

ready to go again,” he added, as Yoshi’s hard-on nudged his thigh.

“Oh, I can wait,” Yoshi said, understandingly. “Another half hour or so.”

Shimada managed to wait about twenty minutes before he moved them into a sixty-nine. They slept very well afterwards. His last sleepy thought was that the next day he’d go shopping for condoms and lube.

Shimada woke up for the second morning with Yoshi cuddled up on his right and the cat sitting on his chest. The cat was staring at him; Shimada stared back. “Flounder,” he said. “Your name is Flounder.”

“HmMMM?” Yoshi snuggled closer.

“I just named the cat.”

The kid opened a sleepy, but loving eye. “Yeah? What did you name him?”

“Flounder.”

“Flounder? Like the fish?”

“Yeah,” Shimada said with more confidence than necessary that early in the morning. “I woke up with it. It was inspired.”

“Then Flounder it is,” Yoshi said solemnly. “What time is it? Oh damn, I have to go to school.” He almost made it up, but flopped back down. “If you kiss me, I’ll get up.”

“That’s dangerous thinking, Yoshi,” Shimada said, dislodging Flounder from his chest and hauling himself and the kid up. “Neither of us has that much willpower.”

“Oh, you’re no fun,” Yoshi pouted.

“I plan to be a great deal of fun later on tonight,” Shimada said to Yoshi’s cute back as he pulled on the yukata. He put water on for coffee and then gave in and joined Yoshi in the shower. “We can do this because we’re standing up and can’t fall asleep,” he murmured into Yoshi’s steamy neck as the kid undulated against him.

“Yeah...whatever you sahhh-oh!”

As turned on as they both were it didn’t take them long to get off and shower, even including washing each other’s backs. “See how efficient that was?” Shimada asked as they were drying off. “Sex and hygiene all in one.”

The tea kettle’s whistle cut through Yoshi’s laugh and Shimada made his exit on it. Yoshi skipped the coffee in favor of orange juice and toast while Shimada read the morning paper. “What’s your schedule like this week, Yoshi?”

“Me? School and then the café, but I have Sunday and Monday nights off this week,” he said. “Why?”

“I might have tickets to ball games and plays and concerts and stuff

like that,” Shimada said. He was feeling slightly guilty that he’d skipped the dating-Yoshi part of their relationship and gone right into the living-with-Yoshi part, but it wasn’t like he could go backwards, only forwards. “But I’ll try to get them for nights you’re free.”

“The café is really busy Thursday through Saturday,” Yoshi said, opening a can of cat food for Flounder. “But I can ask my uncle for time off.”

“If it’s something great, okay, but otherwise, don’t let him down.” Shimada took a sip of coffee. “I don’t want your cousin to kill me.”

“I won’t let him.” Yoshi frowned as the cat walked away from his breakfast. “Flounder, you jerk.”

“He eats it after you leave,” Shimada said, feeling he should defend the cat now that he had a name. Yoshi just sighed and started gathering up his books. “What, no kiss good-bye?” Shimada asked.

It was a nice kiss that gave them something to look forward to.

After Yoshi left for school, Shimada tidied the apartment up. As he was making the futon up, a call from Ikoma interrupted his musing on how he’d ended up with all the housework.

“I got a call about that editorial on your politician,” Ikoma said with no preamble.

“My brother moves fast,” Shimada said bitterly.

“And surreptitiously, too,” Ikoma said. “The call was from a reporter at one of the big Tokyo papers.”

“How do you know it’s not legit?” Shimada asked. Ikoma had always wanted his local paper to get more attention.

“No one in their right mind runs down a wild-eyed editorial in a local paper like that,” Ikoma said, with some bitterness. “It wasn’t a threat either—we’re not big enough to be a threat—but it wasn’t praise either. It was fishing. The guy called to see if I’d let something slip.”

“Who was it?” Shimada asked. He didn’t know the name Ikoma gave him.

“He’s just a mid-level editor,” Ikoma said. “I know this because I called the paper back to make sure he worked there.”

“How thorough,” Shimada said, calmly. “What have you got for me this week?”

Ikoma rattled off a number of assignments, half a dozen of which Shimada accepted, including a high school kendo match on Sunday afternoon and a movie screening on Monday night.

“Since when do you like—?” Ikoma began to ask.

“I asked for two passes, didn’t I?” Shimada asked back.

“Oh...” Some silence and Shimada could hear Ikoma’s chair squeak in the background. “When do I get to meet him?” Ikoma finally asked.

“How about dinner after the kendo match on Sunday?”

They set a time and place. “Look, Ryuu, what’s your brother up to?” Ikoma asked, real concern in his voice.

“Probably nothing,” Shimada said lightly. “Or he’s just trying to rattle us.”

“He’s only half succeeded then,” Ikoma admitted.

“You’ll get over it, Jun,” Shimada said. “As long as I don’t give him a chance, there’s nothing my brother can do to me anymore.”

“Then it’s all good!” Ikoma said, his chair squeaking in agreement in the background. “I’ll need your story on the dog that saved the little girl from drowning this afternoon for tomorrow’s paper.”

Shimada left off housekeeping, put out some fresh water for Flounder and headed into the city to get his story. He completely forgot about shopping for condoms and lube, but he made it up to Yoshi orally that night.

“I really want to—” Yoshi began, still panting from his recent climax.

“I know, we will,” Shimada assured him, slightly more recovered because Yoshi had gotten him off first. The kid was definitely getting the hang of oral sex. “It would be better if we did it on a night when we didn’t have to get up the next morning. Like this Saturday.”

“That’s too—”

“Two days away, yes, you’ll live.” Shimada hugged him close. Flounder jumped on the futon and made himself comfortable between Shimada’s legs. “Look, Yoshi, I don’t want to rush into sex. I did that once. I kind of feel bad about it, but—”

“With Seiji?” Yoshi asked.

“Ah, yes, as a matter of fact, it was with Seiji,” Shimada said, slightly flustered by Yoshi’s directness. “But, as I started to say, I rushed it because I didn’t know any better. And neither did he, but, um...”

“What?” Yoshi asked, sitting up.

“Well...I don’t think Seiji ever really enjoyed it with me...”

“Fucking?”

“Yoshi, please.” Shimada was torn between admiration and embarrassment.

“That’s what it is.” He licked his lips. “Hey, I want some juice. Want some juice?” He scrambled out of bed, but didn’t beat Shimada to the yukata. “We have to get another one of those,” he said, putting on an old pair of Shimada’s pajamas.

Shimada looked him over as he knotted the sash on the yukata. “I don’t know why; you look very cute in pajamas.”

Yoshi poured them both some orange juice and they settled on the couch close together for warmth and because the couch was small. “Okay, why didn’t he like it?” Yoshi prompted. “Seiji, I mean.”

“We got off to a bad start, I didn’t really know what I was doing. I think I could have been gentler, prepared him more, just taken more time,” Shimada said, ticking off the reasons he’d decided were the cause of Seiji’s stiffness while they were doing it. Not that Seiji would ever tell him what was wrong; Shimada had to figure these things out on his own. Shimada had already figured out, with some relief, that this could not be a problem with Yoshi. The kid had no problem telling his lover what was on his mind.

“But if he loved you, it should have been okay, right?”

“I was kind of an asshole then, Yoshi,” Shimada said, mentally inventorying his guilt and filing it away. “I wanted him to be mine, I was impatient, demanding, clumsy. I only figured out how much better it could be later on.” And their sex life had gotten better, or as much better as their stressful closeted life together allowed it to. “He did love me, just not enough,” he added almost to himself.

Yoshi was very still. “What happened to him?” he finally asked.

“We broke up.”

“Because of sex?”

Shimada laughed. “Ah, no, no, because, oh God, it’s a long story...” He looked down at the boy in his arms. “But I guess you want to hear it. My mom got sick, and she asked me to break up with Seiji. I did, but it was only supposed to be until she got well, and then I’d leave my family for Seiji and we’d live happily ever after. Unfortunately...”

“Unfortunately?”

“While I was making my mother happy, Seiji fell in love with someone else...”

“And?”

“And I moved to Nagasaki about a year ago.” Shimada sipped his juice. “I had a huge fight with my brother, too. He never liked it that I was gay. He told my mother Seiji and I were lovers. He made it sound like a crime. And then the guy Seiji left me for went to university with us and works for my brother. We all worked at the same place, knew the same people. It was a huge mess.” He sighed and tightened his arm around Yoshi. “There was just no way I could stay in Tokyo.”

“I’m glad you came here, Ryuu,” Yoshi said, snuggling. “We don’t have to rush. We’ll do what you say. I just...”

“Just what?”

“I just want to be yours.”

Shimada held him close and said, simply, “You are, Yoshi, you are.”

“Did you get them?” was the first thing out of Yoshi’s mouth when he bounced in that night. “The condoms and lube,” he added when Shimada, sitting on the couch with a book, the cat and a cup of tea, just stared at him.

“As a matter of fact I did. They’re by the futon,” Shimada said, dryly. “Hey, no kiss hello? What is this?” he yelled at Yoshi disappearing into the bedroom.

He got a big kiss when Yoshi came back and flung himself into his lap. “Mind the tea, kid,” Shimada growled against his neck as Yoshi examined the packages.

“So these are condoms,” he said, fiddling with the seam.

“Don’t open them,” Shimada said firmly.

“Why not?”

“I don’t know, the air makes them brittle,” Shimada improvised. “Or something. I just know you can’t use them if they’ve been open.”

“Oh...I’ve never seen one before, so...”

Shimada gave in. “Open it.” He watched the fascinated kid on his lap unroll the condom and stretch it for tactile strength and then get bored. “See, not that exciting, is it? There’s only one thing we can do with it now.” He took the floppy latex from him and blew it into a balloon. Yoshi nearly fell off his lap laughing. Flounder looked horrified when Shimada batted the balloon-dom at him. He left the room in feline high dudgeon. “There are more interesting things to do with condoms,” Shimada added when his boyfriend was less hysterical.

“Oh, I know, I mean, I suppose, but I’d never seen one before,” Yoshi got out between giggles. “So, what about this stuff?” he asked, holding up the tube of lube.

“Well,” Shimada sighed, opening the tube. He was half admiring Yoshi’s natural curiosity and half alarmed by it. What if the theory and explanation were different from the reality of sex for Yoshi? What if Yoshi wanted to try these things...on Shimada. “It’s very slippery stuff.” He squeezed a pearl onto Yoshi’s fingertips and watched the kid work the viscosity with his thumb. “It has to be slippery so I don’t hurt you.”

“You could never hurt me,” Yoshi said, as if he could order such things to be so.

“The muscles in your ass might say different,” Shimada said coolly and then smiled evilly at Yoshi’s blush.

Yoshi made a “humph” noise and went into the bathroom to wash his hand. “We could do it tonight,” he said when he came back.

“Don’t you have school tomorrow?” Shimada asked.