

didn't know when he'd be back. I suppose you want your new key."

"If you don't mind," Shimada said blandly, and urbanely nodded to the stranger. Shimada never forgot a face, but he was having trouble remembering where he'd seen this one before.

"I'd like to have a few words with you about Yoshi Katayama," the stranger said while the landlord stomped around in his office-cum-residence getting Shimada a key to his new place.

Not wanting to get into a discussion in front of the landlord, Shimada simply said, "Sure," and led the guy to his new apartment. "Oh, this is nice," he murmured once inside.

"Yes, Yoshi said you hadn't seen it before," the man said.

"Is he in trouble?"

"No."

"And you are?" Shimada asked.

"I'm his uncle. Eijiro Ichimonji." He held out a hand and Shimada shook it. "I'm married to Yoshi's mother's sister. I own the café."

"Oh, yes, that's where I've seen you before. Good noodles there," Shimada said, trying to figure out what to say to Yoshi's uncle, without knowing what Yoshi had said already. He figured he'd keep it simple.

"I just wanted to meet you since Yoshi says he's going to live with you," Ichimonji went on.

"Oh."

"Yoshi told me about the trouble he had at the boarding house." Ichimonji looked sad. "The landlady had some hard things to say about Yoshi. Most of them I don't believe--"

"What did she say?"

"She said Yoshi seduced her boarder, Mr. Watanabe."

"I think that's very wishful thinking on Mr. Watanabe's part," Shimada said blandly.

"I think so, too," Ichimonji said, nodding. "Although I don't know what was really going on there...ah...do you?"

Shimada sighed and decided the truth would be the least amount of work. "Mind you, I only have what Yoshi said and what I saw, but it seems Mr. Watanabe was trying, unsuccessfully, to coerce sexual favors out of Yoshi."

"I thought so," Ichimonji said, nodding some more. "That would explain why my oldest son is so protective."

"Is he a cook with a meat cleaver?"

"Yes! How'd you know?"

"Yoshi mentioned it." Figuring there was more to the story, Shimada fell silent and waited. And waited and finally asked, "Was there anything else?"

“Yoshi’s a good kid...”

“Yes.”

“His parents and older brother died in a car accident in Tokyo last year,” Ichimonji said slowly. “Yoshi came to live with us, but I didn’t really have room for him with my family. I thought he’d be safe with that landlady, but...”

“A guy like Watanabe isn’t your fault, Mr. Ichimonji,” Shimada said. He decided to ask a few questions rather than ask Yoshi himself. “Is Yoshi really 18?”

“Oh, yes,” Ichimonji assured him. “He couldn’t go to school when he first came to Nagasaki, so he just worked in the café and helped take care of his cousins for the first few months he was here. So he missed most of the school year, that’s why he’s still in High School.”

“Why couldn’t he go to school?”

“He couldn’t stop crying.”

It turned out that Ichimonji’s main concern was to make sure Shimada wanted Yoshi there and that he, Shimada, would come to him, Ichimonji, if anything, anything at all odd happened.

“Like what?” Shimada had asked.

“Yoshi gets a little absent minded sometimes,” Ichimonji said. “He loses things, like, money, identification, books...”

“Did he have a nervous breakdown after...after he came here?” Shimada asked.

“No, no, he just couldn’t stop crying,” Ichimonji said. “Sometimes he didn’t even know he was crying, there’d just be tears on his cheeks. And he slept a lot.”

“Oh? How much?”

“Fifteen or sixteen hours a day,” Ichimonji said. “But then he got better.”

“Oh.”

“May I ask you a question, Mr. Shimada?”

“Sure.”

“Where did you get that bruise on your chin?”

“In a brawl in Osaka,” Shimada said blandly.

“Oh! We heard about that on TV,” Ichimonji said. “Some drug dealers working for the politician we had here a week or so ago started the riot. They were trying to force a schoolgirl to take some drugs when some local teens tried to stop them. That politician is a horrible person.”

Shimada merely nodded and saw Mr. Ichimonji to the door where he assured him he’d be in touch if anything odd happened with Yoshi and, yes, he’d be happy to have Yoshi with him as long as Yoshi was

happy to be there. Mr. Ichimonji either failed to notice or willfully didn't comment on the fact that although it was clean, well-lit, and freshly painted, it was an awfully small apartment for two grown men, or one grown man and a mostly grown man, to be sharing. What Mr. Ichimonji didn't know was that the futon in the bedroom was larger than the one in the previous apartment, but Shimada marveled that he didn't notice that there was only one bed in the whole place. There was a wreck of a couch in the main room, but it was more of an over-sized over-stuffed chair than something even a mostly grown adult could sleep on. Perhaps Yoshi's uncle thought his nephew was going to sleep in the kitchen or the bathtub.

So, later on, after Ichimonji left and Shimada was left with his thoughts as he soaked in the much larger tub that came with the new apartment, Shimada began to wonder exactly what he was dealing with in Yoshi Katayama. He was so engrossed in his musing that he didn't hear the front door open and jumped when a scrawny grey short-haired cat ran in. "What the-?"

"Oh you're back!" Yoshi said happily, looking him over in the tub.

"Get out," Shimada said, covering himself as best he could. "And take that stray with you."

"I have to use the bathro--"

"Get out! I'll be out in a minute!" Shimada yelled and Yoshi and the cat fled. "You'll live for two minutes!" The difficulty now was that he didn't have anything to cover his nakedness and Yoshi was way too interested in his nakedness. He wrapped a towel around his waist and came out. "I suppose if you're going to live here, I'll need to buy a robe," he said as Yoshi strolled past him.

"There's a yukata in the closet," the kid said as he neatly closed the door in Shimada's face.

Shimada finished drying himself off and put the yukata on. It fit him, so he knew it wasn't Yoshi's kimono. "Where did this come from?" he asked when Yoshi stuck his head in the bedroom. He was holding the cat, which was one of the most pathetic looking cats Shimada had ever seen.

"The previous tenants left a bunch of stuff here," Yoshi said, standing in the doorway. "Like this cat and the couch and dresser over there." He gestured to the scratched-up, four drawer bureau in the corner and watched Shimada nod. "And it was a mess in here. My cousin and I cleaned it up, so the landlord gave us a little off the first month's rent."

"How much off?" Shimada asked.

Yoshi named a small figure and Shimada said he'd remind the

landlord when he paid the rent. "I think he took advantage of you, but it's the thought that counts." He went into the main room and took a closer look at the couch. It was still a wreck: a low, saggy affair, with a few neat mends in the cushion covers, but looked clean and didn't smell bad. There was a larger low zataku table than in the previous apartment.

"He bought the paint," Yoshi said. "We just—"

"Supplied all the labor," Shimada finished for him. He glanced at Yoshi, who was standing uncomfortably in the middle of the room. "It looks nice in here."

Yoshi visibly relaxed. "There's a real kitchen," he said, cheerfully. "Want some tea?"

"Sure. Don't you have to go to work?" Shimada asked.

"I have the night off!"

"Great, just great," Shimada muttered as he went into the bedroom to put on some clothes. He'd be having a serious conversation with Yoshi sooner than he thought he would and he felt he better be completely dressed for it. He found his clothes hanging tidily in the closet and what wasn't there was neatly folded in the battered dresser.

The cat sauntered in and settled on the bed while he was dressing. "Hello, Kitty," Shimada said, and was ignored. "Are you the Kitty Welcoming Committee?" he ventured, and got hissed at. "Well, maybe I'll have better luck in the next room," Shimada thought.

He found Yoshi setting mugs on the low table and sat with his back to the couch. "Your cat doesn't like me."

"He's our cat," Yoshi said, settling next to him. "Or this is his apartment and we just live here. He gets friendlier. He didn't like me at first either."

"Does he have a name?"

"I don't know, I've just been calling him Cat."

They drank tea in silence for a while. "Your uncle was here today," Shimada finally said.

"Why!? What did he—"

"Just calm down." Shimada stared at Yoshi until the kid looked ready to listen. "Your uncle seems like a good guy—"

"He is!"

"—and he was just here to make sure I'm not a lunatic. Because only a lunatic would take in some kid off the street."

"But you know me," Yoshi protested.

"Not really," Shimada said, thinking back over the uncle's story. "But your uncle told me a few things, one of them explains why we've been talking like Tokyo people since I got home...yeah, home." He

looked around, watched the cat arrogantly cross the room to sit in Yoshi's lap. "Yeah, this is my home," he thought, and didn't find it unpleasant. "Anyway..." he said, distracted by how peaceful he felt.

"How long did you live in Tokyo?" Yoshi asked after some silence.

"I was raised there."

"Me, too."

"You miss it?"

"Sometimes...Sometimes I wake up and can't remember where I am." Yoshi stared into his empty mug. "Did my uncle tell you about...about my family...in Tokyo?" He looked up at Shimada's nod. "It took a while to get used to it, but now I...I kinda like Nagasaki now."

"Me, too." Shimada ignored the hissing, displaced cat and pulled Yoshi into his arms. He planted a neutral kiss on the kid's temple. "Look, Yoshi, you don't have to sleep with me."

"I want to!"

"Well, I want that, too," Shimada admitted. "But you can live here if you want to. You can sleep on the couch or we'll get another futonmmmmmm--"

"I want to be with you, Shimada-san," Yoshi said breathlessly when he took his lips off Shimada's.

"You hardly know me," Shimada murmured, deeply moved by the kiss and the emotion in it.

"But I feel like I do," Yoshi purred, gazing happily into his face. "Ever since you looked at me so strangely in the cafe that time. Like you knew me."

Shimada sighed. "You remind me of someone."

"The Seiji you dreamed about?" Yoshi asked.

"Yeah." Shimada nodded sadly. "You should be more than a reminder to somebody," he said vaguely.

"Then give me a chance to be more."

Shimada looked into those big determined brown eyes. Seiji was never so bold. "Then call me Ryuu," he said, tightening his arms around Yoshi and smiling into his hair. When Yoshi got restless, Shimada easily coaxed him off the couch and into the bedroom.

"How did you get that bruise on your chin?" Yoshi asked as Shimada was carefully removing the kid's clothes.

"I was in a brawl at a political rally in Osaka." Shimada paused to admire Yoshi's slight but so far well proportioned body. His skin was pale and soft, but he could feel good muscle tone underneath. "Like an adolescent tom kitten, just on the verge of being sleek and graceful, but not quite there yet," he thought, and then mentally smacked himself for