

“But my heart is true,” Shimada mumbled, half asleep.

Not disturbing his tired lover with a snappy come-back, even if he had one, Yoshi got up and put the towel to dry in the bathroom. He came back to a completely conked-out Shimada. Curling around his sleeping lover, he began to doze off himself. Musing on their lovemaking, which had been sweet and carefree and, yes, even hot and sexy, Yoshi thought back to Shimada’s homecoming that night and sensed that something was bothering his lover. But, since Shimada preferred to make love rather than talk about his problems, Yoshi figured it was something that could wait until the morning.

The last thing Yoshi felt as he drifted off to sleep was Flounder making himself comfortable in the narrow space between their bodies. His last waking thought was that Flounder would never learn from all the times he’d had to scramble out from between them on amorous mornings, which was what Yoshi hoped for tomorrow. Luckily, they’d never crushed their cat, but they had annoyed the cranky feline more than once and more than a little.

Yoshi woke up late with Flounder meowing for his breakfast. He fed the cat and rushed through bathing and breakfast. Shimada kept pace with him, suggesting that they’d save time if they showered together. This didn’t save any time, but it was a lot of fun.

“Hey, what was bugging you last night?” Yoshi asked as they hurried into the streets of Nagasaki.

“Oh, nothing.”

“Oh, something. I could tell when you came in,” Yoshi persisted. He watched one of the buses he usually took take off.

Shimada sighed, figuring he’d better get it over with. “I saw Seiji yesterday.”

“What?!”

“Calm down.” Shimada raised his hands, but didn’t touch him. “He tracked me down at the magazine and we shared a cab ride to the airport.”

“What did he want?” Yoshi asked.

“To say hello,” Shimada said calmly. “We were close once—”

“Close?”

“Very close, and now he wants to be friends,” Shimada said blandly.

“Friends? Just friends?” Yoshi asked intensely. “That’s all he wants to be with you?”

“Well, baby, that’s all he’s going to get no matter what he wants,” Shimada said, watching a bus come and go with Yoshi rooted on the

spot, not even noticing it. “He’s not in love with me any more than I’m in love with him. He belonged to Takashi even before I left Tokyo. So, honey, don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried. You loved him once—”

“I love you more,” Shimada insisted.

“I love you, too. Tell me again why you broke up with him?” Yoshi asked.

“My mom was sick, she asked me to break up with him before she had surgery,” Shimada said by rote. He’d said it to himself enough times to have it down pat. “I was going to get back with him when she got well enough to withstand the shock of me leaving the family—”

“You would have left your family for him?” Yoshi said; it was obviously the first time this fact had registered.

“Yes, and I did, sort of anyway, when I left Tokyo,” Shimada said patiently. “That visit from my brother was the first contact I’ve had with any of my family since I left. And, you know, Yoshi,” he continued, watching another bus go by. “I might have to take formal leave of my family over you, so don’t be so shocked that I was willing to do it over Seiji.”

“But—”

“But, what? I love you, I want to spend the rest of my life with you,” Shimada cut him off. “And, by the way, I’m not on a tight schedule today. Like, I’m not the one who’s going to be late for school!” He stared hard at Yoshi.

Yoshi stared back equally hard, and then slumped. “Tsk, okay, you win,” he mumbled, pouting.

“I love you, Yoshi,” Shimada said, smiling at his profile. “More than anyone, okay?”

Yoshi blushed. “Okay, I love you more— Oh! There’s my bus! See you later!” he said, and darted off.

“Yeah, later, darlin’,” Shimada thought, watching him go. He caught the next bus for Ikoma’s office.

“How’s Perspectocity?” Ikoma said by way of greeting.

“Flourishing,” Shimada said, looking through his mail. Two readers loved and hated the same story; now, there’s some diversity. “Don’t you ever talk to your cousin?”

“Often, but he brags constantly,” Ikoma said, leaning back in his squeaky chair. “I need to ask a newspaper man to get the straight scoop.”

“It’s flourishing and we need more writers,” Shimada said, not sitting down. “It’s got more ad revenue than you can shake a stick at, but I’m keeping the ad page to text page ratio low and driving the ad rates up.”

“My cousin is right. You’re a genius,” Ikoma said.

“And a vicious one at that.” He walked out on Ikoma’s laugh.

It was too early to call Takashi at Shimada Miyagi, so he drank coffee and worked on a culture feature he’d thought up in Tokyo: Tokyo artists in Nagasaki. Now if only he could find some. He made a note to call the gallerist he’d interviewed earlier in the year. She seemed like the kind of person who’d know who and where they were. It would also be nice to chat with her over a good lunch. Lunch! Something he’d forgotten how to do in Nagasaki, but was rediscovering in Tokyo.

At eleven o’clock he called Shimada Miyagi and asked for Takashi Okamoto. When asked, he gave his name as Junichiro Tanizaki.

“Mr. Tanizaki, how interesting that you have the same name as Ryuu Shimada’s favorite author,” Takashi said when he got on the line.

“And your receptionist isn’t very well read,” Shimada shot back.

“Yeah, well, the office manager doesn’t hire them for their reading habits,” Takashi said, relieved and grateful that Ryuu’s literary code had prepared him for whatever his old rival had to say. He could never understand what Ryuu saw in “The Makioka Sisters.” Takashi was more of a Yukio Mishima man himself. “To what do I owe the honor—?”

“Cut the crap, Takashi, you know why I’m calling,” Shimada snarled, remembering how much this slick bastard annoyed him. “So why is your boyfriend ambushing me at my office?”

“Fuck if I know, Ryuu,” Takashi snapped back, cursing himself for letting Ryuu rile him so quickly. “Something about being friends with you. What did he tell you?”

“Same thing. He wants to be friends, I don’t mind being friends, but not if you and he are on the rocks.”

“We are very very very happy,” Takashi said firmly. “I’m sure I have nothing to worry about if you and Seiji are friends.”

“Well, that’s very very very good, Takashi” Shimada drawled. “Very big of you, too. As you must know, there’s someone new in my life.”

“Yoshi, isn’t it?”

“Of course you know that from my brother’s stalking us,” Shimada said coldly. “Don’t you think he looked like Seiji? I was struck by the resemblance.”

Takashi stared at the phone in horror. “Uh...no, not at all, but I only saw a photograph.”

“He looks just like Seiji in High School.”

“I only knew Seiji at university, Ryuu, and this is a weird conversation,” Takashi said.

“Really? I was just warming up to it, but if you must go...”

“I must, I must, but congratulations on your award, and I do have a question,” Takashi said, almost laughing. This was the old Ryuu, slightly odd in that he could find amusement or beauty in off-kilter or even ugly things most people passed by. This made him a good ad man, but a better journalist.

“Thank you, and what’s your question?”

“You know how thorough your brother is, so I got a pretty good picture of your life in Nagasaki, your job, what a fine young person Yoshi is, his nice family, how happy you are, but there was one thing Daitaro’s operatives couldn’t suss out,” Takashi said.

“Which was?”

“Your cat’s name.” There was silence on the Nagasaki end of the line. “Ryuu?”

“Our cat’s name is being suppressed to protect it from the glare of publicity. I’m hanging up now.” And he did.

Takashi leaned forward on his desk smiling, then he frowned, then he smiled again. Then he went off to a meeting with executives from a perfume company who were not nearly as witty as Ryuu Shimada. And this was a tremendous relief for Takashi.

Eventually, and with Seiji’s gracious assistance, Shimada found an apartment cheap enough to support him and Yoshi in while the kid devoted himself to graphic design school. Yoshi had found the school on the internet and Shimada had visited and approved of it. Although Perspectocity paid well for a small-but-growing magazine, it still wasn’t enough to live in Seiji and Takashi’s neighborhood even if Shimada wanted to. Takashi had even pitched in with the apartment hunt, but all he knew were high-rollers who’d never set foot in the district Shimada and Yoshi would be living in. Seiji, on the other hand, worked with many borderline-impoverished clerks who knew all the cheap but reputable neighborhoods. As a thank you, Shimada sent a huge box of candy to Seiji at his office and took him and Takashi out for lunch.

“When do you move in?” Takashi asked over miso soup.

“Next month,” Shimada said. The couple seemed to be waiting for him to go on, so he did. “Then Yoshi comes up here after New Year. I’ll spend Christmas with him in Nagasaki and get whatever there is left finalized. He’s been very organized, even talked the landlord into letting us out of our lease without too much agony.”

“Is Yoshi a Christian?” Seiji asked.

“Nah, but everyone does something special on Christmas,” Shimada said. “Don’t they? What do you two do?”

“We went skiing last year,” Takashi said, with a smile at a happy memory Shimada couldn’t work up enough bad humor to begrudge him. “And the year before—”

“We went to some ostentatious party for your work that year,” Seiji said, frowning. “And it was a drunken, disgusting nightmare.”

“Which is why we went skiing last year,” Takashi said wryly.

Successfully suppressing a laugh, Shimada nodded sympathetically. “Yeah, those ad client parties can get rough,” he observed. “What will you do this year?”

“Go skiing again,” Takashi said and then brightened. “Why don’t you and Yoshi join us?” Seiji’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, but he smiled so Takashi went on. “You’ll be our guests, I can easily get another ro—”

“Thank you, Takashi, but Yoshi and I really will have to tie up loose ends in Nagasaki over Christmas,” Shimada said firmly, but not unkindly. “But we’ll invite you over when we get settled in January.”

Takashi and Seiji graciously said they’d look forward to it and thanked Shimada for lunch. And peace reigned over Tokyo that week.

Shimada moved into the little furnished apartment in an unfashionable neighborhood and went about settling in as much as he could without Yoshi there. The fact that Yoshi would be there in less than a month gave him something to look forward to. Otherwise, Shimada worked long hours at the flourishing Perspectocity, shopped for housewares not included in the rental and cat supplies for Flounder. He made plane reservations to fly down to Nagasaki on Christmas Day and fly back with Yoshi and the cat on New Year’s Eve. Seiji and Takashi decided to be back in Tokyo for New Year’s Eve to spend it with Ryuu and Yoshi.

Grudgingly, but graciously, Shimada accepted a ride for himself, Yoshi and Flounder from the airport to their new place from Seiji and Takashi.

“Are you sure you won’t regret it?” Shimada asked.

They said no, they were disinclined to go to any of the parties they were invited to, especially the Shimada Miyagi debauch, and they wanted to welcome Yoshi to his new home in Tokyo.

“Why are you being so nice? Guilt?” Shimada asked them over a quick lunch near the Archives. Seiji’s schedule was a little more rigid so Shimada and Takashi met him in a shopping district near his office on weekdays.

“We’re friends again, and this is fun?” Takashi suggested.

“Of course!” Seiji was less tentative. “It’s great having you back in Tokyo. I can’t wait to meet Yoshi and your cat, what’s the cat’s name?”