# *Kizuna: Bonds of Love #2*

***by Kat Avila***

*Reviews may contain information that could be considered 'spoilers'. Readers should proceed at their own risk.*

**Publisher**
**Be Beautiful**
http://www.BeBeautifulManga.com

**Credits**
Writer: Kazuma Kodaka
Artist: Kazuma Kodaka
Distributor: Central Park Media
Translator: BunnyBotX
ISBN: 1-58664-957-4

**Grade:** 9

***Kizuna: Bonds of Love*** is an endearing boy's love/yaoi classic. I was first introduced to Kazuma Kodaka's manga through the anime. Of the three volumes published under the **Be Beautiful** label, volume 2 is my favorite, partly because of the cover drawings. On the front is a playful masquerade close-up of Kei Enjyoji (or Enjouji) and Ranmaru Samejima costumed as a classic vampire and his victim respectively. Ran-chan is set in the foreground by his white dress shirt and gloves and pale yellow jacket, Kei in the background by his midnight blue coat and crimson red cape. The back cover drawing is a medium shot of Ran determinedly smooching and embracing Kei during lovemaking while Kei watchfully glances back over his left

shoulder at the viewer. The two shots are obvious fan service; the front cover drawing is unrelated to any story in the volume.

Volume 2 contains a flashback to Kei and Ran's childhood when Kei fell in love with Ran. Cherry blossom petals are flying all over the place, which is to be expected since the Japanese school year begins in spring. Kei dares to befriend the aloof Ran who already has a reputation as a fierce competitor in the martial art of kendo. On page 21, Kei is enjoying his teasing of Ran during chemistry lab. His tongue is sassily sticking out as he gazes up at an unusually flustered Ran with a "what-are-you-gonna-do-about-it" look. The flashback ends in the recent past when Kei and Ran meet again as university students.

The chapter divider page on page 61 has an inset shot of an aroused Kei and Ran starting to get down to business, the kind of sexy drawing that makes me think, "This manga was worth the money," in this case, $15.99. There is something magnetic about watching two titanic men work out a love relationship (Ranmaru was formidable in kendo and Kei is the illegitimate son of a powerful criminal gang boss), and Kodaka makes you care about what happens next to her characters because she's not afraid to let them be tender and vulnerable with each other, almost to the point of it being laughable.

What follows the divider page is the heart of ***Kizuna: Bonds of Love***. The story includes the hit-and-run that precedes the
dramatic deepening of Enjyoji and Ran-chan's relationship. Some of Kodaka's strongest artwork is in this section; for example, on page 75, the bottom left-hand panel is Ran striking an artificial kabuki kata-like pose (much like the mie) as Kei takes him to heaven with a hand job. Your eyes linger on the uncommon panel.

A striking sequence begins on page 97 and ends on page 102. It covers the assassination attempt that puts Ran in the hospital. You see umbrellas flying in the air. Ran raises his arm protectively in front of himself after pushing Kei to safety. On page 101, the expression on Kei's face is something you never ever want to see in reality.

Definitely, Kodaka at her best.

The last major story in this volume, "One Man's Bloom", is about a brutal event in Kai Sagano's life (Kai is Kei's disruptive half-brother) that brings him emotionally closer to his stoic bodyguard Masanori Araki. The level of cruelty and violence in the story is atypical for a popular woman's manga, but it makes you remember what makes the yakuza legendary.

There are a lot of emotional ups and downs packed in volume 2. Kazuma Kodaka's storytelling is what makes ***Kizuna: Bonds of Love*** collectable.

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