

happy, so if that was a date, we understand.” His parents were sincere and were always welcoming and pleasant to Takashi when he came to pick Seiji up for, well, for dates, some of which were as simple as a cup of tea and taking the family dog for a walk in the opposite direction from the Shimada family residence.

After weeks of odd jobs and interviews, Seiji was finally hired as a clerk at the National Archive. He’d always liked organizing things and had minored in information science at university, so he felt very much at home in his boring new job. His parents heaved a huge sigh of relief and invited Takashi for dinner to celebrate Seiji’s new job. They were very happy to see their son getting back to normal; he’d become so withdrawn after he became friends with Shimada, they’d been worried, but now he was more his usual, low-key, slightly brooding, optimistic self.

One evening when they met for drinks after work, Takashi asked if Seiji had heard from Ryuu lately.

“No,” Seiji said, wondering why, all of the sudden, Takashi brought Ryuu up after all the time that had gone by. “He...he stopped calling me after I didn’t return his calls. Why did you ask me?”

“He’s, ah, gone,” Takashi said, signaling for the check. “He left Daitaro a note last night that he was leaving Tokyo and not to look for him. Daitaro asked me if I knew where he might be and to ask you.”

“Do you think I’d tell Daitaro anything?” Seiji snarled. “Sorry,” he said in a milder voice. “I, I don’t know where Ryuu is or where he’d go. We didn’t speak after that day I broke up with him.”

They walked along awhile in silence and then Takashi said, softly, “I guess he gave up, then.”

Seiji slowed down next to him. “I couldn’t go on like that...” he said almost to himself. “It was too painful.”

“I understand.” Takashi put his arm around him and they walked like that to his car. When they got to Seiji’s parents home, Takashi took Seiji’s hand and pressed his lips to the palm. Seiji leaned over and kissed him lightly, more of a promise of kisses to come, kisses worth waiting for, than a proper kiss. Takashi did not come in to say hello to Seiji’s parents, who weren’t home anyway, and this was fine with Seiji. He had a lot to think about that night.

That weekend Takashi spent his Saturday obsessively cleaning his apartment and putting brand new designer sheets on his bed. Seiji merely packed an overnight bag and told his parents he’d be back late on Sunday. They didn’t ask any questions, but didn’t frown or scowl either. He arrived at Takashi’s place in time for the simple dinner Takashi made for them.

“It’s nice you can cook,” Seiji said after thanking him for a nice dinner.

“I don’t like cooking very much, but I like the challenge, and I like sharing it with people I like,” Takashi said, feeling a little less nervous once they were on the couch with cognacs.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve been here,” Seiji said, looking around the comfortable room. “When you moved in, right? I helped you hang that painting.” He gestured to a large landscape painted as if the view was from medieval castle walls. It included a parapet and a rushing river.

“Yes, and then I made a fool of myself,” Takashi said, moving a little closer. “Sorry, thank you for forgiving me. I was out of line to kiss you like that. You...weren’t mine.”

“I couldn’t like your kiss, even though I wanted to,” Seiji said softly. “But this is now...”

“Yeah, now,” Takashi sighed and drew Seiji into a kiss that rapidly escalated into a very passionate kiss. It was as if all the pent up love they’d had for each other burst into flame as they held each other close.

“I’ve always liked that painting,” Seiji said as calmly as possible when he came up for air. “But could we go into your bedroom where I won’t be distracted by it?”

“Yeah, I...think we’d be more comfortable there,” Takashi panted, discreetly adjusting his erection in his chinos. Seiji, flushed and lovely, ruffled his hair and didn’t help matters as he slid out from beneath him.

“Have you done this before?” Seiji asked as Takashi was carefully removing Seiji’s clothes.

“Nope, only with girls,” Takashi said running his hands over Seiji’s lean flanks. “You’ll have to correct my technique where you can.”

“Tsk! I’m not going to comp—” Seiji frowned and then leaned up for a kiss. “It’s like I haven’t really done this before either. It feels so different with you, Takashi.” He lay back in Takashi’s arms and looked trustingly up at him.

“Your skin is so soft and warm,” Takashi murmured, kissing his neck and letting his hands explore his chest, pausing to gently pinch one then the other of Seiji’s hard nipples, and then lower over his taut belly and hesitating in his silky pubic curls. “Hey, why did you tense up?” he asked, making little circles with his index finger just above Seiji’s penis.

“I, I don’t know what you expect,” Seiji said nervously.

Takashi took Seiji’s hand and moved it to his own erection. “Something very similar to what I have,” he said pressing Seiji’s hand

against his cock. “Does this seem sort of familiar?” Takashi asked, and when Seiji began to explore his manhood, he moved his own hand back to Seiji’s beautiful crotch.

The truth was that Takashi was nervous, but he covered it well as he fondled Seiji’s delicate arousal. It was warm, smooth, responsive. Takashi wasn’t so worried about whether they’d be able to jack each other off; he was more concerned about fucking Seiji well, or at least adequately, without hurting him. He was slightly worried that Seiji would even want to go that far, but was encouraged when Seiji rolled on his back and didn’t fight Takashi off when he pushed his legs apart. Nor did Seiji reject him when he nuzzled the head of his sweet cock. The desire in Seiji’s eyes was the same as in the dreams Takashi had nearly given up on. “I, um, have...stuff...” Takashi mumbled.

“Stuff?” Seiji repeated vaguely. He looked on sultrily as Takashi drew a pack of condoms and a container of water-based lube from the bedside table. “Ohhh, stuff,” he sighed happily and took up one of the condoms. “These are nice.”

“I’m glad you like them,” Takashi said, distracted by warming the lube on his fingers and not sure how to proceed. While still examining the condom package, Seiji helped him out by playfully draping an ankle over Takashi’s right shoulder and tilting his hips up. Mentally thanking him, Takashi slid his slippery fingers between Seiji’s smooth round cheeks and watched the younger man shiver with pleasure at the contact. Takashi leaned down for a kiss as, after a little exploring, he pressed his fingertip inside Seiji, who tensed a little. “Does that hurt?” Takashi asked gently, not moving.

“No, no, it’s...it’s just been a while,” Seiji said, his voice breathy with desire. “Don’t stop, okay?”

“Okay.” Takashi kissed him again and pushed his finger farther inside. He leaned back to get a better angle to press another finger in beside it. Carefully monitoring how much Seiji was relaxing on his fingers, Takashi was impressed when on an inward stroke he brushed against something inside Seiji that caused his lover to arch with pleasure, his half-mast cock leaping to full hardness and a startled cry of pleasure bursting from his lips. Intrigued, Takashi explored the place inside Seiji again until Seiji was nearly incoherent with passion. “I’d always thought that was a myth,” he said, surveying the splayed out, panting Seiji before him. He shifted his position between Seiji’s legs and leaned over him.

“You’ll need this.” Seiji wasn’t so out of it that he couldn’t open the condom and carefully roll it down Takashi’s erection and put some lube on the tip. “Um, I’m, I’m a little out of practice.”

“I’ll be gentle,” Takashi said reflexively. Positioning the slippery tip, poised to enter Seiji’s body, Takashi then had a moment of conscience. “We don’t have to do this, Seiji,” he said, willing to make the supreme sacrifice (that night).

“Yes, we do,” Seiji said, teeth clenched with lust. “I want to, I want to very mmmmmuch.” He sighed deeply as Takashi pressed the head inside and gently worked his cock in all the way to the root.

“Okay?” he asked when he hit bottom.

“Mmmmm.” Seiji wrapped his legs around his waist and thrust up against him.

Unable to miss a hint like that, Takashi began to move in small pulses, not wanting to hurt the man beneath him. Eventually lengthening his strokes and encouraged by Seiji meeting his rhythm, or perhaps setting it in that telepathy happy lovers have, Takashi let waves of moans roll up from deep in his chest as he rose to his climax and felt the top of his head coming off. He held Seiji, thrashing in his own orgasm, against his chest, both of them getting their breath back in small, exhausted gasps, finally working up to long satisfied sighs of pure contentment.

“Did we live?” Seiji asked, smiling against Takashi’s shoulder.

“I think so,” Takashi said, kissing him, brushing Seiji’s damp locks off his forehead. He shifted gently, this way and that, until his limp, but still condom sheathed cock slipped out. Reluctantly, he rose from Seiji’s arms and disposed of the latex. “That was totally worth the wait,” he said, relaxing back into the arms he’d left for too long.

“How long have you been waiting for this?” Seiji asked, sleepily stroking his hair.

“A few days after I fell in love with you at first sight,” Takashi said softly. “I knew I was in love with you, I just didn’t understand the desire part.”

“I love you, Takashi,” Seiji said, tightening his arms a little before dozing off.

“I love you, too, Seiji,” Takashi said, making a vow before he slept. “And I will never leave you.”

A few weeks later and with his parents’ blessing, Seiji moved in with Takashi because they were very much in love. Because Takashi was honest with his parents about how much he loved Seiji, even before Seiji loved him back, Takashi’s parents invited them over as a couple for family events and casual lunches and dinners. Their friends were simply glad to see them both so happy. Daitaro sneered, but Takashi had become so valuable to Shimada Miyagi, he mostly kept his opinion to himself. An additional benefit was that Seiji’s new loving

home was closer to his job and he felt so loved, so happy and so safe, it was as if he'd only been half alive before his life with Takashi.

So when Takashi said nearly the same words to him as Ryuu had said three years before asking him to wait out family events, Seiji's blood ran cold and his world withered before his eyes. The possibility of leaving Takashi, the way he'd left Ryuu, weighed heavily on Seiji's mind and was again a choice between this kind of hell and that kind of hell. But, hey, at least they'd been happy for a little while.

"And how did you find out about this mess?" Takashi asked, shoulders slumping. He was trying very hard to keep it under wraps until he could extricate himself from the Yamada daughter snare Daitaro had him in.

"Well, apparently Seiji mentioned it to Yoshi who mentioned it to me because Seiji is somewhat freaked out about it," Shimada said, sipping his very good martini and watching Takashi frown. "I've been in your place, Takashi. If you give an inch, they've got you."

"Got me? Oh please, Ryuu, this is a very different situation," Takashi said, snapping out of his funk. "For one thing, my mother's health isn't involved and Daitaro isn't my brother."

"But you are caving in to Daitaro, doing this miai with Yashimoto—"

"Yamada Minoro's daughter." Takashi ordered another round.

"Whoever's daughter, what's her name?"

"Yoko."

"Yeah, Yoko Yamada," Shimada said, rolling it around in his mouth with a gin soaked olive. "Yamada Yoko. I hear she's a little party girl hellion. That she has her eye on you seems odd."

"Yeah, thanks, I think," Takashi said, sipping his vodka tonic. "You seem well informed about her."

"She's been trying to run with the Jupiter Li crowd," Shimada said, a predatory gleam in his eyes.

"Should I know who or what that is?" Takashi asked.

"He's one of those Shanghai super zillionaires with a shady past that things happen around," Shimada drawled. "I have to find something to write about in Tokyo while I'm stuck here. Since I got tossed in jail for asking the right questions at the wrong time in Riyadh, the paper's keeping me close to home until the fuss dies down."

"That could take a while. And after your adventures in Riyadh, this Li character sounds more like a subject for the gossip columns than a hard-bitten international correspondent like you," Takashi said with a smile. He'd been hard pressed to keep Yoshi off a plane to Saudi Arabia while Seiji pulled strings he didn't know he had in the