

strung people, some rough-looking guys. Jupiter Li and his body guards are a little scary, too.”

“Really? I think I read he’s building something in Korea with PRCK Architects,” Seiji said. “He’s incredibly rich. What’s he like?”

“I don’t know, I was only introduced to him once,” Yoshi said. “And that was enough. He doesn’t speak Japanese, so we said a few things through his translator, and then he just sat there all evening, talking to his body guards or talking to Koji through the translator. Koji really digs him for some reason.” He didn’t add that Daitaro and Suzuki had been very interested in Jupiter and Koji at the Papa Elysium party. “And, in addition to the Jupiter Li weirdness, there’s always all these strange women with shrill laughs who drink too much at these parties. They get really intense over weird stuff, too.”

“Like what?”

“Fashion and money,” Yoshi said. “Oh and sex, like, who’s having sex with who. It’s stupid. I thought it was stupid before, but I really think it’s stupid after Ryu was in jail. I thought I’d lose my mind then. Thanks again for everything, Seiji, I don’t know what I would have done without you and, and, um...”

“Takashi?” Seiji smiled wryly. “Yeah, he was great during that crisis.” He ordered another drink. “What projects are you considering?”

“Eh?” Yoshi felt awful that he’d brought up just the subject they were trying to avoid.

“At Koji’s party, you said you were considering your next project,” Seiji said, licking salt off the rim of his glass. “Is it a film? Or TV?”

“Actually, it’s nothing,” Yoshi said with a grimace. “My second film bombed, so nobody wants anything to do with me and acting. I’m kind of relieved, films are too much work.” He glanced at Seiji smiling sympathetically at him, which was good. “Oh, don’t get me wrong, I don’t mind hard work, but I never felt like I finished a thought when I was making the films. It was ‘do this,’ ‘stand here,’ ‘look this way,’ ‘look that way,’ ‘smile,’ ‘frown,’ ‘cut!’ and never a moment to think about what I was doing.”

“I thought you were pretty good in the second film,” Seiji said sincerely.

“You’re a good friend, Seiji,” Yoshi said, patting Seiji’s shoulder. “I was terrible every time I opened my mouth. They should have just let me wander around in pajamas and tight jeans for the whole film, it would have been better.” He was glad to hear Seiji laughing and they went on to talk about films and books and places and people they liked.

At seven o’clock they got a taxi to the Hotel Arcadia, where the

party was already in full swing. “Oh my...” Yoshi said, looking around for a nonexistent corner of quiet.

“Well this should take my mind off of, uh, everything,” Seiji said, blinking at the noise—Peruvian musicians, a Mariachi band, lots of shrill female laughter, and some kind of high pitched squealing in the background that might or might not have been a blender—and the collection of wildly dressed people milling about in a contained and controlled-so-far riot.

They hovered at the edge of the crowd until Koji himself, wearing a skin-tight black spandex cat-suit and thigh-high boots, rolled up to greet them. “Isn’t this wild?” he said. “This place was made for a scene like this, yes, yes, yes!!!” He drew them into the throng and away from the pale and trembling hotel manager, who was torn between wringing his hands over the shocking, for the Impala Bar, goings-on in his hotel and serious amounts of money being tossed around that night, including a nice, big, fat tip for him in advance that other less sensitive people might call a bribe to play along. The manager was especially concerned because guests for an elegant miai would be arriving shortly and he was beginning to think it would be better if they were brought in through the back door. Unfortunately, a large group of people in kimonos had just arrived and were looking on the proceedings in the Impala Bar with great and pointed interest. This could be no other than the miai guests and the potential bride and groom.

“Oh! Oh!! Oh!!! There’s Jupiter Li!”

Takashi glanced over at Yoko, whose delighted squealing could barely be heard over the din of the party. “Which one?” he yelled, wondering if he could use the chaos of the bar to escape. He’d been to this hotel in the past and never noticed how much the bar area looked like a cauldron before.

“The one in the big hat with the feathers...no, the white feathers, and shiny silver suit,” she cried, leaning forward in desire. “Oh! And there’s Koji Kawazu! And, and! And the other pajama boy!!! What’s his name?”

“Yoshi,” Takashi said dully. He’d just caught sight of Seiji, coatless, dancing with some guy wearing some kind of a sequined smock. Seiji sadly returned his lover’s gaze and went back to his clumsy two-step. “Yoshi Kata—”

“WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON HERE?” Daitaro was red in the face with fury and practically on top of Takashi. He was, however, staring a hole in Koji, who was dancing with Norboru Suzuki, Jupiter Li’s pet architect of the moment.

“Fuck if I know,” Takashi said. “Excuse me.” And he waded bravely into the crowd to find Seiji. “Seiji, what are you doing here?” he asked when he’d wedged himself next to his lover.

“Dancing,” Seiji said, looking at the floor.

“Hey, samurai asshole, buzz off,” Seiji’s dance partner sneered.

“Shut the fuck up!” Takashi and Seiji said in unison, and then Seiji went on solo. “Takashi, I’m here to have a good time. You’re here to do whatever it is you’re here to do,” he said, pausing to look pointedly at the little group of beautifully and traditionally dressed Japanese people being shepherded past the freak show of the northern hemisphere. “So let’s both just get on with it.” He smartly turned his back on him and swam into the crowd.

“Seiji!” Takashi tried to follow, but the tide of bodies was against him. He suddenly found Koji planted in front of him.

“Nice dress, Takashi,” Koji snarled. “Is there one tie that unties for it all to come off?”

“Are you behind all this, Koji?” Takashi yelled, trying to get past him.

“I’d like to know that, too,” Daitaro yelled beside him. “What the fuck are you up to, Koji?”

“You can both fucking drop dead!” Koji yelled. “Hey! Chang! These two are leaving!”

“We’re going, we’re going,” Takashi yelled. “Call off your gorilla.” He heard someone say, “Was that Takashi?” behind him, but didn’t look around. He was thinking very very hard on what to do since he was out of his depth in this situation. “Um, I have to use the men’s room, be right there,” Takashi said when they got to the door of the private dining room, where the hotel manager was prostrate with apology and regret. Yoko was still trying to get away from her irritated father and mother to join the party, Takashi’s parents looked concerned and puzzled, Daitaro’s wife looked almost as angry as he did, and at the sight of all of them, Takashi fled for the Gents as fast as his zoris would carry him.

It wasn’t much quieter in the bathroom. There were two, sometimes three men in each stall, but he found one that was unoccupied and locked the door and got out his cell phone.

Shimada was at the Murano Bar and Grill, a somewhat seedy hangout for all kinds of media types, but newspapermen were on the top of the heap. When his cell phone rang, he was halfway through his fifth martini and listening to a guy who’d gotten in trouble in Manila asking the same questions as Shimada had asked about money, murder, and who was really running the Philippine sex trade in Saudi Arabia.

This was a relief to Shimada, because he was starting to itch to work on the story that got him tossed in jail not so long ago. “Hey, Takashi...where the hell are you?” he asked, trying to hear the other man over some very strange echoic sounds in the background.

“I said you’ve got to help me!” Takashi yelled into the phone. “Seiji is in trouble!”

“What kind of trouble?” Shimada said from under the bar where the reception seemed a little better. “Where is he? Where the hell are you?”

“We’re at the Hotel Arcadia,” Takashi said desperately. “At the Impala Bar, it’s a nightmare in there.”

“The Impala? A nightmare of boredom,” Shimada observed. “What are you doing—?”

“The—the—the, uh, meeting thing we discussed,” Takashi shouted, starting to panic at Ryu’s lack of action.

“The miai? I told you not to do it,” Shimada drawled, getting to his feet because he was having trouble finishing his drink under the bar and the bartender couldn’t see him ordering another one. “Look, Takashi, I’m drinking with my colleagues. If you’re gonna ignore my advice, you made your bed—”

“But Seiji is here!”

“—so you get to—”

“And Yoshi!”

“—lie in it. Of course Yoshi is with Seiji,” Shimada said, taking a big sip of his fresh martini. “He’s keeping him company while you do something stupid.”

“And Koji is here!”

“So? Takashi this is boring,” Shimada said, getting more irritated than bored. “I have world events to discuss here with serious journalists.”

“Then I have a newsflash for you and your fellow newshounds, Ryu,” Takashi yelled. “Jupiter Li is hosting this party and he’s here in the Impala Bar at Hotel Arcadia right now,” and with that, Takashi hung up in Ryu’s ear.

“What a scoop!” Shimada thought. But, with Jupiter Li involved, he was suddenly on a mission to rescue Yoshi and Seiji from—from, something, maybe a Chinese billionaire or sex slavery or bad taste, or something, but one thing was certain: he would need reinforcements. Shimada poured the rest of his martini down his gullet, slapped some money on the bar and yelled to the assorted newsmen, paparazzi and gossip mongers in the bar:

“Jupiter Li is hosting a fag party at the Hotel Arcadia Impala Bar

and both of the Pajama Boys are there!” He was at the head of the stampede to the taxi line.

Back in the men’s room at the Hotel Arcadia, Takashi stepped out of the stall and was confronted with both Daitaro and Yoshi.

Daitaro merely yelled his name, but Yoshi was more civil. “I thought that was you,” he said over the din. “Is your—your thing here?” Yoshi pushed away a drunk who wanted to know more about “his thing.”

“I don’t have a thing,” Takashi blurted.

The drunk sighed, “Man, that’s too bad.”

“Yes, you do have a thing!” Daitaro yelled. “And we’re going to it right now!”

“Oh, man, that’s good news,” the drunk mumbled, dropping to his knees. “Can I come with you?”

Yoshi stepped delicately around the kneeling boozier and followed the kimonos out of the men’s room. “Takashi, I—”

“What kind of friend are you to bring Seiji to a thing like this?” Takashi wheeled and snapped at him. “Can’t you get him out of here?”

Already feeling stressed and that events were spinning out of control, Yoshi lost his temper. “First of all I didn’t know your stupid thing was here!” he yelled at the shocked ad men. “And second of all, why should I make him leave? And third, FUCK YOU BOTH!” He spun on his magenta loafers and ran into the crowd.

“Oh, shit,” Takashi moaned and would have followed him but for Daitaro dragging him in the other direction.

“Takashi, please!” For Daitaro this amounted to begging, and got Takashi’s attention. “Listen, please, just get through a half hour with the Yamada family and I’ll work it out later and...” Daitaro let his sentence trail off. He was staring hard at something in the sunken bar.

Takashi considered pressing his advantage, but following his employer’s line of sight, he saw Norboru Suzuki staring hard at Daitaro. Suzuki had his arm around Koji, who was looking the other way. Unable to ignore the rage being transmitted between the two men, for the sake of peace, Takashi decided to herd Daitaro away from there and into the banquet room. He vaguely heard a commotion at the front entrance, but he was too far from it and too distracted by what he now knew he needed to do, to really analyze what it might be.

What it was, at that moment, was most of the media talent in Tokyo bursting into the Hotel Arcadia and pouring into the Impala Bar.

It only took Shimada a moment to find the most normally dressed person in the moiling, sweaty, now slightly panicked, party crowd. “You’re coming with me, Mr. Hayashida,” Shimada said, latching onto