

MASAHIRO arrived at his desk one morning to find a single red rose awaiting him. His first thought was one he seemed to have been having a lot recently: *I'm too old for this.*

When Ogawa took his seat next to him, he avoided eye contact, and said nothing. Masahiro was used to that. Since that encounter in the lift, Ogawa had seemed to do everything he possibly could to avoid having to communicate with Masahiro. He had even heard a rumour from some of the young women who worked on the other side of the partition – who had become very friendly with him recently, for some reason – that Ogawa had put in a request to have his workstation moved to a different desk. He wasn't sure how true that was, but Ogawa had certainly started avoiding that particular train into the office in the mornings; the large flask of coffee by his computer was a sign that he was trying to get used to an earlier commute.

He was also the one responsible for the rose on Masahiro's desk; Masahiro was reasonably certain of that.

"Ogawa-kun?" he said.

Ogawa either hadn't heard him, or he had chosen not to listen.

He grasped the side of Ogawa's chair and twisted it to the side so Ogawa faced him. Ogawa tried to stand, but Masahiro grabbed his shoulder and tried to hold him in place. It made Ogawa overbalance; he toppled forward, landing on top of Masahiro and pinning him against the desk. Their faces were inches from each other. Masahiro could smell the strong

coffee on Ogawa's breath.

He raised his free hand to create some distance between them, but Ogawa grabbed him by the wrist. "Umeda-san," he murmured, "we need to stop doing this."

There were people watching; Masahiro could sense it. He ignored them. "Yes," he said, slowly and carefully. "We need to stop."

Neither of them moved. "What were you going to say?" said Ogawa.

Masahiro glanced meaningfully towards the rose. "Why did you put that there?" he said.

"How did you know it was me?" said Ogawa.

"Kobashikawa-kun would have put one on your desk as well," Masahiro pointed out.

"And you think Kobashikawa and I are the only people here interested in you?" said Ogawa.

Masahiro attempted a dismissive grimace, but as always, it was oddly difficult to dismiss Ogawa.

"I'm an old man," he said at last.

"And?"

"Well ..." He shrugged, as best he could when Ogawa was still pinning him against the desk. "You know ... my body isn't ... what it used to be."

"You think this is just about your body?" said Ogawa. With some effort, he reached over to pick up the rose. "You know

what this is, don't you, Umeda-san? You know what these flowers mean?"

"I," said Masahiro, and he watched mutely while Ogawa straightened up and turned to his work with an expression on his face that Masahiro didn't think he'd ever seen before. After a while, he succeeded in placing it. It was disappointment.

He turned to his own computer, typing a little more slowly than usual, and glancing more times than he would care to admit at the rose that still lay on the desk. It wasn't about his body – or not only about it, at least. And it wasn't only about Ogawa's body either. His subordinate was a kind man – a cute man, even. A younger man, who could make him feel excited about life again, with that fresh optimism that only young men had.

He was smiling to himself; he bent his head low to hide it, but the smile soon vanished anyway as he realised what this meant. He had thought that kiss in the lift might be the end of this awkwardness between them. Either they would give in to the sexual attraction that had been building for weeks, or it would finish there and they could go back to being a supervisor and his subordinate. But there was something else: it wasn't just that magnetism. He *liked* Ogawa; and Ogawa liked him. And he strongly suspected that it would be even longer before either of them did anything about it. This wasn't the sort of tension that could be defused with a kiss.

He could invite Ogawa for a coffee, perhaps. They could

get to know each other better. Then they could go to the cinema, maybe, or on a day trip somewhere. All he needed to do was ask. But for now – he turned back to his computer screen again. It would come. For now, he would just let that tension simmer a little longer.