

The Pajama Boy

A Novel by Ginger Mayerson



The Wapshott Press

The Pajama Boy

Published by
The Wapshott Press
An Imprint of J LHLs
PO Box 31513
Los Angeles, CA 90031



The Wapshott Press
www.WapshottPress.com

Copyright © 2008 by Ginger Mayerson

First printing August 2008

All rights reserved. Being a work of fiction, any resemblance herein to persons living or dead is astonishing and purely coincidental. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

ISBN: 978-0-6152-3547-9

06 05 04 03 4 3 2 1

Wapshott Press logo by Molly Kiely
Cover design by Robin Austin

Author's Preface

I've been reading too much yaoi manga and too many yaoi novels. "The Pajama Boy" was born from the need to kick all those stray yaoi tropes out of my consciousness so they wouldn't end up in something else I was writing. Probably this is a strange reason for writing a novel, but if novels were only written for normal reasons, I suspect very few novels would ever get written. I'll try not to ruin it for you, but although this book is set in contemporary Japan, it has nothing to do with Japan. Or rather, this novel has about as much to do with contemporary Japan as those yaoi manga set in 18th century Europe have to do with 18th century Europe. Or has as much to do with gay sex as, well, yaoi. For those of you who might have wandered in here from reality, yaoi manga is gay porn comics created mainly by women for an audience of mostly women. There are lots of explanations on why yaoi is such a huge hit at this point in publishing history and you can look 'em up yourself. It's one of those why-ask-why kind of cravings. I don't really have a solid hypothesis on the popularity of yaoi. Just when it all seems to be a combination of internalized misogyny, racism, androphobia, the denial or ignorance of the reality of male anatomy (in part due to Japan's censorship laws) and gay sex (again, in part due to Japan's censorship laws, but also because it's messy, sweaty, and can be painful) and my face hurts from scowling at the entire genre, some yaoi manga or novel will make me smile because of its goofy sweetness and the whole crazy circus starts up all over again.

Although "The Pajama Boy" springs from my irritation with yaoi, the genre I love to shake my head at, and my need to exorcise my yaoi demons by writing them out, I can only hope, reader, that this novel makes you smile at least once or twice at its goofy sweetness. And if not, then I hope the bitchy prose and *poco a poco accelerando* plot will keep you reading.

Hey, live it up!

And lest I forget: Many many many thanks to Jane, Lene, Logan, Lynn, and Kris for their editorial and moral support while writing this book. Also huge thank yous to Robin for the gorgeous, and multiple, cover artwork.

Ginger Mayerson
May 2008

Nagasaki

“Sir? Here’s your order...Sir?” The boy at the cash register nervously held his take-out order to him. “Excuse me? Sir?”

“Yeah...yeah. Thanks.” Still staring, Shimada fumbled for his wallet and shoved money at the kid. He grabbed his take-out order and fled.

Rushing to his room, Shimada couldn’t eat his dinner when he got there. “The resemblance...too strong,” he muttered. Same soft brown eyes set trustingly in a little pointed face. Same untidy black hair. Same resemblance to a wary kitten with a new toy he’s not so sure of. “Too strong...” He splashed some water on his face and looked in the mirror. A man in his mid-twenties looked back, not the callow high school boy he once was. Still young, just tired and thin and in need of a haircut. His youthful phantom slid away and he was suddenly very hungry.

The newspaper Shimada wrote for had recently moved their office to a new building. The café was now on his route home. He’d never noticed it in the neighborhood before, but it smelled good, looked clean and the menu had everything he liked. After his first unsettling impression, Shimada avoided the café for a few days and then gave in. On that second evening, an older man was at the cash register and the boy was cleaning tables. There was no shock that night; the boy was just another teenage boy who looked like many other teenage boys. With a small feeling of disappointment Shimada went home. Even the noodles weren’t as good as they were the first time.

The side street café was cheap and cheerful. Shimada only noticed the name, Café Chango, on this third visit when he decided to eat there instead of getting take-out. Eating there afforded him a more leisurely view of the boy. “I really have to get over this,” he thought. “That is not Seiji, although he kind of reminds me of him...he’s not him.”

From behind his menu, Shimada cast furtive glances at the boy cleaning tables and taking orders. The boy was casting his own glances, and occasionally their glances locked before one or the other looked quickly away. When the boy finally came to the table to take his order, neither of them could make eye contact and Shimada decided to get it to go after all.

There really was something about this boy that reminded Shimada of his lost love left behind in Tokyo. He thought Nagasaki was far enough away from all that, but apparently fate wanted to torture him some more. He resolved to avoid the café’s street thenceforth.

His work kept Shimada busy for a while. He and his photographer were guests at a new luxury hotel and spa for a week. This soft news

story reminded Shimada unpleasantly of advertising. Fortunately, he dug up some disgruntled employees, and exposed some shady labor practices and intimidation, as well as some slipshod construction and kick-backs to local contractors, which put that part of the story in the hard news section. This made him feel better, especially when his friend and editor, Ikoma, got a few threatening phone calls.

"I try to give you a vacation and you find a dead rat," Ikoma said, shaking his head in mock sadness.

"I'm a newspaper man, not a fashion writer."

"We're just a little regional paper, Ryuu," Ikoma said, lighting a cigarette.

"News is news, Jun," Shimada said grimly. "Big, little, local, regional, national, international, it's all news." He walked out on Ikoma's laugh.

"Careful you don't win any awards, pal," Ikoma yelled after him.

Shimada barely heard him. He was very hungry for noodles. But it was late and the café was closed. Disappointed, Shimada strolled on, but stopped when he heard voices in a nearby alley.

"You did it before, you can do it again." A deep voice.

"I paid you back, once is enough." A younger, frightened voice.

There was scuffling and a slap; the deep voice snarled, "Cock tease!"

Shimada stepped into the alley and saw the café boy fighting off a larger man. "Hey."

"You fuck off!" the man screamed.

"I doubt it," Shimada said. He dodged the man's lunge and decked him with a right hook when he came up again.

Grabbing the boy by the arm, Shimada decided a little distance from the situation was in order. They were several blocks away when they finally stopped to catch their breath.

"Th— thanks," the boy panted. "Oh, I know you! Where've you been?"

"Working."

"Oh, um, thanks..."

"You're welcome," Shimada said, enjoying the resemblance/non-resemblance to Seiji in the boy. "What's your name?"

"Katayama, Yoshi Katayama," he said. "What's your name?"

"Ryuu Shimada."

"It's nice to meet you," Yoshi said. "Thank you for rescuing me."

"You said that."

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Ryuu said. "I'll walk you home."

“Well, that’s a problem...”

“Oh?”

“That guy...”

“Yeah?”

“We live in the same boarding house...and...”

“And?” Shimada’s investigative reporter’s instincts started to kick in.

“And...I’m not sure what to do,” Yoshi stammered. “I guess I could sleep at the café, or...or maybe at your place?”

“You just met me, Yoshi, is it wise to go home with me?” Shimada asked, suppressing a smile. “How do you know I’m not as bad as that guy back there?”

“Because you rescued me from him,” Yoshi said logically. “And I know you from the café...sort of.”

To buy some time while he thought this over, Shimada asked what was going on back in the alley. Yoshi’s story was that he’d borrowed a little money from his neighbor in the boarding house and when he couldn’t pay it back, the neighbor offered to let him work it off in hand jobs. Not realizing that one hand job wouldn’t be enough, Yoshi had reluctantly jacked the guy off. Yoshi had been successfully avoiding the man until the guy ambushed him after he’d closed the café.

“I was lucky you came along,” Yoshi said.

“Yeah...lucky,” Shimada said, still mulling it over. “How much did you borrow from that guy?” Yoshi named a paltry sum. “He’s going to be mad now, so you can come home with me and we’ll deal with it tomorrow.”

Shimada’s tiny room was a mess. “You can have half the futon,” he said when they were taking their coats off. “Unless you want to sleep on the floor. But I only have one blanket, so...”

“I don’t take up much room,” Yoshi said, looking around. “Where’s the bathroom?”

Shimada pointed to a door by the window and loosened his tie. His right hand hurt from punching the creep; the knuckles were red and swollen. It would be okay in the morning, but he put some ice on it anyway. A drink might be nice, but he was crashing from the adrenalin rush so he decided against it. Instead he pulled a pair of pajamas he’d never worn out of his dresser and tossed them on the bed. “You can wear those,” he said to Yoshi, who blushed. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Yoshi said, blushing harder. “I was just wondering what I could wear...”

“You can wear those,” Shimada repeated, puzzled by the turn this conversation was taking. He went into the bathroom while Yoshi

changed into the pajamas. Shimada usually slept in the nude, but he put on a pair of sweat pants and a t-shirt that night. He found Yoshi way far over on the right hand side of the futon.

“Is this side okay?” he asked. “I noticed there were books on the other side.” He nodded at the pile of books, magazines, newspapers, and junk mail piled up on the left side.

“Yeah, you’re fine there.” Shimada got under the blanket and turned off the light. “Good night.”

“Good night,” Yoshi said. “Hey...why did you stare at me that time?”

Shimada turned the light back on, looked at the wide-eyed Yoshi and decided the truth wouldn’t hurt much. “Because you reminded me of someone I knew in high school,” he said. “But that was a long time ago.”

“How long ago?”

“About eight years ago.” Shimada watched Yoshi forming another question and decided to head it off. “I’m blitzed, Yoshi, ask me whatever it is in the morning.” He turned off the light and fell asleep when his head hit the pillow.

A little after dawn, Shimada woke with Yoshi curled in his arms and a rush of nostalgia for such sweet mornings with Seiji. But this was not Seiji, and it was time to get up. “Hey you,” he said, jostling Yoshi, who snarled and burrowed deeper. “It’s morning, kid, time to face what must be faced.”

“Oh!” Yoshi rolled away and sat up, blinking. “I forgot where I was.”

“Who do you usually share your bed with?” Shimada asked.

“No one...now. I used to sleep in with my older brother sometimes,” Yoshi said softly. “I was dreaming about that.” He looked at Shimada and smiled. “Thanks again for rescuing me.”

“Well, I’m not done rescuing you yet,” Shimada said.

An hour later, after a hasty wash and breakfast, they were at Yoshi’s boarding house. The landlady met them at the door; she’d been watching the street for Yoshi. “You little slut!” she yelled and went on to accuse him of leading nice Mr. Watanabe on and then having a thug beat him up. “Here’s your things,” she said, waving at a small pile of packages by the door. “Get out!”

“But I’m paid to the end of the month!” Yoshi protested.

The furious woman thrust her hand in her apron and counted out some coins. She shoved them at Yoshi and yelled “Get out!” again. Some of the other boarders were peeking timidly at them from the stairs.

Yoshi was staring stunned at the money in his hand.

“Is that enough?” Shimada asked, watching the landlady lest she attack them.

“I think so,” Yoshi said, and told Shimada what he paid a month.

Shimada did some math in his head. “Well, that’s robbery, but that’s what’s left on this month,” he said. “Let’s go.” He picked up a parcel.

“And who are you?” the landlady snarled.

“Me? I’m just a thug who pulls child molesters named Watanabe off little boys in alleys,” he said over his shoulder. He shoved the parcel-laden Yoshi out ahead of him before he had to listen to any invective screamed at him.

“Oh, damn, what now?” Yoshi asked. He sounded annoyed and distressed in equal measures.

“Well the good news is you won’t be running into your banker, Mr. Watanabe, anytime soon,” Shimada said blandly. “I suppose the bad news is you can stay at my place until you find a new one.”

“You mean that?” Yoshi said, trotting to keep up with Shimada’s determined stride.

“I do. You work at that café, right?” Yoshi nodded. “So if any of my treasured possessions disappear, I’ll know where to start looking,” he said with a wry smile. “You remember where my place is?” he asked, handing Yoshi his keys.

“I think so.” Shimada wrote it on the back of one of his business cards for him. “I read this paper,” Yoshi said.

“Many people do,” Shimada said. “See you.”

That evening, Shimada stopped by his landlord’s office to tell him about Yoshi and request a second set of keys. “Oh, that nice young man,” the landlord said. “He stopped by to tell me the same thing on his way to school.”

“School?” Shimada thought.

“And he did a little shopping and cleaning when he got back from school,” the landlord said as if this were the most wonderful thing he’d ever seen.

“Shopping and cleaning?” Shimada thought, but said, “I see.”

“Such a nice young man. Such nice manners. He bowed to me on his way to work this evening,” the landlord said, handing Shimada a spare set of keys. “You just missed him,” he added, naming a small sum for the keys.

Shimada paid him and for good measure bowed politely before he left. Up in his now very clean room, he found the refrigerator full of food, and a stack of school books by the right side of the bed.

“Hmmm, how long do you plan to be here, Yoshi?” Shimada asked the empty room and, predictably, didn’t get an answer. He helped himself to an apple from the bowl on the counter and settled down with the paper.

He’d had dinner with Ikoma, who’d roared through his story of rescuing Yoshi as if it were the greatest comedy he’d ever heard. “You’re a romantic at heart, Ryuu,” he’d said. “Oh, where will it all end?”

In retrospect, and listening to Ikoma laugh, Shimada found it funny himself. He was still smiling about it as he skimmed over the slick ads and ads thinly disguised as “news” stories in a new Tokyo magazine Ikoma gave him at dinner. Advertising made him sick, but that evening nothing could ruin his good mood.

He wasn’t sleepy, so he decided to head for the café to walk Yoshi home and met him on the stairs. “You’re early.”

“I didn’t have to close tonight,” Yoshi said, handing him a bag. “I brought some noodles for dinner.”

Shimada didn’t tell him he’d already had dinner. But he really liked the café’s noodles, so he dished up a smaller portion for himself and sat opposite Yoshi and waited for the kid to finish his prayer before eating. “Any trouble tonight?” he asked casually.

“How’d you know?”

“Your former neighbor seems like the kind of guy who doesn’t get the message the first time.” Shimada omitted that he’d been on his way to make sure Yoshi got back ho– back to the room safely.

“He did show up, but the cook chased him off with a butcher knife,” Yoshi said cheerfully. He went on to recount that he’d explained being attacked after his work shift, but not why he was attacked, and so the whole café staff was on the alert for trouble. Sure enough, his ex-neighbor was loitering behind the café and an alert cook scared some sense into him. The same heroic cook had walked Yoshi ho– walked Yoshi back to the apartment building that night.

“That cook sounds like a nice guy,” Shimada remarked. “He makes good noodles, too.” He listened to Yoshi make a yummy noise. “Does he have room for you at his place?”

“I doubt it,” Yoshi said, slurping broth. “He’s got a wife, two kids and a new baby in a place not much bigger than this.”

“Did you have a chance to look for a place today?”

“Well, no, I went right from school to work today.”

“And when did you have time to wrap the landlord around your little finger?” Shimada asked.

“Eh?” Yoshi looked up, surprised.