

Seiji made a disgusted sound and looked out the window. If they hadn't been on the highway, Shimada thought Seiji would have asked the driver to stop and let him out. But Seiji had a brave streak, Shimada couldn't deny him that. "We meant a lot to each other once," Seiji said slowly. "It's not like you died, so I don't see any reason I can't come to say hi to you and congratulate you on your award. Congratulations on your award, okay? I would say that even if you hated me....Do you hate me, Ryuu?"

Shimada relaxed a little. "No, I don't hate you, Seiji," he said, omitting that it would be too much effort to hate him at this point. "My life is very different now, though. No all night parties, no big spending, no exotic travel."

"You never liked that much anyway," Seiji said warmly.

"Neither did you," Shimada said dryly. "We only did it to please Daitaro and I 'spose you and Takashi are on the same treadmill."

"Oh, sort of," Seiji said with a shrug. "I quit SM after you left and got a data entry job at the National Archives. It's rather dull and I'm part of a huge department, but it really does suit me better than advertising."

"How'd Daitaro and Takashi take that development?" Shimada asked, marveling at Seiji's nerve in quitting his brother's company. He'd always thought Seiji had the soul of a clerk, but would never admit it to either of them.

"They don't care," he said. "I nearly had a nervous breakdown after you left Tokyo, so the less stressful job was necessary and also means I can take better care of Takashi."

"Does he need care?" Shimada asked, half kidding. The Takashi he remembered was cool, confident and ready for anything.

"A little," Seiji said calmly. "He took care of me when you left--"

"You. Dumped. Me."

"I know, but it was still painful." Seiji looked at him with such honesty, Shimada had to look away. "And then Daitaro dumps a lot of work and personal stuff on him."

"That's my bro," Shimada said bitterly. "No friends, just husks of people he sucked dry and cast aside."

"Well, it's not that bad," Seiji said.

"Yet."

"Ever," Seiji said firmly. "Takashi isn't you or me; he's getting as much out of Daitaro as Daitaro is getting out of him. It's a little scary sometimes how much alike they are."

"More like terrifying, alarming and disgusting, if you ask me," Shimada said. "Oh, we're here." He'd almost begun to enjoy their chat.

Seiji thrust a business card at him. “Ryu, please call me or email me,” he said, a grace note of desperation in his voice. “I miss being your friend and I don’t have many of my own friends. Hasn’t enough time gone by that we can be friends now? Please?” he asked, glancing at the restless taxi driver. “I’ll take care of the cab, I have to take it back anyway. Don’t miss your plane.”

There were tears in Seiji’s voice, if not his eyes. Shimada knew the sound of this raw honesty and was moved by it. He could not trust his own voice, so only nodded and got out of the cab. He watched it pull away, taking Seiji back to Takashi, and this bothered him not at all. “Maybe we can be friends,” he thought as he hurried to the gate to catch his plane back to Yoshi.

Takashi was pacing their apartment when Seiji got home.

“You’re late, Seiji.” Takashi looked at his Rolex for the nth time.

“I saw Ryu.”

Momentarily poleaxed by visions of his hard-fought and hard-won lover in a love hotel with his former rival, Takashi fought for cool and control. “Oh my God, please don’t leave me, Seiji!” he cried, falling to his knees and wrapping his arms around Seiji’s waist.

“Ta-kashi,” Seiji said wearily. “I’m not leaving you. Please get up. Or stay there, and I’ll sit down.”

Takashi leapt to his feet and apologized. Seiji indicated that he wanted a drink by glancing at the drink cart and graciously accepted a Seven and Seven. Flopping down next to him on the couch, Takashi asked, “Where did you see him?”

“In a cab,” Seiji said with a sigh. “I ambushed him at Perspectocity and he allowed me to share a cab ride to the airport with him.”

He worked hard to drum up visions of Seiji and Ryu having sex in a cab, something so out of character for both of them, that Takashi finally gave up on that scenario. Seiji was more loyal and comfort-loving than that. Takashi felt momentarily ashamed for doubting him. If Seiji were going to cheat on him, he’d leave him, and that would be infinitely worse and, technically, wouldn’t be cheating. “How was he?” Takashi finally asked to distract himself from his own train of thought.

“Barely civil, but he didn’t throw me out onto the highway.”

“Ah, that’s good,” Takashi said, steeling himself to ask, “Why did you—?”

“See him? Because we meant everything to each other once, and I can’t act like that’s nothing,” Seiji said firmly. “We were friends and lovers, Takashi, I hope enough time’s gone by that we can be friends again. And you know there’s someone new in his life, so maybe he can

finally forgive me for chickening out on him.” He glanced at his lover, who had his completely neutral listening-to-client-bullshit face on. This annoyed Seiji enough to continue. “Besides, Daitaro broke us up, it really wasn’t Ryuu’s fault!”

Smiling, Takashi snaked his arm around Seiji. “And I just profited from your former lover’s inability to stand up to his family.” He kissed the frown off Seiji’s brow.

“It was Daitaro mainly, you know that,” Seiji said, leaning up and briefly returning a kiss. “You know what a monster he is, how ruthless and relentless he is when he wants something. It’s unnatural.”

“I still think Ryuu was a fool for letting Daitaro and his mother—” he raised a hand to still Seiji’s objection, “—his mother was undeniably in it, Seiji, you can’t blame it all on Daitaro—”

“That’s like blaming the gun for the bullet,” Seiji snapped.

“Now, now, where was I?” Takashi hugged him closer. “For letting anyone break you two up for any reason. I would have fought them to the end for you.”

“That’s easy to say now,” Seiji said, leaning his head on Takashi’s Armani-clad shoulder. “But what if Daitaro opposes us? You work for him, your future is with him.”

“My future is with you, Seiji,” Takashi said, reassuringly. “And you’ve hit the nail on the head. I only work for Daitaro, he’s not my elder brother. Not to worry, though, if I got canned from SM for being your lover, I’d dig ditches or write poetry or just live on your salary.”

“You’d hate it,” Seiji said softly. “You’d be miserable every second.”

“Not if you still loved me.” In his deepest heart, Takashi hoped he’d never have to choose between his family and Seiji. In his private honest moments, he saluted Ryuu’s attempt to dodge that bullet even when he failed and a grieving Seiji threw himself into Takashi’s waiting arms. Occasionally Takashi wondered if he’d played a part—other than being the one person Seiji would bring his broken heart to and the one person who wouldn’t let him go and the one person Ryuu would never take Seiji back from—in Daitaro’s dreadful scheme. But the one thing no one had foreseen was that Ryuu would tell them all to go to hell and vanish from their lives. Yes, they all knew he was with some dinky little local paper in Nagasaki, but as far as being reachable, Ryuu might as well have been on the moon these past two years. And soon he’d be back in Tokyo with a new love, and...ah, damn, it was too much to think about just then, it was enough just to hold Seiji, the love of his li-

“Takashi?” the love of his life said softly.

“Yes, darling?”

“What’s for dinner?”

At home in Nagasaki, Shimada found Yoshi reading in bed and wearing the cute silk pajamas Shimada brought home from the last trip to Tokyo. Shimada was not a mushy boyfriend, but he could not resist seeing Yoshi in these particular white silk pajamas he’d seen in a department store. They looked cute on Yoshi for as long as he got to wear them, which was usually not long at all. That he was wearing them for Shimada’s homecoming, made it all that much sweeter. “Hey,” he said. “No, don’t get up, I’m taking a shower and joining you.” Cute pajamas notwithstanding, Shimada realized he needed a little more time to figure out how to tell Yoshi he’d seen Seiji. He also needed a shower to give him enough energy to make it into bed with Yoshi.

Refreshed and rosy, Shimada decided to take the offensive. “What are you reading, hon?” he asked, toweling his hair dry.

“‘The Red Pony’.”

Shimada, who occasionally read *The Economist* magazine, looked more closely at the book; it was in English. “I’m impressed,” he said. “I didn’t realize your English was that good.”

“Don’t be too impressed, it’s a simplified version.” Yoshi smiled at him and stuck a Perspectocity subscription card in the book to mark his place. “Or maybe not,” he added, looking at the cover before tossing it aside. “This book is so simple, it’s like for idiots.”

“But you’re reading it,” Shimada teased, pulling him close.

“I like English class, so I guess I’m good at it,” he said, twisting a little in Shimada’s arms to give his lover better access to his neck. “I like reading and listening, but I don’t like speaking very much.”

“Let’s speak English!” Shimada said in that language.

“Maybe later,” Yoshi said, not in English, and pulled Shimada down for a kiss.

The pajamas didn’t stay on very long, which was a relief to both men. Deftly moving them into a sixty-nine that would have been enough for the fatigued Shimada, he could not help but smile when Yoshi tapped him on the shoulder with the tube of lubricant.

“I want to,” Yoshi said simply, and then turned his oral attentions to Shimada’s burgeoning cock.

“I want to, too.” Shimada said, and playfully devoured Yoshi’s rock-hard erection, teasing out his teenage lover’s orgasm as he gently stretched and lubed him.

It had almost become a game with them: usually Yoshi came first due to his youth and Shimada’s brilliant fellatio technique, but as

Yoshi's technique improved, he could sometimes get Shimada off before Shimada had him ready for sex. But that night Yoshi wanted to get laid, so he only got Shimada really hard, and then came hard himself when he'd gone just a little past his limit. Yoshi was trying to build up some stamina and control, but a good orgasm after Shimada was away for a few days was not to be missed.

Shimada spent a little more time applying lube and stretching before taking Yoshi's renewed erection in his mouth again. He sucked him to half-hardness and shifted them until they were face to face, Yoshi spread out beneath him and Shimada lifted the kid's knees and began gently easing his condom-clad, lubed-up shaft into Yoshi's body. The kid seemed a little tense, so Shimada leaned down to kiss him. This did the trick and Shimada was able to slip the head into him. "Okay?" he asked, and got a nod from Yoshi, who was breathing heavily beneath him.

Moving slowly and gently, Shimada worked his cock all the way into Yoshi's body and then began to fuck him in short pulses, gradually lengthening his thrusts. At one point he hit Yoshi's sweet spot and had to hold the thrashing, sex-crazed teen down so he didn't tear his delicate tissues. Nevertheless, with a writhing, moaning young man in his arms, Shimada didn't delay either of their orgasms much longer. Reaching between them, he put his hand with Yoshi's to stroke the kid to climax, just an instant before Shimada drove his cock in to the hilt and came with a heartfelt, grateful moan against Yoshi's neck. "Thanks," he panted. "Oh God, thank you so much."

Yoshi, panting and barely recovered from his own orgasm, kissed Shimada's temple and hugged his shoulders. They lay like that, breathing each other in, wordlessly loving, until Yoshi's muscles relaxed enough for Shimada to pull out. Shimada rolled onto his back and sighed; the trip to the bathroom was always the toughest part of sex.

Although Yoshi could tell Shimada was extra tired that night, he felt no remorse about the sex they just had. "Hey, I'll do that," he said pushing Shimada down and carefully removing the condom. He disposed of it in the bathroom, where he took a moment to clean himself up, and came back with a warm towel and wiped his ejaculate off Shimada's chest, and took a few gentle swipes at Shimada's limp cock. As gentle as Yoshi was, this caused Shimada to twitch a little. "Sorry."

"It's okay," Shimada said, sleepily. "Just sensitive from your hot sexy lovemaking."

Yoshi leaned down and kissed him softly. "That sounded really stupid," he said.