

“Damn, I take a good picture, don’t I?” He was in an exceptionally good mood, which was, as far as Takashi was concerned, preferable to a bad mood. Takashi considered asking why he was in such a good mood, but Daitaro beat him to it by expounding on how wonderful the free publicity was for Papa Elysium, PRCK Architects (the trendy, asshole architect) and that it didn’t hurt the world to know that Daitaro Shimada was not such a snob he couldn’t be seen with trendy pajama models.

Takashi was inclined to accept this explanation and drop the discussion if only to get away from the blazing, blinding glare of Daitaro’s rampaging ego searing everything within twenty feet of it.

Seiji and Yoshi had been amused by the pictures, and although Seiji said it looked like fun, he still preferred quieter, more intimate establishments for late-night suppers. He and Yoshi had such a good time in galleries and just wandering around Tokyo that weekend, they hardly had time to discuss the events of that night.

The only person Takashi had some qualms about seeing the pictures was Ryuu, since it was his brother and Koji who were the main photographic subjects. But Ryuu was exhausted by his Moscow trip and when he did recover and Takashi asked him what he thought about the photos, all Ryuu ever said was, “Damn, Daitaro takes a good picture, doesn’t he? Maybe he should have gone into modeling. Oh yeah, and you and Yoshi looked bored out of your minds. Remind me never to go to that place.”

A few days after Shimada got home and recovered from the Moscow assignment, Renge Hirayama insisted he have lunch with him so he could give him Yoshi’s modeling checks. “I kept trying to give them to him, and he kept saying to give them to you,” Renge said over a very dry martini. “Why the hell is that?”

“Now that you make me think about it, I think he doesn’t have a bank account,” Shimada said, chewing a nice fat, gin-soaked olive and perusing the menu.

“Well, do something about that, Ryuu,” Renge said. He mentioned that the restaurant’s Steak Diane was especially good and ordered it for himself. He also ordered another round of martinis. Shimada ordered lobster roasted with basil because the food in Moscow had nearly killed him and lunch was on Renge.

“Why is MM sending them to you?” Shimada asked vaguely. He was distracted by the huge sums on checks with Yoshi’s name on them.

“According to Kenbo, Yoshi told accounting to send them to you and they had no idea who you were, so they sent them to me,” Renge told him. “So that’s the good news.”

“There’s bad news?” Shimada asked.

“There’s weird news, and it’s not my fault.” Renge sipped his fresh drink. “It seems Yoshi verbally agreed to a three film deal with SKT Productions. One of their lawyers called me yesterday to work out the details.”

“Oh, God...” Shimada looked down at the plate set in front of him. “Oh, lobster!”

Renge went on while his Steak Diane was flambé-ing and Shimada, at Renge’s request, dug into his lobster lunch. “It appears that SKT is putting together a deal to make a film out of ‘The English-Speaking Escort.’ It’s not a bad idea, really, and they’re figuring there’ll be enough juice from it to get at least two more films out of Yoshi from it. The SKT guy didn’t say it, but I’m assuming they’re making the same kind of deal with Koji.”

“Did Yoshi sign anything?” Shimada asked and Renge, his mouth full of delicious Steak Diane, indicated that he hadn’t signed anything. “Then you can get him out of it, can’t you?”

“That’s just it, Ryuu, I’m not sure I want to,” Renge said, almost enjoying Shimada’s comically shocked look. “It’s a lot of money—”

“For a kid who’s a fad, you mean,” Shimada said.

“You know, pal, I really think we should stop thinking of Yoshi as a fad, because he’s consistently defied all the fad pitfalls—no, eat your lunch and let me finish,” Renge said, and Shimada obeyed because the lobster was superb. “We know Nakadai-sensei is a genius demon with a camera, but you can only get gold out of mud if there’s gold in the mud. His work with Yoshi is some of the best work of his career. Yoshi comes right off the page with his eyes closed. How many established supermodels can do that? One or two. Somehow Yoshi does it naturally or learned it fast. I saw those first ads and they didn’t give me much hope, but he’s obviously a quick learner and inspired.” He held up a hand to stop Shimada from interrupting. “It’s faster if I finish and then you argue. Take this stupid play: who knew Yoshi could figure out how to cope well enough not to get laughed off the stage on the first night? And now this film deal. I say let’s do it, Ryuu. I’ll negotiate a bail-out if he’s too horrible to make all three films. He’s made some dough, and his movie career is over. If he’s good enough, he can stop after three films, it’s up to him. Movies are brutal, but so’s modeling and theater work and he’s aced them both, so I think he should at least take a shot at this movie deal. And then the money is too good to pass up, even you have to agree with that. I know he’s just a sweet guy that you love with all your heart—even someone as jaded as me can see that—but since he’s not a fad, he might just be a pot

of gold. Now you can talk.” And with that, he turned to his steak lunch.

“What is there to say, Renge? You’ve summed it up,” Shimada said appreciatively. “If Yoshi really wants to do this, get him the best deal you can. I need to talk to him, though. He hasn’t said a word about it to me.”

“It happened while you were gone last week,” Renge said, ordering coffee for both of them. “What have you been doing since you got back from Moscow?” Shimada merely smiled smugly at him. “Thought so. Well, if you can get out of bed, try to have a serious discussion before the weekend. I’m supposed to cut the deal or back out of it next week. I read your stuff on the Moscow/Tokyo trade meeting; you write like a novelist. I couldn’t put it down.”

“Thanks, I’m really digging the assignments I’m getting from News International,” Shimada said, eyeing, but passing up the dessert cart. “Not only do they let me go out on a limb for a story, they back me up, too. I’m in Peru in a few weeks as a follow-up on General—”

“You know, I wonder if you shouldn’t stick around more.” Renge reached down for his briefcase, and not only for his wallet to pay the check. “Yoshi is too much influenced by Koji. He did the play for Koji and probably Koji talked him into the movie deal, too, because Koji benefits from those things as well, if not more than Yoshi. You did see those wonderful free publicity pictures on the web and the cheapo papers, didn’t you?” Shimada said he had and thought they were wonderful free publicity and pretty stupid otherwise. “But what the hell is Yoshi doing running around with Koji? And goddamn Daitaro in the mix?” Shimada protested that Takashi had been there and it had never happened again. “There are rumors that Daitaro is fucking Koji.”

“Really?” Shimada thought about it for a second. “So? Must be nice to have time to listen to idle gossip.”

“It’s part of my job.”

“Okay, Koji’s a slut, I had heard that,” Shimada admitted. “It’s his ass. So?”

“So, I think you should stay home more, Ryuu.” Renge reached into his briefcase again. “Because anyone whose boyfriend looks like this, should be home to keep an eye on him.” He handed a large envelope across the table to Shimada.

Shimada sighed and said, as he removed a photograph from its sleeve. “Ah, c’mon, Renge, I trust Yoshi comple...” The most beautiful Japanese youth in the world stared back at him from the glossy print. And it was Yoshi Katayama.

“Why can’t you just keep them?” Yoshi asked. He was reluctantly filling out forms at one of the larger Tokyo banks, where clerks, tellers, bank managers, security guards and customers were flitting around to get a look at the Sleepy Pajama Boy.

“Because they’re yours,” Shimada said, checking the forms over and handing them to the nearly hypnotized New Accounts Manager.

“I’ll give them to you!”

“And I took the afternoon off to do this boring chore with you, so at least humor me and deposit the fucking checks in your fucking new fucking bank account.” Shimada smiled at Yoshi’s giggling and ignored the New Accounts Manager’s shocked gasp. There were a few other formalities and then Yoshi and Shimada were free to dodge the paparazzi by escaping out the back door into a waiting taxi. “Are they always following you around like this?” Shimada asked, watching the pack disperse after losing its prey.

“Not so much, unless they know I’m somewhere or I’m with Koji. They really hound Koji,” Yoshi said innocently.

“I bet he loves it,” Shimada said coldly, recalling Renge’s words about Koji’s influence on Yoshi.

“I suppose someone told one of them we were in the bank. The photographers, I mean. Hey, let’s walk home from here,” Yoshi suggested. He waited while Shimada paid the taxi and left a big tip for getting them away so quickly. The cabbie winked at Yoshi and said it was his pleasure to drive the Pajama Boy, and got a big smile from Yoshi. “I want to give you that money, Ryuu, I don’t know what to do with it,” he said as they strolled in the peaceful afternoon light.

“That’s dumb, Yoshi,” Shimada said dismissively. “Buy a car, a fur coat, diamonds, give it to charity, or better, give it to your relatives in Nagasaki. They’d love to have it.”

“Oh...I meant aren’t there investments or something I should do with it?” Yoshi asked, somewhat abashed by his lack of imagination and greed. “But I will send some of it to Aunt and Uncle and my cousin. That’s a good idea! That’s why I want you to have it, you know what to do with it.”

“Oh, I see what you’re saying, okay. I wrote about some ethical investors recently. Let’s see what they suggest after you figure out what you want to send to Nagasaki,” Shimada said, more kindly now that he understood.

“I want to give you half of it,” Yoshi insisted. “After I send some to Nagasaki.”

“Why don’t you just pay the rent until the lease expires in December?” Shimada suggested. “I’m making enough for a bigger place, so we should move when we can.” He draped his arm around Yoshi’s shoulders. “And we’ll see what the investor guys say about the rest. I’m not ready for you to keep me like a gigolo yet.”

“Hmph, I’ve met a few gigolos lately. You’d never last, Ryuu,” Yoshi said leaning sweetly into his lover.

“Yeah, well, how much time are you spending with Koji?” Shimada asked or rather, accused.

“Not much, none now,” Yoshi said, completely missing the accusation vibe. “I think he has a new Sugar Daddy. He’s been getting picked up by a hired car right after the show every night.”

“Sugar Daddy? Where are you learning these things?” Shimada asked, amused, and all he got for an answer was a shrug. A very cute shrug, but a shrug nevertheless. “Now about this three movie deal, what’s the truth, Yoshi? Do you want to do it or not?”

“I do,” Yoshi said sincerely.

“Why?” Shimada asked.

“Because Koji says we’re a fad and the movie money is good, so we should get as much of it as we can before we’re history,” Yoshi told him. “And it sounds kind of fun! Lots of work, but fun!”

Shimada looked into the earnest, loving, beautiful face of the man he was crazy in love with and couldn’t find any arguments worth marshalling. So he just kissed him, and if anyone didn’t like it, they could go straight to hell.

“Seiji, I’m only doing this—this thing to keep everyone calm and happy,” Takashi said the evening he told Seiji he would not be having a miai with the Yamada family’s daughter, Yoko, no matter how much it looked like one. “I have everything under control, just please be patient. I love you. Trust me for now.”

Hiding his hurt, fear and terrible feeling of *deja vu*, Seiji said, “Yes, all right, I love you, too.” Four years earlier, he’d heard something eerily similar.

When Ryuu’s mother fell ill, Seiji could only wish her a quick recovery from afar. Ryuu’s family hardly noticed him, and could never quite remember his name when he answered their calls at the apartment he shared with their younger son.

Well aware that Ryuu walked a tightrope with his family over him, Seiji was happy to be in love and in the background. He was never a spotlight kind of person; he felt best supporting Ryuu, who hadn’t yet worked up the courage to tell his family he was gay and in love with