

"Sanzo, you okay?" Goku's question came at the same time as Gojyo's, but instead of hearing Sanzo snap at them to speak one at a time or just shut the hell up, there was only silence.

"Sanzo? Sanzo, can you hear me? I'm not picking you up. … Sanzo? That's weird. Hey, Gojyo? Can you hear Sanzo?"

"No, I can't hear him. I got nothin'. Not even static. Did he drop his phone, maybe?" Gojyo drummed his fingertips on the steering wheel and listened harder. He could barely make out the sound of Goku's rapid-fire typing over the background noise of the angry drivers all around him.

"Maybe," Goku said. "I'm not picking up his cell signal. Yeah, maybe it is busted."

"He must've been almost back to the car by now though, right? The backup should be in the glove compartment, so we should be hearing from His Pissyness in just a few minutes." Gojyo gripped the steering wheel more tightly and leaned forward. Like that would help him gain another few feet or something, right.

"Yeah, he should be calling in on the backup in a few minutes. Still …" Goku sounded a little edgy. Okay, he always sounded a little edgy when they were out without him, like they couldn't take care of themselves and needed a monkey-for-brains to look after them or something, but Gojyo thought he might be sounding a bit edgier than his normal "a little edgy." It was kind of annoying, especially since it was coming on top of the major irritation of being stuck in traffic.

"Gojyo, do you have your PDA ready?"

"Hm? 'Course. What for?"

"I'm gonna track Sanzo, send you the coordinates as they come in—just in case, you know? I mean, Minus Wave … They're creepy, Gojyo. Creepy and wrong, and something doesn't feel right about this."

"What?" Annoying wasn't even beginning to cover it. "Paranoid much? And how're you gonna track Sanzo if his phone's broken, huh? Even you can't make busted electronics start working from three towns away." Gojyo rolled forward another yard and a half before hitting the brakes again. Hmm. Maybe the leaning and death-grip-on-the-steering-wheel combination had worked after all.

"Um. Well, I kinda … Uh, there's a tracker in Sanzo's shoe. In, uh, all your shoes, actually." Goku sounded like he was blushing, and the rhythm of the keyboard's clackity-clack-clacking stumbled.

"Are you shitting me? You're tracking us? Like, tracking us, tracking us? Jeez, monkey, you really are paranoid. What the hell?"

"It's just a precaution! In case something, you know, happens! Like … like your phone stops working on your way back from casing a place. A, um, a creepy place. It's not like I ever look
"where you're going when you're not on a job or anything!"

"Holy shit, Goku! You ever hear of 'invasion of privacy'?$ Gojyo grabbed his PDA and stabbed at the unlock button to wake it up. "How would you like it if I got Hakkai to plant a pinhole camera on your jacket the next time you head over to Nataku's for a hot monkey love session, huh?" A tracking device. A goddamn tracking device. He was so kicking some monkey ass when he got back in. He was so telling Sanzo and watching Sanzo kick some monkey ass when they got back in!

"I told you, I never check up on you, you stupid, perverted pervert! And it's just a tracker, nothing else! I've never needed to use it before; usually everyone's all in one place together, or they've got a backup phone already on 'em. But this time Sanzo's alone! I'm not there, an' you're not there, an' Hakkai's not even here, an' … an' if something happens an' I didn't do everything I could, even if it wasn't exactly kosher, I—"

"All right, shut up already! I get the picture. You're a dead monkey when Sanzo finds out, though. And you're a hurtin' monkey when I get ahold of you. Just so you know. Jesus." Gojyo's knuckles were starting to hurt from how hard he was holding on to his PDA.

"I know! I know, an' I'm sorry, but if something happens to Sanzo an' I didn't do anything—oh."

"What?" Gojyo glared down at his PDA. There was nothing there—just a map showing the way to the factory he was supposed to be hitting next, same as when he'd last looked at the thing.

"He's on the move, awfully fast. But if he's already at the car, why hasn't he called in—?"

"Maybe the backup's dead," Gojyo said reassuringly. He wanted to stay pissed at Goku, to tell him he was blowing things out of proportion, but some of Goku's uneasiness was starting to rub off on him.

"No, that's not it. I always double-check Sanzo's backup before he goes, same as Hakkai does for you." Goku's voice was worried and distracted and impatient all at once.

"What?" They were going to have to sit down and have a serious talk about trust and boundaries and shit like that when he got back to the office.

"Never mind! He's—no, that's wrong; he's headed in the wrong direction—Gojyo! Gojyo, he's headed west, away from the warehouse and here. I've got it—" Gojyo looked up from his PDA to the endless line of brake lights and rear bumpers stretched out in front of him. "Okay! You should be able to see it on your PDA now. He's headed to the river, it looks like! Can you get there? Can you intercept?"

"FUCK." Gojyo clipped the PDA into the holder on the dash and threw his truck in reverse. He backed into the piece-of-shit Volvo behind him, scraping its hood with his bumper. Before the shocked pseudo-hippie behind the wheel could react, he'd put the truck back into drive and was roaring along the shoulder, kicking up rocks and clumps of mud in his wake.

"It's gotta be them, Gojyo. They've got him! You gotta get to him before they hit the river. If they catch a boat, it'll take us that much longer to go after 'em—"

"Goku, I know. I know! I'm going as fast as I can! I'm about, shit, fifteen minutes behind them. Rrrrgh!" Gojyo punched the dashboard in frustration. "Can you—can you get ahold of Hakkai?"

"No." Goku suddenly sounded smaller, younger. "I can't. He's off-comm, Gojyo, you know that.
He can't … not when he's being Gonou, not today. He— It's just us right now."

"Okay." He knew that; it showed how screwed up everything was that he'd even forgotten for a second that Hakkai was never available when he was really working the Sick Fuck persona. "Can you—shit. Shit!" Gojyo cut a sharp left and felt the tires on the right side of the truck lift off the road for a split second before they crashed back down to the asphalt, squealing horribly. "Can you pick them up with traffic cams? Maybe we can get a look at their faces or their vehicle, or maybe we can catch 'em if it looks like they're going to ditch their wheels for another car?"

"Already on it." Goku's voice faded out a little. Gojyo heard breathing and the soft click-click-click of a keyboard for a couple of minutes. He kept glancing between the road in front of him and the blip traversing the screen of his PDA, watching as the number of miles between his location and the blip grew smaller. "I think I ..." Goku's voice came back, stronger now. "I got 'em! They're in a gray Dodge van, tinted windows, um, no license plate I can see ... But—no, no!" Goku's voice rang in Gojyo's ear. "Gojyo, they're heading off the regular streets and onto the riverfront roads. I'm gonna lose the visual from the traffic cams. All we're gonna have is the signal from Sanzo's tracker!"

"I'm still too far behind. Damn it! Can you get me there faster? Is there a shortcut?" Gojyo was just reacting now, swerving around other cars and trucks and screaming through red lights. He didn't know what he was supposed to do when he got to Sanzo, aside from rescue him. Would they be able to get the kidnappers to talk, to give up the location of the auction house? Would the kidnappers even know, or would they be like the ones Kougaiji and Jien had questioned—completely useless since they already had that information? Gojyo bounced the truck up onto a sidewalk and tore through a parking lot at Goku's urging before roaring back onto a mostly deserted road and punching it. The truck began to shimmy as his speed climbed. Fuck, would they be armed? Wait, what kind of stupid question was that? Of course they'd be armed. Would he have to take them out to rescue Sanzo? Would he—

"Oh no! They're at the river—they've stopped! Hurry, Gojyo!"

Gojyo gritted his teeth and aimed the truck at a chain-link fence, plowing through with a screech of metal-on-metal and a shower of sparks. "Are they back on the move yet, Goku? Are they on the water?"

"N-no. They're just sitting there." Goku sounded confused. "I'm looking for security cameras to see if I can hack in and get a visual, but it doesn't look like there're any working cameras in the area."

The truck tore across a weed-littered lot and onto a poorly kept frontage road that looked as though the port authority had forgotten it existed as soon as it was completed. Gojyo eased off the gas. Breaking an axle or popping a tire now wouldn't do Sanzo any good. "I'm almost there; two minutes out."

"Still no movement. What … what do you think they're doing?" Goku was almost whispering now, but his fingers never stopped clicking at his keyboard. The sound was starting to set Gojyo's teeth on edge, ratcheting up his already redlined sense of urgency.

"I don't know, monkey." Gojyo pulled the truck to a stop behind a rusted-out shack and eased the door open. After leaning across to the passenger's side to take one last look at the location of the Sanzo blip on his PDA's screen and to retrieve his gun from the glove compartment, he shut the door again quietly. He hated using the gun, but he'd take any advantage he could get in a situation like this. "I'm on foot now."

"Still nothing. They're just … sitting there. Be careful, Gojyo." Gojyo flicked the switch on his mic
twice to signal that he'd heard and had gone silent. He was already on the move, long strides eating up the distance to the gray van and Sanzo.

But the van wasn't there.

Sanzo wasn't there.

Gojyo picked his way over some bent metal and rotting two-by-fours, staying low and keeping his eyes moving as he went. There was nothing here. Nothing at all—just some piles of junk and a couple of abandoned buildings. He hadn't heard the sound of a motor fading into the distance. Not a boat or the van—nothing. How could he have missed them?

"He's not here. There's nothing here, Goku."

"What? No. No, he's there! He's got to be there. You're almost on top of him, Gojyo!" Goku's voice sounded strained, like he was trying to hold something in.

"You're not hearing me, Goku. He's not here. " Gojyo kicked at a broken bottle on the ground in front of him. It went tumbling over the weed-interrupted concrete with the hollow, glassy sound bottles sometimes make, then went silent for a second before slowly rolling to a noisy halt. Eyes narrowed, Gojyo tracked the bottle's path. "Oh, shit," he whispered, hurrying forward to inspect a small heap of garbage mostly obscured by weeds.

"What? Did you find him? Gojyo—is he okay?"

"I don't know, Goku. He's not here. It's just his clothes, his shoes …" Gojyo was on his knees, gun forgotten as he pulled torn clothing from behind a tall clump of dead grass and piled it next to him, cataloging everything for Goku. "His wallet, his phone—snapped in half; it must've broken when they nabbed him—his keys, and … Fuck. It's got to be Minus Wave. There's a syringe here. There's a little liquid left in it, and how much you want to bet it's that drug they give the kids before they sell 'em off? They must've grabbed him, drugged him, and stripped him in the van, then tossed everything out right away without stopping. Fuck. Fuck!" Three days. They had three days to find Sanzo. Three days before Minus Wave tried to sell him and realized that the only way they'd ever sell Sanzo, drugged or not, was as a corpse.

"I'm going back to the truck, Goku. I'm bringing Sanzo's stuff in. Keep … keep looking for the van on the traffic cams, okay? Maybe you can catch them that way. And I'm gonna try getting through to Hakkai. I doubt he'll pick up, even knowing we're out on recon, but … it's worth a try, right?" Gojyo listened. He only heard silence and the soft hiss of static, and the softer hiss of what might have been Goku's uneven breaths. "Goku?"

"O-okay." The clicks coming through from Goku's end were hesitant at first, but they started to pick up in speed and strength as Gojyo listened. "Okay. I'm gonna pull together everything we've got, every single little thing, so we can go over it as soon as you're here."

"We'll find him, Goku. And we'll get him back before anything happens to him." Gojyo injected his voice with false confidence, wishing he could believe himself.

"Yeah, okay. You're right, Gojyo. We'll find him." From the sound of it, Goku wished he believed Gojyo, too.

One day before mission start:
They were all staring at the photos fanned out in the middle of the big table. In them, Sanzo lay naked across a bed, his features relaxed in a way Gojyo couldn't remember having ever seen before. Sanzo was never relaxed, not even when he was sleeping. It was pissyface 24/7 with him, without exception. Gojyo looked down at the nearest photo again. A few old scars were visible in this picture—curved pink lines and slash marks here and there, and an ugly starburst high above Sanzo's left hip where he'd taken a bullet once. A few purplish smudges encircled his wrists, and Gojyo could see dark blue bruises on the insides of Sanzo's arms. There was another mark on Sanzo's neck, but that was only visible in the one closeup of Sanzo's head and shoulders.

A low, growling whine cut through the uneasy silence, and Gojyo looked up. Goku was grimacing and holding his hand flat against his stomach. He looked pale, and there were lines around his mouth, like he was hungry and hadn't eaten for days. Which was probably the truth.

"Jeez. Stupid monkey. What'd you feed that thing?" He pointed at Goku's stomach, knowing full well what the answer would be.

"Nothin'. I'm n-not hungry." Goku's jaw was set defiantly, and his fingers curled as his stomach let out another plaintive growl.

"Goku," began Hakkai softly.

"I just … I can't eat, you guys. When I think about Sanzo, about what they might be doin' to him … When I think about everything he's ever done for me since he found me an' took me in, an' I couldn't do anything to help him— He—he's the first family I ever had, before you guys even, an'— an' … I just—" Goku's eyes were wide and dark with misery.

"He's all right, Goku," Hakkai said reassuringly. "You know that Minus Wave won't damage their merchandise if they can help it. They leave that to their buyers."

Goku's eyes got wider. "I know," he said. "But—"

"Yeah, Hakkai's right. And since that's us, he's gonna be fine." Gojyo got up from his chair and walked around the table to put his hand on Goku's head, the way Sanzo sometimes did. He messed up Goku's hair affectionately, hoping that Goku couldn't feel his anxiety through the gentle touch. Goku was too smart for his own good sometimes. Intuitive, Hakkai always said. "Hakkai's already put in his bid, and they've accepted. Sanzo's as good as ours. He's as good as home, okay?"

"I know!" Goku pushed Gojyo's hand away. "But with the way the exchange is set up, you guys can't go in with any weapons or listening devices or anything. They'd find anything you tried to sneak in. We don't even know where they're keeping him! An' I know we've done jobs almost this blind before, but this is Sanzo. An' it's just the two of you—"

"Goku," Hakkai tried again, "the plan is sound. When the Minus Wave car comes to pick us up at the hotel, one of the Youkai will notify you immediately. You'll be able to track us with the traffic cams and via satellite, if necessary. You've already linked your tracking and recognition programs to the pertinent databases, and you've triple-checked your connections."

"I know," Goku whispered.

"And then we'll go in and get him, monkey," Gojyo said confidently. "With the three of us, the chances of getting out and rescuing anyone else being held are pretty good. And then you can send in the Youkai to help finish cleaning the place up."

"I know," Goku said, a little more strongly this time.
"It would be most unfortunate if we rescue Sanzo but neglect to shut down Minus Wave's operations. I for one would prefer that they are discouraged from continuing to ply their trade here. Or anywhere, for that matter." The corners of his mouth turning down, Hakkai laid a fingertip on the corner of one of the pictures. Gojyo could almost see him recalling the video he'd been shown during one of his Sick Fuck meetings.

After Sanzo'd been taken, Hakkai had told Gojyo that he'd met with a contact who turned out to be a "distributor" for Minus Wave. He had, Hakkai told Gojyo in a voice low enough that Goku couldn't overhear, seen a "purchaser's video," used as both insurance and promotional material. It seemed that Minus Wave liked to film the first encounter between the new owners and their property, both for their own archives to be used against any disgruntled customers, and also to show to prospective buyers. The one Hakkai had seen had featured one of the earlier victims—a high school student who'd been found in pieces on the riverbank only a week ago. Even if he hadn't recognized her from their files, Hakkai had said softly, he would have known that she wouldn't last long. They played rough, he'd told Gojyo. I get the feeling that Minus Wave encourages it, actually. It ensures repeat customers and creates a more active market for their wares. And then he'd excused himself to have another cup of tea and take his third shower that evening. Gojyo had let him go without a word, trusting that Hakkai would remember they had to go back and keep working on the Sanzo Rescue Plan before Goku exploded from worry.

"And I'm reasonably confident that Sanzo isn't being drugged as much as some of the other victims were before their purchase and transferral to their 'owners,'" Hakkai continued. Gojyo forced himself back to the issue at hand.

"Yeah, what was it the guy said to you when they called to accept your offer? That the one you picked was 'mouthy'?'"

"Yes." Hakkai's glasses caught the light, and for a moment, his eyes were obscured by the glare. "I told them that unless my new pet was violent or showed signs of injuring himself or their personnel, my partner and I would prefer that he be more lively for our first meeting. I told them that we rather enjoy feisty toys, and I mentioned that I find it makes their training all the more … satisfying." Hakkai's voice was expressionless—nothing like it had been on the recording of that conversation. Hakkai—or Gonou, really—had sounded cool but somehow still eager when he'd taken Minus Wave's call. There had been a dark excitement in Gonou's words. It had given Gojyo the chills and sent a jolt of something hot and electric down his spine, all at the same time. He'd been a little horrified at himself. I mean, okay, Hakkaiz's hot, especially when he's being creepy, and I've always wanted a shot at Sanzo. Fuck, it's Sanzo. But like this … There's something seriously fucked in my head. Seriously, seriously fucked, he'd thought even as he listened.

"R-right," Gojyo said.

"I know all that," Goku said quietly. "I know Sanzo's going to be okay until you can get to him." Goku's eyes said that he wasn't lying, but he couldn't let go of his worry, either. "He's got to be! But no weapons, no help from the outside until you can get away and signal us, and I—I can't go in with you, to watch your backs …"

"No, we need you to hang back, tracking us and coordinating with Kougaiji and Jien," Gojyo said.

"I know!" The lack of food and the constant anxiety were making Goku snappish. "But—"

"We won't be entirely helpless," Hakkai assured him.

"Garroting wire?" Gojyo asked. He shuddered slightly; he hated garrotes despite their effectiveness, and the fact that Hakkai had managed to conceal one in a belt that would fool even x-
rays and hand-held detectors both filled him with admiration and skeeved him out.

"Yes." Hakkai swept the photos of the naked, unconscious Sanzo into a pile and tucked them neatly into a folder and out of sight. "And I was thinking that this might be the perfect time to try out something experimental."

"The—the mix-n-match military-grade explosives?" Goku was starting to sound marginally less worried.

"Oh, no." Gojyo flopped down onto the floor, right next to Goku's chair. "No, Hakkai. You know how I feel about that shit. Experimental is a four-letter word in my vocabulary, and that's saying a lot."

"No, I think it's a good idea," Goku said. "I've worked with it a little, and it's totally harmless unless you embed the igniting lozenge in the soft explosive. And even then, unless you hit them really hard, they won't do anything."

"That's what the geeks always say," Gojyo muttered. "And then there's always an unexpected reaction or something, and the geeks go, 'Oops!' and 'Wow, we didn't know it could do that! Can you get it to do that again?' No thanks."

"I'm sorry, Gojyo, but we need every advantage we can get." Hakkai smiled at him apologetically. "I can wrap the igniting lozenges and the explosives to look like everyday sweets. We can carry them in with us, and no one will be the wiser."

"Sure. And what do we do when they ask us to eat one to prove that they're harmless candies? Or even worse, if they want one themselves?"

"Give 'em one." Goku jumped out of his chair and dashed out of the room. They could hear him banging around in his lair for a couple of minutes before he came back. He carried a handful of individually wrapped cinnamon candies in his left hand and a just-opened pack of soft fruit chews in his right. "Take a couple of these for just in case, and then use the wrappers from the rest for the explosives. If you're careful about where you put the decoys and where you put the live stuff, it should be okay. Right?"

"No way!" Gojyo felt his shoulders slump.

"It's a fine idea, Goku, and I think it should work well. Gojyo and I will get started on that right away," Hakkai said.

"I can help," Goku offered. "I need a short break from checking my sat-hacking program and my linking programs, and—" He winced and clutched at his stomach as an angry noise—the loudest one yet—rumbled throughout the room.

"Nah. Go feed yourself, bottomless monkey. We need you at your best for tomorrow. We're counting on you, and if you faint from hunger, who's gonna watch out for us and make sure my brother and his crew don't fuck everything up on their end?"

"Yes, you should get something to eat, Goku. I believe that the Chinese restaurant down the street is having an all-you-can-eat special this evening."

"Oh. But don't you want me to—" Goku's stomach growled again, even louder this time. Gojyo pointed at the doorway as Hakkai raised his eyebrows. "Yeah, all right. I think … I think I could eat something now. I'll be back real soon, though, okay? I want to go over this again. There's too much we don't know, and I want to have options for backup plans just in case. Okay?"
"Yeah, that's a good idea. I'd feel better if we went over the 'experimental' stuff some more, too. And can you pick up some extra pot stickers, maybe?" Gojyo shifted his butt on the floor and dug out his wallet, then extracted a couple of bills and held them up so Goku could grab them.

"Kay. I'll be back in just a while. We've still got a lot to do before we call Kougaiji and them and bring 'em up to speed."

"We'll be ready for you," Hakkai promised. He exchanged a glance with Gojyo as Goku turned around and barreled out the door. Gojyo didn't get up and get back in his chair until he heard the front door shut and the lock turn.

"So just how fucked is Sanzo?" Gojyo demanded. He flipped the file folder open and spread the pictures out again. "He's got bruises from needles in his arms and in his neck, Hakkai. How much of the drug have they been giving him?"

"It's just as I said." Hakkai's voice was calm and even. "I told them that we, ah, require an active pet. I'm guessing that most of the bruises on his arms are from blood draws since they do run a full workup on their victims' blood—to ensure that they're handing over clean subjects. I've been assured that Sanzo is perfectly healthy, if a bit on the thin side and with a very unpleasant temperament."

"You sure?"

"As certain as I can be without seeing him or speaking to him myself, yes."

"And the one on his neck? His wrists?"

"The one on his neck looks like it might be the injection site from when they caught him unawares. And the bruises on his wrists look like they might be from the same time period, or perhaps from when he woke up the first time." Hakkai touched the photos as he spoke.

"So we don't have to worry too much about him being too fucking looped to help us bust out."

"I don't think so, no. It is possible that he will still be somewhat drugged. I doubt that they trust any of their merchandise, even the ones who give them little trouble."

"And that's another thing. I can't believe Sanzo hasn't killed anyone yet. I can't believe they haven't killed him."

Hakkai shrugged. "I must admit that I also find it difficult to believe. The intelligence we have—that they're less abusive and invasive of the more compliant victims—must be true."

"Okay, but this is Sanzo. I mean, he once gave me a concussion for looking at him wrong!"

"You're overstating the injury, Gojyo, and understating your mutual antagonism, but I see your point. I can only assume that he saw the wisdom in going along with his Minus Wave kidnappers until he could find an opening. Perhaps he's decided that his best chance for escape is to allow himself to be bought?"

"But he can't know that we're the ones buying him. He might have hoped, but he can't know. So you're saying he'd let someone—just so he could get out—?" Gojyo ran his hand through his hair.

"I can't say what Sanzo is thinking. But I believe you might be correct."

"Sanzo would— He'd—" Gojyo made a vague fluttering motion with his hand. "Doesn't compute,
Hakkai. I mean, I'd do it. I've done it, and it wasn't anywhere near this skeevy, but it was still—it was … It was still …” Gojyo ran his hand through his hair again, then leaned forward, dropping his elbow on the table. It landed on one of the Sanzo pictures, and he stared at it. It could have been him in Sanzo's place. It should have been him in Sanzo's place, the way they'd set things up with the original recon and everything …

"I know." Hakkai leaned across the table and took Gojyo's hand in his briefly, giving it a companionable squeeze before letting go. Gojyo's fingers felt warm even after the pressure of Hakkai's gentle grip was gone.

"No, it's fine. I just—what're we gonna do? I mean, are we gonna have to—with Sanzo? On camera, with those sick fuckers watching?" He'd wanted a piece of Sanzo since almost the first time they'd shouted at each other, but this wasn't how he'd wanted to get it.

"By which you mean, will Sanzo let us?" Hakkai was watching him closely. Gojyo could feel the weight of his green gaze even without looking.

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess that's what I mean." He finally looked Hakkai full in the face.

"He'll have to. We'll have to, Gojyo." Hakkai removed his glasses. "And I'll have to make it look convincing. You know what Gonou is meant to be like."

"Yeah." Gojyo swallowed heavily. "And I know what Gonou's boyfriend Lee's s'posed to be like, too." He looked away from Hakkai's eyes, at a spot somewhere over his shoulder. He didn't want to have to do this. But … Oh, fuck. If he was honest with himself, maybe he did. Not exactly like this, of course not, but if Sanzo let them? Let him? Him and Hakkai … with Sanzo? The thought of being with Sanzo—of being with Hakkai and Sanzo—made a slow heat start to build low in his stomach. Gojyo felt his face screw itself up into an expression of self-disgust. Damn it, he did.

"I only said 'look convincing,' Gojyo." Hakkai tilted his head thoughtfully. "If Sanzo isn't drugged and if he's willing to cooperate, it will be much easier on us all. Since he's mostly gone along with his kidnappers up to this point, I'm inclined to believe that he will cooperate."

"Yeah? I'm inclined to believe the second we're free and clear, Sanzo's gonna kill us. Really kill us. Slowly, even." And we're probably going to deserve it. Fuck. Fuckity-fuck-fuck. This is so fucked up. I'm so fucked up!

"That's very possible." Hakkai smiled and slid his glasses back on. "But it's possible that he won't, either. We won't know until we've returned safely, will we? Now, shall I get the explosives so we can start wrapping? I'd like to finish before Goku gets back."

Gojyo tucked the photos back into their folder once again and rubbed his forehead. The brief kick of lust had already subsided. Now he was just getting a headache. "Yeah. Sounds great."

Now:

"Fine. Let's get this over with already."

"Did you hear that?" Hakkai, now naked from the waist up, turned to look at Gojyo over his shoulder. "Our new pet is indeed 'mouthy,' as promised." He pulled his glasses off and set them on the seat of the chair.

Gojyo dropped his jeans, smirking. He saw Sanzo watching him as he kicked them away, saw
Sanzo noticing the bulge of his half-hard cock. Gojyo flicked his eyes to the corner of the room, where one of the cameras was hidden, and rubbed himself suggestively. He let his eyelids droop with pleasure at the gentle friction, only partly acting at the little thrill he got from seeing Sanzo's eyes widen.

"Not for long."

"No, I think not." Hakkai moved until he stood in front of Sanzo. Sanzo's attention snapped over to Hakkai and he glowered up at him, moving back slightly when Hakkai reached for him. Hakkai only curved his lips in a dangerous smile. His fingers, long and spiderlike, crawled along Sanzo's jaw. Gojyo saw Sanzo shiver, then tense all his muscles to keep himself still when Hakkai brushed a thumb over fading purple mark on his neck. He shivered a little himself, briefly imagining how Sanzo's skin must feel—how it would feel to have Hakkai’s hands on him.

He'd find out soon enough.

Sanzo's arm came up, and Hakkai immediately changed his grip, resting his fingers against the pressure points in the depressions behind the corners of Sanzo's jaw. "I know what you might be thinking," Hakkai said softly. He stroked the curve of Sanzo's cheek with the tip of his thumb. "But I can assure you, if you should try to cause me harm, I can hurt you before you do any damage to me." Gojyo watched as Hakkai's wrists and fingers shifted, and if he hadn't been looking for it—hoping for it—he wouldn't have seen the split-second hesitation between Hakkai's subtle movement and Sanzo's flinch. No way the cameras caught that hesitation, he thought to himself. He almost sighed in relief. Sanzo was playing along so far, and as willingly as they could have hoped. And if his thinking and reflexes were that good … Not so drugged after all.

Hakkai relaxed his hands, though they still framed Sanzo's face. "You see? I can make this experience pleasurable for all of us—or for just my darling and me. I'm feeling uncommonly generous today, so I'll let you decide. This time." He stroked Sanzo's cheek again, and Gojyo grinned in what he hoped looked like amusement as Sanzo's glare sharpened.

"Just remember," Hakkai continued in a kind, almost teacherly voice, "that our first time sets the tone for the duration of our relationship."

Sanzo started to lean away from him, maybe unconsciously; maybe for show, but the warning flex of Hakkai's hands stopped him. "Yeah, I bet I know how that ends, you fucking sicko," Sanzo spat. Hakkai tilted his head, flashing a polite smile that lasted less than a second. "Not all my pets have been discarded," he said in a voice that got softer and somehow more cruel at the same time. "Those few who've pleased me the most have been given as gifts to some of my more … gentle business associates. They are quite content in their current situations, I can assure you."

Gojyo closed his eyes and swallowed hard. The way Hakkai was talking, he almost believed him capable of everything he was—and wasn't—saying.

Almost. So fucked up, Gojyo, he told himself. He opened his eyes again when Sanzo spoke.

"Content," Sanzo sneered. "You—"

"I don't care to repeat myself, but you're a new pet, so I'll make an exception this once." Hakkai forced Sanzo's chin up until Sanzo looked him in the eye. "I can make this enjoyable for us all, but the choice is yours. We will take our pleasure regardless of what you decide." Hakkai flicked a glance over at Gojyo, and Gojyo took a step forward.
Sanzo flushed—his jaw tightened and his eyes narrowed slightly. Oh, he was pissed. Hakka was going to pay for that later if Sanzo had anything to say about it.

"Ch'." Sanzo looked away from Hakkai.

"I thought as much." Hakka moved his fingers from Sanzo's chin to back against the pressure points along his jaw. "My trousers, if you will," he said pleasantly. Gojyo saw the muscles in Sanzo's jaw flex again, but he reached for the front of Hakka's pants, unbuckling Hakka's belt, then fumbling with first the button, then the zipper. His fingers caught in the waistband of Hakka's briefs before he managed to get Hakka's fly open and peel the fabric away.

"Lee," said Hakka softly.

"Yeah." Gojyo came to stand behind him. He rested his chin on Hakka's shoulder and smirked down at Sanzo, sitting naked on the bed and glaring up at them. Looking at them both, Sanzo tilted his head upward. His eyes narrowed. Do it, Sanzo was saying, do it and get me the fuck out of this room so we can finish the job, and I might not kill you when we're through. Gojyo nodded, leaning more of his weight on Hakka to mask the motion, and Hakka relaxed back against him. There would be no more hesitations.

And what the fuck; he might as well make the most of it. Maybe play out a bit of a fantasy or two. He'd never have Sanzo—either of them—like this again.

Gojyo reached around Hakka's waist and gripped Sanzo's wrists. He could feel the tension in Sanzo's muscles, the tiny tremors that ran through him as he guided Sanzo's hands to the thin layer of cotton covering the soft swell of Hakka's cock.

"Touch him," said Gojyo in a low voice.

Sanzo's fingers twitched once, and then he spread his palm over the front of Hakka's briefs. Hakka sucked in a quick breath, and Gojyo felt himself getting harder as he watched Sanzo's fingers trace the growing bulge of Hakka's erection. He gripped Sanzo's wrists more tightly, encouraging him to press harder against Hakka's cock, and rocked his hips, rubbing himself against Hakka's ass—pushing him forward into Sanzo's hand. Gojyo turned his face into Hakka's neck and bit down, tasting the faint salt of his sweat and the even fainter crispness of his soap.

Hakka arched his back, grinding against Gojyo. Fuck, that felt good. Gojyo bit down again, harder and a little higher this time. He felt Sanzo's pulse picking up, felt it fluttering faster under his fingertips at the sound of Hakka's soft gasp. Huh, maybe this wasn't going to be such a trial for the pissy bastard after all. Gojyo watched Sanzo from beneath his lashes as he bit and sucked his way up Hakka's neck. Sanzo never took his eyes off him as he nipped his way along Hakka's jaw before covering Hakka's mouth with his own. Hakka's kiss was hot and sweet and slightly sticky, like the cinnamon candy he'd eaten when they'd first arrived, and Gojyo groaned when Hakka licked into his mouth. His tongue was more eager than Gojyo had expected, even when he took their cover into account.

Sanzo drew in a deep breath, and Gojyo felt the tendons in his wrists shift as he watched them kissing. Gojyo looked down as Sanzo's fingers curled, hooking in the waistband of Hakka's briefs and pulling them down so the head of Hakka's cock was exposed. Hakka was fully hard now, cock flushed a dark pink and wet from the fluid beginning to leak from the slit. Gojyo almost wanted it in his own mouth, but the thought of watching Sanzo go down on Hakka was even hotter. Fuck, yeah. That's gonna be so ... Yeah. Gojyo pulled away from the kiss and pushed on Sanzo's wrists so that they were dragging Hakka's underwear down together. Except for the slight shiver that ran through him, Hakka remained motionless.
"I want to watch him suck you now," Gojyo said. He nuzzled at the spot just beneath Hakkai's ear and rubbed his erection against the warm, soft skin of Hakkai's ass.

"Ah!" Hakkai gasped. He stroked the corners of Sanzo's mouth with the tips of his thumbs, without moving his fingers from the pressure points along Sanzo's jaw. "Yes. Open your mouth, pet."

"I know how to suck a dick, dick." Sanzo's glare would have killed a lesser man, Gojyo was sure. He touched the tip of his tongue to Hakkai's earlobe and nipped, liking the way Hakkai arched against him when he did that—and the way Sanzo's eyes darkened as he watched.

Hakkai said nothing. He pulled Sanzo forward until the head of his cock nudged Sanzo's lips, leaving a glistening, off-center smudge of precome there. "I don't wish to repeat myself," said Hakkai. He was smiling that cruel little smile again as he dug his fingers into Sanzo's jaw, presumably forcing Sanzo to open his mouth. Gojyo wondered briefly how much pressure Hakkai'd used—whether he'd even had to. He hadn't been paying attention, and he wasn't really interested in thinking about it now, either. Instead, he thrust his hips forward, pushing Hakkai's cock into Sanzo's mouth. The sound Hakkai made—a low, throaty hum—hit Gojyo hot and hard somewhere in the vicinity of his stomach before spreading lower.

"Ah, fuck," he groaned. He rocked his hips forward again—oh, God, it was like he was fucking Sanzo's mouth with Hakkai's cock—forcing Hakkai a little deeper this time. Sanzo made a quiet sound, and Gojyo felt a shiver run through him. He let go of Sanzo's wrists to get a better look at what he was doing: gripping Hakkai's hips, his nails leaving pink marks on Hakkai's smooth, pale skin. It was fuckin' hot, and judging by the way Hakkai's pulse beat against Gojyo's lips when he kissed his neck, Hakkai agreed. Gojyo rocked forward again, and then and again and again, his own cock getting harder each time Hakkai's slid further into Sanzo's mouth. He bit down on Hakkai's shoulder, stifling a moan as his next thrust pushed Hakkai far enough that Sanzo's nose was pressing into the curls at the base of Hakkai's cock. Hakkai shuddered and pulled back, panting. He brushed his thumb across Sanzo's cheek one last time and then dropped his hands, stepping to the side.

"Yeah," Gojyo said. He moved closer to the bed, crowding Sanzo. His voice sounded rough. "Yeah, I want to fuck him now. I want to fuck him"—oh, shit, I wanna fuck him!—"while you're fucking his mouth." He put a hand on Sanzo's shoulder and shoved. "Get on your hands and knees." Sanzo raised his head, only half glaring this time, but didn't move. His lips were a dark, wet pink from the friction of Hakkai's—of their—thrusts, and his cheeks were flushed. His eyes looked a little glazed, too. Maybe residual drugs in his system after all? The effect of having Hakkai's cock down his throat? Maybe it was a bit of both.

"You need a little help, sweetheart?" Gojyo slid his hand from Sanzo's shoulder to his neck and felt more than heard the hitch in Sanzo's breathing when he grabbed a handful of blond hair. Oh, that was interesting. And based on the way Hakkai had suddenly shifted his stance and let out a nearly inaudible "ah," he'd noticed it, too.

"I thought you didn't want to be restrained," Hakkai reminded Sanzo in a low, silky voice. He bent over to retrieve his pants and briefs, and began folding them neatly. "Have you changed your mind?"

"I think he just wants a little convincing," Gojyo said. He tugged on Sanzo's hair again, pulling him off balance so he had to catch himself with a hand on the bed. "See?" He tugged again, ignoring the death glare Sanzo was giving him. "C'mon, sweetheart."

"Get your fucking hands off me," Sanzo snarled. He brought his hand up, fingers stiffened, and aimed for Gojyo's solar plexus. Jeez, could you be any more obvious? Gojyo thought. All right, I
hope they buy it. He caught Sanzo's wrist and twisted his arm up behind his back, giving him a good shove at the same time so that Sanzo landed on his face.

"Feisty, not just mouthy! But more bark than bite." Gojyo hauled Sanzo a little way down the mattress and kicked at his legs. "All fours," he reminded him.

Sanzo somehow managed to get his legs up on the bed and his knees under him, glaring balefully all the while. Gojyo helped him up, beginning to enjoy himself, and transferred his grip to either side of Sanzo's neck. He hooked his fingers under Sanzo's collarbone and jerked upward, making sure to let his fingers straighten a little so he wasn't putting much real pressure on Sanzo's nerves. Sanzo winced and moved with him, following his cue perfectly.

"Hands and knees. Now. This is your last warning." Gojyo punctuated his words with a little squeeze that made Sanzo grunt and glare at him for real. Sorry. Gojyo twitched the corner of his mouth in apology.

"I'd do as he says," said Hakkai from over by his clothes. He'd taken his pants to the chair where his jacket, shirt, and tie were draped, and was now going through pockets. Something crinkled, and Hakkai frowned as he pulled out a red, cellophane-wrapped disc. He raised an eyebrow at Gojyo, then dropped it back into the pocket and rifled through another one. "Ah," he said, sounding satisfied and holding up a small tube of lubricant.

"No need to traumatize our toy," Gojyo said. He jabbed Sanzo's shoulder blades with his thumbs, and Sanzo grudgingly put his palms flat on the mattress.

"Not yet," Hakkai agreed. He came back to the bed, where Gojyo was now manhandling Sanzo, rearranging him until he was on his hands and knees and just how Gojyo wanted him. Gojyo could feel Sanzo's tension ratcheting up with each touch, but he could also see that while Sanzo'd started to get hard from having Hakkai's dick down his throat, he'd gotten harder with Gojyo's hands all over him, roughly pushing and pulling and occasionally pinching. Well, well. Who'd've known?

Gojyo got up on the bed behind Sanzo and positioned himself so he was kneeling between Sanzo's legs. Shit, he was really going to do it—he was really going to fuck Sanzo. Just thinking it made his balls tighten, and he bit his lip to stifle a moan.

Gojyo caressed the hot skin of Sanzo's ass with his right hand, felt him shudder and tense up beneath his palm, and held out his left hand for the lube. Hakkai handed it to him with the cap already flipped back. Fuckin' Hakkai. Always so thoughtful. Gojyo would have rolled his eyes if he hadn't been so turned on.

"Go on, Lee," Hakkai said. He moved to the edge of the bed and curved his hand around Sanzo's throat, ready to put pressure on Sanzo's carotid and render him unconscious at the slightest hint of difficult behavior. "I think I'd like to watch while you finger him, at least at first." Hakkai's voice was low and hungry, and Gojyo had to stifle another moan as a tremor ran through Sanzo, up his arm, down his spine, and straight to his dick.

"Y-yeah, all right." Gojyo coated his fingers. It was to Sanzo's credit that he didn't jump or flinch when Gojyo touched him with a cool, slick fingertip. He remained still even when Gojyo pressed into him, firmly and insistently.

Hakkai sighed. "Yes. Relax for my darling, pet. Yes, just like that." He was watching Sanzo's face. "Such a beautiful expression." He placed his free hand on Sanzo's shoulder and pushed, slowly driving him back onto Gojyo's finger.

Sanzo let out a short, sharp gasp, muscles clenching as he dug his fingers into the mattress. Gojyo
groaned softly. Fuck, Sanzo was tight. He slid his finger away and then pressed back in—two this time. Sanzo gasped again, head snapping up as Gojyo curled his fingers downward.

"Yes, that's it," Hakkai said breathlessly. He brushed Sanzo's hair aside, presumably to get a better look at his eyes. "Oh, that's lovely." Hakkai kept his hand curved around Sanzo's throat and got on the bed, kneeling in front of him. "Give him more, darling; he's almost ready." Gojyo saw him slide his hand up from Sanzo's neck to cup his jaw, thumb and index fingers back against Sanzo's pressure points. "Now open your mouth. You're going to suck my dick again."

Gojyo bit off another moan at the jolt Hakkai's words sent racing through him. He waited until Hakkai had laced his fingers through Sanzo's golden hair, tugging him down and forward so Sanzo's head was in Hakkai's lap. "Go on," Hakkai murmured. He flicked his eyes up to meet Gojyo's with an intensity that made Gojyo's skin prickle, then tugged on Sanzo's hair again, turning his head and pulling him down all the way. "Oh," he sighed.

Gojyo coated his fingers with more lube and slid them back inside Sanzo, twisting them slightly and then spreading them, stretching him. Sanzo groaned softly, the sound muffled by Hakkai's cock. Gojyo spread his fingers a little wider, and Sanzo groaned again. His back was damp with sweat, and the muscles in his thighs were shaking. "What was that?" Hakkai relaxed his grip on Sanzo's hair and allowed him to lift his head.

"Just fuck me already," Sanzo growled. He was trying to hide the raggedness of his breathing, the roughness of his voice, but Gojyo could hear it. He pushed his fingers deeper. "Just fu—ah—hah! Fuck!"

"Oh, you're gonna get fucked," Gojyo assured him. He reached for the lube one last time and gave his cock a liberal coating, then held himself steady with one hand and gripped Sanzo's hip with the other, chanting ohfuckyes in his head over and over again until his cock was deep inside Sanzo's ass. Oh, fuck yes. Fuck, yes. Gojyo held himself still, reveling in the searing clench of Sanzo's muscles around him. He could feel the heat rising from Sanzo's body—hear the harsh gasps as Sanzo panted, cheek pressed to Hakkai's thigh, fists clutching at the mattress. A burning started down low in Gojyo's belly and spread to his balls before climbing up his spine.

And then Hakkai was bending forward over Sanzo and saying something in that low, dangerous voice, was stroking Sanzo's forehead with a pale hand and guiding him forward with the other. Sanzo raised his head a little, his breathing still ragged, and parted his lips. His tongue curled around the base of Hakkai's cock and he licked, stroking upward and leaving a wet trail.

Shit. I— The desire to simply fuck, to thrust fast and hard and now, snapped Gojyo's hips forward. He groaned as the burn built inside him, fierce and deep and beginning to rise, throbbing in his balls and pushing him forward—pushing him deeper into Sanzo. Sanzo's skin was slick now, almost fever-warm and covered with sweat. Gojyo's hands slipped on Sanzo's hips, and he dug in with his nails, leaving short, angry marks as he fucked into Sanzo again and again. Sanzo was clutching at Hakkai's thigh now, his breaths coming hard and fast, his tongue erratic and clumsy as he licked his way up Hakkai's dick. Gojyo gripped Sanzo more tightly and canted his hips. On his next thrust, Sanzo's head jerked up, and he let out a soft, surprised grunt. Gojyo fucked into him again, and Sanzo turned his face into Hakkai's thigh, shuddering.

The burn was getting sharper now, gathering from deep inside. Gojyo's thrusts were getting faster—getting harder and deeper. He loosed his hold on Sanzo's hip and reached down, found Sanzo's cock, wrapped his fingers around it. It was hot and heavy against his palm, slick with sweat and precome. Gojyo stroked with tight, rapid jerks, rubbing his thumb just under the head and over the slit, and then it was pulsing in his hand as Sanzo clenched around him and shuddered, spilling
semen over his fingers and onto the mattress. Gojyo gritted his teeth and rode out Sanzo's orgasm, willing himself not to come. *Not yet, not yet; I want this to last; not yet!*

"Oh," Hakkai gasped. "Ha—ah!" Gojyo looked up. Hakkai's eyes were black with arousal, almost none of the green showing, and his cheeks were flushed. He caught his bottom lip between his teeth and looked down, where Sanzo still had his face pressed against his thigh. *Oh, hell yes,* Gojyo thought as he watched. Hakkai's hand was moving—up and down and up again, faster now—as he jacke himself, and then he jerked Sanzo's head up by the hair, holding him so Gojyo could see the left side of Sanzo's face in almost-perfect profile. Hakkai came with a soft, hitching moan, hips flexing upward as his semen licked up over Sanzo's cheek, across his slightly open mouth, on his chin and throat. Sanzo dragged his tongue over his lips, almost dazedly, seeming not to care that Hakkai still had him hauled up by his hair. *Fuck-drunk,* Gojyo thought hazily. He groaned. The burn was almost intolerable now—an aching pressure at the base of his spine, in the pit of his stomach, heavy in his cock and balls. Forget about waiting; forget about making it last. He needed to move—to fuck and to come now.

Gojyo rocked his hips forward, picking up the rhythm he'd dropped to try to make himself last, and heard his breathing getting louder, more uneven as his thrusts sped up. The burn had turned into a sharp, stabbing pleasure that made his skin tingle with heat and his balls tighten. *Oh. Oh, fuck. Fuck!* Gojyo wasn't sure if he was saying the words aloud or not; he didn't care. He closed his eyes and gave himself over to it all, fucking into Sanzo one last time as he felt himself coming undone on a wave of incandescent ecstasy.

Hakkai was the first to recover. Pushing Sanzo aside, he unfolded his legs and moved to the edge of the bed before standing gracefully, none of the unsteadiness that Gojyo was currently feeling in evidence. Gojyo took satisfaction from the fact that Hakkai was still looking a little hot and bothered as he walked over to his clothes, though. *Fuckin' Hakkai. Unfazed after something like that ... What a guy.* Gojyo grimaced and sat back on his heels, cursing quietly as his softening cock slid free of Sanzo's ass. Sanzo made a noise that sounded like a muffled "hnh" and pushed himself up on arms that trembled slightly.

"Easy now, sweetheart." Gojyo eyed Sanzo's rear—*Shouldn't. But ... yeah. I'm gonna. I'm dead anyway; I might as well die for as many good causes as I can*—then gave it a smart smack. "Just relax a minute."

"Fuck. You." Sanzo's violet glare was sharp enough to give Gojyo a minor twinge, but until they were out of here, he owned Sanzo. Half-owned him, anyway. And he was damn well going to act like it.

"Mouthy." Gojyo cracked a grin that he knew Sanzo'd recognize, even if the blond was still a bit fuzzy from his orgasm. "I like the thought of you in a ball gag, you know." Sanzo went rigid. Thankfully, Gojyo was saved from certain death by a half-dressed and bespectacled Hakkai's well-timed return to Sanzo's side.

"Hmm." Hakkai eyed Sanzo with a—*Gojyo had to admit it—creepily speculative glance and an even creepier smile.* "Perhaps we'll have him wear one for the ride back to the hotel." Hakkai threaded his fingers through Sanzo's hair, ignoring the soft "nnh!" sound Sanzo made, and wiped his come from Sanzo's face and neck with a large handkerchief. "I suggest you clean yourself up," he said in a way that made it clear he wasn't suggesting at all. The handkerchief fell to the mattress between Sanzo's hands, and Sanzo crumpled it in his fist before maneuvering himself to where he could stand up.

"Now, darling," Hakkai began. He moved next to Gojyo, where he could keep an eye on Sanzo,
and took Gojyo's wrist. He raised Gojyo's hand to his lips, looking at Sanzo from behind his glasses the whole time, and licked some of Sanzo's cooling semen from Gojyo's index finger. Sanzo only stood there, watching, the handkerchief in his hand forgotten. "Sonofabitch. Gojyo'd just had completely wrong, completely awesome sex in a den of sickos, perverts, and bastards, and he and his dick were starting to seriously consider another round. Would it be out of character for Lee, boyfriend of Sick Fuck Gonou, to want to go again? And how much of this kinky, messed-up shit was actually Hakkai, anyway? Damn, how much kinky, messed-up shit was Hakkai hiding?

Gojyo was starting to think that he needed to spend more quality time with his roommate almost as much as he needed to get Sanzo on his hands and knees again.

"You need to clean up, too. I want to get back to the hotel before too long, and it is a two-hour drive. I'd like to introduce our new pet to some of the more," Hakkai chuckled, making it sound warm yet dark at the same time, "involved games that we like to play." He nipped Gojyo's fingertip and let go of his wrist. Gojyo tried not look disappointed. Instead, he sucked his ring finger into his mouth, tasting the slippery, bitter-salt flavor that was Sanzo on his tongue. Sanzo was watching him, just like he'd been watching Hakkai. His eyes were dark with what Gojyo thought looked an awful lot like the renewed interest he'd just been feeling himself.

And then Hakkai was knocking on the door, and it was opening so he could talk to someone outside the room. Sanzo's eyes snapped back to a sharp, angry violet, and the tension in his muscles shifted to fight readiness. Gojyo couldn't imagine how he'd managed to keep it from showing for three days, even if he'd been drugged for part of it. He stepped in front of Sanzo and took the crumpled handkerchief from his hand. Not yet. He wiped the rest of the sticky Sanzo mess from his hand, then twitched the hanky in Sanzo's face. "If you need help …" he began, leering. Sanzo took the soiled handkerchief and turned so he was mostly facing away from Gojyo.

"Yes, thank you," Hakkai was saying. Gojyo looked over his shoulder and saw Hakkai close the door and head back over to him and Sanzo, his hands full. "Get dressed; we're leaving." Hakkai dropped a pair of drawstring sweatpants and an oversized t-shirt onto the bed, then placed a pair of flimsy canvas slip-on shoes on top of them.

"Huh." Gojyo started collecting his clothes from the floor and pulling them on: his jeans, a sock, his half-buttoned shirt, his other sock, his shoes. Now more or less respectably clothed, he walked over to Hakkai, who was adjusting his collar. "Hey, babe," he said. Hakkai understood at once and hooked him by the front of his shirt, pulling him close and beginning to button it the rest of the way. Gojyo looked down, at Hakkai's hands. He was only partly doing it to hide his face behind his hair so they could talk. Now that he'd seen Hakkai's hands on Sanzo, had watched Hakkai jack himself off and come all over Sanzo's face … Yeah, okay, he had more of a thing for Hakkai's hands now than before. But— "Those shoes might be trouble. They look slippery—kinda flimsy. It might almost be better for him to go barefoot for when we get in a fight," he said softly.

Hakkai looked up, over Gojyo's shoulder, and then back down at his hands, where he was doing up the next button. He slid his hand inside Gojyo's shirt, fingertips brushing over Gojyo's nipple. Gojyo shivered and leaned into Hakkai's touch instinctively, tilting his head as Hakkai cupped his cheek and came close enough to kiss. "Don't forget the explosives. The shoes will afford some small protection," Hakkai breathed against the corner of his mouth.

"Mmm," Gojyo said. No, he hadn't forgotten about the explosives, though he'd wanted to. Damn it. He started to move away, but Hakkai pinched him, rolling his nipple gently between thumb and forefinger. Gojyo opened his mouth to gasp or moan or do something else—maybe breathe hard and start to hump Hakkai's leg?—but then Hakkai's lips were against his and Hakkai's tongue was in his mouth, and oh God, Hakkai tasted like Sanzo and cinnamon, and Gojyo almost stopped
thinking entirely. Unfortunately, the kiss was over all too soon, but when his brain came back on-
line, Gojyo took some small satisfaction in the thought that Hakkai seemed almost as reluctant to
stop as he was.

The door opened again without warning, and Gojyo could practically feel the air between Sanzo
and the door crackle with tension. Hakkai was closest, and he moved to block whoever it was from
entering. Gojyo caught sight of a dark, stocky guy in some kind of uniform. He held up a hand, and
something in it caught the light and flashed silver. Hakkai went still for maybe half a second, and
then he tilted his head thoughtfully. "No," he said finally. "If he struggles, I prefer to have him
marked and restrained by us—and therefore our belongings—only. Surely you understand our need
to reinforce the transferral of ownership. Even if he doesn't fully understand the significance
consciously, the groundwork is already being laid. And I must admit—" Hakkai's voice lowered to
a more intimate pitch so that Gojyo had to strain to hear him "—that this is my favorite part of
breaking in a new pet—when they start to give in before they understand what they're truly giving
in to. It makes the struggle later, when realization dawns, all the more satisfying." The goon said
something else, his tone quiet and deferential, and Hakkai inclined his head. "Thank you. We'll be
out in just a moment."

Hakkai closed the door and turned to Gojyo. "I declined the handcuffs. It's enough that he's
wearing their—" Hakkai's lip curled "—clothes for now. Not that he'll need to wear anything once
we've gotten him home, hmm?" He walked past the chair and picked up his tie, then continued in
Sanzo's direction. "Turn around. I'd prefer for you to be reasonably comfortable for the long ride
back to our hotel, but if it's necessary to drug you and fold you into a large suitcase, that can be
arranged. I assure you that you will enjoy neither waking up in the suitcase—because I will let you
wake up in it, make no mistake—nor the effects of coming off the drug. Unlike many others with
my predilections these days, I prefer to train my pets the old-fashioned way. But I will use the
drugs graciously provided by our hosts if necessary." Hakkai twisted the tie so that it looped over
on itself. "I'm intrigued by its effects, and I do plan to experiment with it. I would rather not use it
on you too often, though. I enjoy your … spirit. It would be a shame to taint our time together with
something that alters your natural responses, but then again, if it becomes necessary, it might be
interesting to see how much you can withstand—how much you'll," Hakkai cleared his throat
meaningfully, "enjoy—under its influence and how often you can go through withdrawal
undamaged. The choice is yours." Hakkai nodded at Gojyo, and Gojyo moved to stand behind
Sanzo. He was still pretty shocked by the things coming out of Hakkai's mouth, but the uncertainty
of Sanzo fighting them during sex was gone, and a lot of his anxiety about the whole rescue had
gone with it. A mind-blowing orgasm could do that for a guy, apparently.

Now they just had to worry about getting out. That was something Gojyo was sure they could
handle. After all, they did almost-impossible-escape shit like this at least once a month.

Sanzo's hands bunched into fists, but he turned around and showed Hakkai his back. Hakkai pulled
Sanzo's arms behind him, presumably did something with his knot-fu, then tugged on Sanzo's
bound wrists. "Let's go." He looked at Gojyo intently for a second and made a tiny pulling motion
with his left hand. Gojyo smiled and grabbed Sanzo's arm, just above the elbow. He tugged him
around so they were facing the door.

"Sure, babe. I'll keep a hand on the goods at all times, okay?" He made sure that Sanzo was
looking (well, glaring) at him and mimicked Hakkai's minute gesture where Sanzo could see him.
Sanzo's chin dropped a fraction of an inch, signaling his understanding. If Hakkai's knot didn't
come undone when Sanzo twisted his wrists just so, Gojyo would free him.

The door opened again at Hakkai's brisk knock, and the short, dark goon gestured them into the
hallway and started down it, talking over his shoulder at Hakkai. "That was quite a nice
"performance," the goon said. Gojyo resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Great, a smarmy, conversational thug. "A lot more tame than I expected, but Dr. Nii and Dr. Yisou said that you had a reputation for subtlety, Mr. Cho. They said you like to work your way up to the fun stuff, that it's as much about the psychological as the physical for you. Elegant, they said."

"Indeed," Hakkai said. "I'm flattered that they think so." They paused at an electronically sealed door, waiting until Shorty had swiped a keycard through the reader and pressed his thumb against a small glass plate.

"Yeah. The last, uh, patron we had through here got a—" Gojyo quit listening, tuning out the creepy little man's even creepier recitation of the fucked-up shit that went on at his workplace. Instead, he watched Sanzo, who was tense and looking around surreptitiously, fingers shifting irritably behind his back. Gojyo realized it was probably the first time that Sanzo had seen anything other than the room where he'd been held.

They went through another sealed door and emerged into a large room that had a small, tastefully appointed sitting area in one corner and a bank of monitors along the opposite wall—where Gojyo and Hakkai and first been escorted and thoroughly checked for weapons when they'd been let in the building. Gojyo had thought that all the monitors looked kind of like Goku's Tech Lair when they'd first been brought in. He hadn't changed his mind in the hour or so he'd been fucking Sanzo, and it weirded him out a little.

"One moment, please," Shorty said. He went over to the techy-looking security goon sitting in front of the surveillance wall and bent down, muttering something. Gojyo took that opportunity to look around the room carefully. He saw only one camera, and there were only the two skeevy guard dudes—Shorty and his friend. Which was weird, when he thought about it. Weren't they supposed to be met by one of the infamous doctors or something, like they had been when they'd first been brought in. He hadn't changed his mind in the hour or so he'd been fucking Sanzo, and it weirded him out a little.

Shorty hurried back over. "Dr. Nii's assistant Miss Huang was supposed to be meeting you to give you the rest of your merchandise and make sure that you're satisfied with your acquisitions, but they've all been called away. Something came up at one of our other locations." Damn it! Gojyo tried not to be too disappointed. Their first priority was getting Sanzo back, their second rescuing anyone else being held with Sanzo and finding out where the other kidnapped kids had gone. Grabbing or entirely removing any of the Minus Wave higher-ups in an effort to start bringing the syndicate down was only a third. Once they were out of here and had all the information Goku could suck from this shithole, they'd bring Minus Wave to its knees and fucking bury it. Yeah—even if Gojyo had to do it himself, with his bare hands, they would.

"We're anxious to get back to our hotel and pack for the flight home," Hakkai said, sounding vaguely troubled, "but I suppose we can wait here if necessary."

"Oh, no," said a soft voice from behind them. Gojyo whirled around and saw a tall, thin man carrying a small case and dressed in clothes that looked expensive and understated. He'd apparently ninja'd his way through one of the electronic doors without any of them noticing. "That won't be necessary."

"Mr. Yuen," Shorty exclaimed. "This is Mr. Yuen, Dr. Yisou's assistant." He smarmed his way across the room to stand next to the newcomer. Gojyo had to resist the urge to lean away from him as he passed by.

"I've brought you a month's supply of Delerium," Yuen said. He flipped the case over and opened it, tilting it so they could see the rows of ampoules filled with liquid and slotted neatly in the case's
foam liner. Hakkai nodded appreciatively, and Yuen closed the case. "Goh will bring you a copy of the recording of your … session … with your property, here." Yuen flicked his fingers at Shorty, and Shorty scuttled off to the bank of monitors, where the tech-flavored thug was brandishing a small disc.

"Thank you," said Hakkai in a very civil tone. Gojyo tensed slightly and felt Sanzo, standing next to him, do the same. That was the tone that said, *I've had enough of this and will now end things on my terms, thank you very much.*

"Yeah, thanks," Gojyo echoed. He guided Sanzo over to Goh and the monitors, and took the disc. "That's about it, then. Ready to go, babe?" Gojyo was holding Sanzo loosely now, surreptitiously positioning himself to take Goh down as soon as Hakkai gave the signal. Sanzo nodded at him slightly, then focused on the still-sitting tech.

"Yes. Yes, I am," Hakkai said. Gojyo saw Hakkai's hands drop to his belt then whip back up, silver wire glittering between them. He heard Yuen's surprised exclamation choke off into a horrible bubbling sound, and then he had his hands full of pissed-off security goon.

Gojyo dropped the disc and pivoted as Shorty came at him, catching a glimpse of Sanzo in his peripheral vision. Sanzo's hands were free and currently twisting the tech's head to the side, snapping his neck. Gojyo caught Goh by the collar of his uniform shirt and jerked him back, getting an arm around his neck and putting him in a stranglehold. "Just relax into it, asshole, and I'll let you live. Don't fight me," he said into Goh's ear. Goh wheezed and went for his gun, somehow managing to unholster it and raise it in Sanzo's direction. "Aw, fuck, you stupid bastard. Sanzo!" Gojyo hauled Goh to the side, spoiling his aim, and shifted his hold—all in one smooth motion. A quick jerk of his hands, and Shorty flopped to the ground, head hanging at an odd angle that mimicked the tech's.

Sanzo stalked over and picked up the gun. "Fuck off, moron," he said when Gojyo opened his mouth to protest. "Find your own." Sanzo checked the clip, then looked across the room. "Hakkai!"

"Jeez, Hakkai," Gojyo groaned, following Sanzo's gaze. Hakkai still had the garrote pulled tight around Yuen's neck, his knee in the small of the man's back for leverage. "I think he's pretty much dead. You can quit killing him now."

Hakkai looked up at them, mildly surprised. "Oh." He relaxed his arms, letting Yuen and Yuen's partially severed head fall to the ground, then held the wire away from his body and snapped it once in a practiced manner. Tiny droplets of blood leapt from wire to floor with a faint patter. "Let's see what we're up against." He coiled the wire loosely as he stepped over Yuen's body to join them over by the flickering screens.

"Looks like they have three other victims here," Gojyo said. He pointed at the three monitors in the lower left corner of the display. "They look drugged. We'll need help getting them out, then. I hope the Youkai are in position."

"Hn." Sanzo flexed his fingers on the gun's grip. "How many?"

"Counting my brother and Kou, fourteen. And armed for a small war, so we don't need to worry about superior firepower."

"Hn. I can see a dozen guards, probably armed about like this one," Sanzo said, nodding down at Shorty's corpse.
"And about … three? No, four non-thug personnel showing up here, here, and here," Hakkai said. He was standing just behind Gojyo, leaning over his shoulder—almost the same position Gojyo'd been in when Sanzo'd started sucking Hakkai off. Gojyo felt himself flushing with warmth and stepped forward, pointing at another monitor to cover it.

"And this looks like—"

"An outside view, yes. Good; looks like the perimeter's clear of Minus Wave personnel. It'll be much easier for the Youkai to get in if there's minimal outside resistance." Hakkai turned away from the screens and bent down. "You might not want to watch this," he warned Gojyo. Sanzo, still studying the movements of the guards on the monitor, ignored him.

"Why, what're you gonna—oh, fuck, Hakkai! Ew!" Gojyo turned his head away as Hakkai slipped a loop of his garrote around Shorty's thumb, but he wasn't fast enough to miss the way Hakkai sliced it off with a quick jerk of the wire. He heard cloth ripping and turned back to see Hakkai roll the thumb into a ragged bit of Shorty's uniform shirt, then tuck the thumb and Shorty's keycard into his hip pocket.

"Gah. Aren't we just going to blast our way out?" Gojyo rubbed his hands on his thighs, like he was trying to scrub away the image of Shorty's thumb popping off his hand.

"I don't want to use the explosives in this room. It might damage the equipment, and the less time Goku needs to retrieve all of their data, the sooner we start bringing Minus Wave down. We can get out—and Goku can get back in—without any difficulty this way."

Gojyo wrinkled his nose, but nodded. It made a gross sort of sense.

"How far from the outside are we?" Sanzo was done looking at the monitors and was now eyeing the two doors.

"Not far. There's what, three doors like this between here and the outside?" Gojyo rubbed his chin, thinking. "Yeah, three. We're planning on blowing them, right?"

"Yes. It'll create a rolling signal for Goku and the Youkai. They can start getting into position as soon as they hear the first one, and they'll be ready to charge in and start subduing the personnel here as soon as we're out. This way, we won't have to try smuggling Goku back in to disable the rest of the locks. He can just follow the Youkai in, get access to this room, and he and I can work from here while we coordinate the cleanup and rescue from the inside. And this way, the fight will come to us. It's better than stumbling around, waiting for the doors to open one by one."

"Decent plan," Sanzo allowed.

"Wait until you see the 'experimental boom,'" Gojyo said.

"Speaking of …" Hakkai reached into his pocket. "I think it's time to go."

"Hell yes!" Gojyo grinned in relief. Sanzo said nothing as he followed Hakkai and Gojyo to the far door. Hakkai swiped the keycard through the lock and pressed the tip of Shorty's thumb to the scanner, and the door popped open. They emerged into a wide hallway, at the end of which stood another electronically sealed door.

"Fruit chew, please," Hakkai said, holding out a hand. He'd put the card and bloody, cloth-wrapped thumb in one pocket and was fumbling around in another. Gojyo made a face and reached into his tight jeans, eventually producing a slightly squashed square of explosive covered in bright yellow paper. He peeled the paper off and dropped the square onto Hakkai's outstretched palm.
"I think I've got about four more of these. Pockets aren't very roomy in these jeans. I think I should've worn a jacket, like you."

"No, four more should be enough. It should only take one for each door." Hakkai flattened the soft explosive base in his hands, then unwrapped an igniting lozenge and pressed it into the explosive. "I'll be right back." He jogged up the hall and knelt in front of the door, pushing the explosive against the door's lock until it stuck, and then came back just as quickly. "Sanzo, how many rounds do you have?"

Sanzo checked his gun. "Fifteen, plus what's in the gun I took off the tech."

"Hey!" Gojyo glared at Sanzo, who glared right back.

"Good. Can you hit the ignition lozenge—the circle in the middle there?"

"Ch'." Sanzo's lip curled as he took careful aim. "Fire in the hole, idiots." Gojyo had just enough time to cover his ears before Sanzo squeezed the trigger and the end of the hallway exploded in splinters of wood and metal.

"Go, go, go!" Gojyo was up and running down the hall before either Sanzo or Hakkai, to where the door hung by a single twisted hinge.

"Clear it," Sanzo called from halfway down the hall. Gojyo nodded and braced himself, then kicked the door off its hinge. He hit the floor before it did, rolling flush against the wall just in case there'd been goons waiting behind it, but all was quiet as Sanzo and Hakkai drew even with him, then went past him, both hugging either side of the hallway with guns drawn. Nice. So Sanzo'd give Hakkai his extra gun but leave Gojyo to fend for himself. Typical of the bastard. Gojyo got to his feet and followed them through the ruined doorway, already digging in his pocket for the next square of explosive.

The next hallway had a bend in it—and extra doors on either wall before the corner. Hakkai pushed his glasses up his nose as he set the igniter in the explosive. "Gojyo, take my gun and—"

"Way ahead of you." Gojyo picked up the gun Hakkai'd been holding and ran back down the hall, to the ruined doorway. He crouched down, spine against the wall so he was partially hidden by the exploded doorjamb, and forced himself to relax so he could pick up any suspicious sounds or twitches of motion. He nodded once at Sanzo, who was peering around the corner, waiting for his signal. Sanzo raised his gunless hand. He began counting down silently from 5, and then fired. The sound of this explosion was less jarring, and without the need to shut his eyes against the debris, Gojyo could stay more vigilant. He swept his gaze up one side of the hall and down then other, then stood up and made his way toward Sanzo, covering each door as he passed it. He was halfway down the hall and past three of the doors when he heard a tiny click behind him. Gojyo whirled around, gun ready, and dropped to his knee. He fired twice, and the guard stepping into the hallway went down, dead before he hit the ground. He heard shots coming from behind him, around the corner, and yelled, "Sanzo? Hakkai?" Shit; he couldn't hear anything except for gunfire and yelling now, and he was stuck between doors. Gojyo stood up and backed into the wall, checked the hallway to his left and right. He saw nothing except for the dead guard.

"Move faster," Sanzo yelled back. Gojyo heard a couple more shots and checked his section of hallway again, then saw Sanzo's head poke around the corner. Sanzo's eyes went wide. "Gojyo! Get down!" Gojyo let himself go loose and start to fall to the ground, turning his head to follow Sanzo's line of sight. He heard the crack of a gunshot, and then another almost on top of it, and a line of fire streaked across his left temple. The world went red with pain—"Fuck, is this it? I get to screw Sanzo, and this is it?"—and then faded to a cold, stark black.
"... be okay?" Goku was saying. "Okay, then. Sanzo—Sanzo, I'm so glad you're back."

The darkness behind his eyelids was tinged red, like the pain throbbing in his head and the nausea beginning to take shape in his stomach.

"Ch.' I know." Even through his growing misery, Gojyo could hear the affection disguised by irritation in Sanzo's voice. "You already said. Just hurry up and get back in there; we need to clean out their system as soon as possible."

"Y-yeah. Yeah, okay, Sanzo. Hakkai?"

"I'll be along in a minute. Gojyo is fine, I promise. Jien wouldn't be in there holding the control room for you if it were otherwise."

"Right." For a second there, Gojyo wasn't sure if the rhythmic thudding was coming from inside his head, but then he realized—once the sound began to fade—that it was Goku running back into the building.

"Pft. Goku."

"He's barely slept in the last three days—even less than the rest of us."

"Stupid monkey. Make himself sick, he keeps that up."

"Indeed." Soothed by the sound of Hakkai and Sanzo's very normal conversation, Gojyo tried cracking his eyes open a little. He could see a little of the dusk-stained sky, framed by a wide rectangle. The inside of Goku's van? He must be lying on the floor of Goku's van, his head turned toward the open door. Wow, he must've looked pretty bad if Goku'd let them put him in with his precious electronics. He opened his eyes a little wider, thankful that the sun was beginning to set and that he wouldn't be subjected to the stab of bright sunlight on top of his probable concussion.

"We're all taking two weeks off as soon as this is over," Sanzo said. "I'm sending the monkey and Nataku to Mexico." Sanzo and Hakkai were standing in profile, facing one another.

"If we're getting a vacation, I think I'd prefer Hawaii. And now, if you don't mind, I'd like to see that cut. It looks quite unpleasant." Hakkai lifted his hand, reaching toward Sanzo's forehead, but then hesitated. His hand hovered there, a couple of inches from Sanzo's face. Gojyo blinked slowly, but nothing had changed: Hakkai's hand was in the air; Hakkai wasn't touching Sanzo—it was almost as if he were afraid to. But Hakkai, touching Sanzo; being invited to touch Sanzo ...

Hakkai was gentle, Gojyo could tell, the same as he always was. And Sanzo—Sanzo was ... welcoming it. He stood and patiently let Hakkai run his fingers over his brow until Hakkai was satisfied. And even then, when Hakkai was done, Sanzo didn't lean away like he normally would. He just stood there, looking at Hakkai, and then—

"Hawaii. Hnh. We'll see about that."
That was it. He was hallucinating, and that couldn't be good. Gojyo tried to push himself upright, but pain flooded his head and left him gasping for breath before he even got so much as a centimeter off the floor. "Owwww—" he moaned. Crap, he sounded pathetic.

"Gojyo!" Hakkai was at his side in an instant, one hand warm and solid on Gojyo's shoulder, and the other even warmer on his face. Gojyo tried to turn his head into Hakkai's touch, but Hakkai held him still. "Don't move too much. It looks like you've got a concussion, but you should be all right. I'd still like to take you to the hospital for some proper x-rays, though."

"Nah, I'll be fine," Gojyo assured him. He lifted his hand and waved it unconcernedly, though even that was enough to make the uneasy feeling in his belly shift warningly. And what was up with words being all squishy in his mouth all of the sudden? "Up and ready to kick ass an' bring Minus Wave down an' then spend a week on the beach. Yeah."

"The beach?" Hakkai smiled at him, a real smile—the kind that always made Gojyo want to smile back. "I was thinking Hawaii."

"Lotsa beaches there," Gojyo said. He tried to nod, but that made everything go hazy and red and wavery with pain all at the same time.

"Stay still, Gojyo. Sanzo," Hakkai said over his shoulder, "I'd really like to stop at the hospital before we get back to the office." His hand came away from Gojyo's face, and Gojyo reached for it. His clumsy fingers brushed against Hakkai's wrist, then latched on.

"Really like y'r hands, Hakkai," Gojyo breathed, closing his eyes again. He felt Hakkai stroking his forehead, caressing his cheek.

"I know, Gojyo." Hakkai stroked his cheek again, then ran his thumb gently over Gojyo's lips. Gojyo's eyes snapped open. Ow ow ow! "I know. I have to go help Goku now so we can finish up." Hakkai stood up straight, then turned to Sanzo. "Keep him awake. We should be done in oh, about thirty minutes? Maybe twenty." Gojyo saw Sanzo nod, and then Hakkai touched his cheek one last time and was gone from his field of vision.

Gojyo spent the next few minutes trying to keep his eyes open and breathe deeply without making himself hurt more or agitate the Nausea Monster in his stomach. The first few lungfuls were a struggle, but after that he started to feel a little bit better. Sanzo leaned against the van, occasionally glancing in at him, then looking back out into the rapidly darkening sky.

Gojyo breathed for another minute. He was definitely feeling better. In fact, he was feeling so much better that—"Hnnnnngh." Gojyo pulled himself upright, first pushing himself up from the floor and then using the handle on the van's door. And then he clung to the handle, eyes closed as he learned how to breathe through the pain and nausea all over again.

"Idiot." Sanzo's hands clamped on his arms, holding him steady. He could feel Sanzo's breath on his face.

"Thanks."

"Ch.'" Sanzo let go of him carefully, and Gojyo slumped against the edge of the van's door. After another minute, he was feeling well enough to open his eyes. The sky was stained red and orange, with a band of purple fading into the darkening blue of impending night. It was pretty. And it made him want a cigarette. A cigarette … Gojyo let himself tip to the side a little. Had he—yeah, he'd tossed a pack and a lighter into the van before they'd left for the hotel. Goku had squawked for half a second until Gojyo pointed out that he wasn't going to be smoking in the van. He was just putting
his smokes in the van—and it wasn't like he had room for them in his jeans, especially with the "fruit chews" lining his pockets. Gojyo smirked a little as he remembered how easily Goku had given in, and then he grinned outright as his fingers hit cellophane-wrapped cardboard and a cool metal rectangle. Yes! His Hi-Lites and his Zippo! The zing of pain that ran through his head as he pushed himself up to sit against the door again was well worth it.

Less worth it was the way the concussion seemed to be affecting more than just his head and stomach. Gojyo's fingers shook as he tapped out a smoke. He'd fumbled with the pack, having trouble getting it open. Then he was fumbling with the cigarette, almost dropping it twice before managing to wedge it between his fingers. When he got to the part where he was supposed to light the cigarette, he lost it completely. He flicked the lighter open and promptly dropped it on the ground, where it landed with a sad little clinking sound. Gojyo wanted to cry. He was going to have to lean down to get the lighter, and if he did that, his head was going to explode. But if he didn't, he couldn't have his smoke, and now that he had a cigarette in his hand, he wanted a smoke more than anything else in the world, even more than for the pain in his head to disappear. He closed his eyes to gather his courage, took a deep breath, and—

"Here." Gojyo's eyes snapped open as he heard the familiar sound of his lighter sparking and catching. He shoved the cigarette between his lips and gingerly leaned forward. The flame kissed the tip of his smoke, and Gojyo sucked in a lungful of hot, sweet nicotine.

"Thanks," he mumbled around the filter. He took another drag and held it in. Somehow, the act of smoking seemed to push his queasiness aside. He breathed out, watching his exhalation trail up into the sky and fade away. "I think … I think your smokes are in here somewhere. I'm sure Goku brought them. Hell, you can even use my lighter." Gojyo looked up at Sanzo and tried to grin. It wasn't working, so he looked away and reached down next to his leg, fiddling with the pack of Hi-Lites. A cool hand covered his own briefly, nudging his fingers aside, and then pulled the pack away. Gojyo looked up again. Sanzo was tapping out a cigarette, tossing the pack into the van somewhere behind Gojyo, lighting up.

"Nah." Sanzo inhaled smoke, only frowning faintly at the taste of the Hi-Lite, and then let out a long, slow breath. Gojyo shivered, making the glowing tip of his cigarette tremble. Sanzo studied him for a moment, then pivoted on his heel and sat down next to him. He was so close that their shoulders were almost touching—so close that Gojyo could feel the heat coming off Sanzo's body.

"H-hey, Sanzo. I—" Gojyo stopped when Sanzo turned his head to look at him. He was almost not glaring for once.

"Shut up, idiot." Sanzo took another drag, held it in, exhaled slowly. "This is fine."

Gojyo looked at him—really looked at him—and then nodded once, carefully. He sucked in another lungful of smoke. He felt warm, inside and out, and when he exhaled, he knew Sanzo was right.

Everything was fine.

The fuckin' Minus Wave Conglomerate was going down, the rescue mission was a success, he'd gotten to live out a bit of his greatest fantasy …

And if he was reading the signs right, he'd have a chance to do it again. In Hawaii.

Oh, yeah. Everything was definitely fine.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!