











































## Once a Year

Written by Arcade Party

It barely took twenty minutes into the festival before Burdoc tripped and landed flat on his face.

"Dude," Malik groaned, "Every year?"



There was a tiny, barely-audible groan from where Burdoc still hadn't moved. If past experience was anything to go off of — and Malik wasn't wrong, since this did seem to happen every year — it would be at least another twenty minutes before the shame faded enough for Burdoc to pick himself up. Longer if an old woman walked by and laughed at how ridiculous youth could be.

Not content to just leave one of the loves of his life there, Tomai crouched down and leaned in. "Hey."



A big, teary crocodile eye peered back at him from between Burdoc's gigantic fingers.



There were a lot of different things Tomai could choose to say to console Burdoc. He'd tried a lot of different ways to pick up Burdoc's mood after humiliating accidents over the years, and Malik had tried even more ones.

(Somehow, despite the fact that Malik's suggestions tended to be a little bit too direct or mean for Tomai's tastes, they always ended up working out better.)

But sitting there, looking at Burdoc's glowing green blush and listening to Malik's tentacles fidget absently behind him... Tomai couldn't help but really, sincerely appreciate how they'd been coming here every year. He'd always taken the festival for granted — kind of taken Malik and Burdoc being there for granted, too.



Tomai lifted his head and inhaled, breathing in the fresh, crisp air rolling off the lake. He listened to the bustling of the people as they sold their wares, or argued with each other, or even just walked by without saying a word.

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His friends — boyfriends, Tomai reminded himself with an inevitable creeping blush — just watched.



Then he looked back down at Burdoc and offered a hand. Malik leaned over his shoulder, grinning, and nodded at Burdoc. "Burdoc," Malik said, "I can see your whoooole butt, so you better get up."

With a shriek, Burdoc shot to his feet. He swirled around, clearly trying to get an angle so he could see how likely it was that his humiliated-and-prone pose had showed anything off. With Malik, sometimes he'd just say things to see what happened — Tomai knew that just as well as Burdoc did. And the way he was hovering around Burdoc, cackling up a storm, made it impossible to tell.



(Malik definitely had been telling the truth this time and Burdoc's underwear had definitely been a magnet for Tomai's eyes, but Tomai wasn't about to tell him that in the middle of the festival.)



He cleared his throat, trying to catch his distracted companions' attention again, and gestured behind him to the food stalls. "C'mon," Tomai called out, watching their faces light up, "We've still got lots of stuff to go see!"



## Tomai

THERE'S JUST 15 DAYS BEFORE THE ANNUAL NIGHT FESTIVAL -- HOW WILL YOU CHOOSE TO SPEND YOUR TIME? WILL YOU SPEND IT WITH YOUR FATHER, THE LADY, OR YOUR TWO BEST FRIENDS BURDOC AND MALIK? WHAT YOU CHOOSE WILL AFFECT TOMAI FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE!

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