

orchestrated for him. They'd been traveling most of the day, this was the first time they'd been alone in a quiet enough place for Seiji to vent about it.

"Yeah, this is pretty bad," Takashi said neutrally. He was surprised at how well Seiji was taking it all.

"They are still coming to Tokyo, aren't they?" There was some agitation behind this question, but Seiji was still very calm.

"It sounded like it," Takashi said, tired, bored and starting to get hungry. "He said he'd need a writing or editing or both job, but not in advertising."

"Do you—?"

"I might, I put out a few feelers before we left." Takashi looked at his watch. "But quitting all of a sudden like that isn't going to look very good. People will want to know why and few people will understand the situation. Most of Tokyo would love to have and would do anything to have Daitaro as a sugar daddy. It's just going to look odd, Ryu quitting a flourishing magazine like that."

"Yeah, well, I—" Seiji looked up helplessly at Takashi. "We won't let them starve!"

Takashi put his arms around his lover. "Nah, we won't let them starve," he said. "Or live in the streets or—"

"Don't joke," Seiji pouted.

Takashi kissed him. "But speaking of starving..."

"Eh?" Seiji opened his eyes.

"It's dinner time, isn't it?"

Tokyo

On the afternoon of their flight to Tokyo, Yoshi did something that impressed Shimada very much. He mixed Flounder's tranquilizer with a little caviar left over from their pre-New Year's Eve celebration. This was the celebration they knew they couldn't have on the thirty-first. It had involved having sex all over their soon-to-be-former apartment and, at one point, Yoshi licking caviar off Shimada's nipples. It was, in fact, rather amazing there was any caviar left at all. So Flounder was down for the count when Yoshi gently laid the grey kitty on the blankets from their bed comfortably arranged in the crate.

Unfortunately, the Kitty Quaaludes had worn off by the time their luggage was unloaded in Tokyo and a howling, yowling cat carrier came rattling down the luggage carousel.

"Oh, there they are," Seiji said, indicating with his chin because he was too polite to point.

"That must be the cat with no name," Takashi observed dryly.

Introductions were made, cat and luggage collected, Yoshi and Seiji looked each other over pretty carefully, but with Flounder carrying on like his world was ending—and maybe it was—there wasn't much conversation on the ride into town.

"Poor kitty," Seiji said, once they were in the new, small one room-plus-kitchenette-plus-bath apartment. "What's your cat's name anyway?"

"Don't tell them," Shimada said intensely. "Privacy concerns," he added vaguely when Yoshi wanted to know why not.

More worried about Flounder's mental state than his identity, Yoshi had bigger things on his mind. "Oh, boy, he's gonna freak," he said to Shimada. "Did you get a catbox? I don't see one."

"I got one," Shimada said, taking Seiji and Takashi's coats.

"And litter?"

"Yes, dear."

"And cat food?"

"Yes, dear," Shimada said. "Seiji made sure the cat would be well taken care of."

Takashi laughed and put his arm around Seiji. "It became a mission with him."

"It did, I even did some research," Seiji said, gracefully disengaging from Takashi and opening the closet door. "I put the cat box in here, so your cat can hide in a safe and comfortable place until he gets used to the new smells. That's what the webpage said cats go on, um, smells to acclimate."

“Huh,” Yoshi said, setting the cat box in the closet. “Let me get some water and dry food for him.” After provisions were placed within easy reach, Yoshi opened the cat carrier door. Flounder wouldn’t be coaxed out, so Yoshi left the carrier door open, left the closet door slightly ajar for air, and bowed deeply to Seiji and Takashi. “Thank you very much for all your help and support,” he said politely.

“Yes, thank you both,” Shimada murmured, also bowing.

“You’re very welcome,” Takashi said equally politely and everyone bowed again.

“But, Ryuu,” Yoshi said, looking innocently into his face. “Why can’t these nice people know Flounder’s name?”

“Flounder? Like the fish?” Seiji asked, delighted. “That’s perfect!”

“Or like the verb?” Takashi asked, trying to see what was so perfect about it.

“I think there’s a journalist trapped in your ad man body, Takashi,” Shimada said blandly. “Only Ikoma has ever asked that question.”

“It’s like the fish,” Yoshi said to Seiji, ignoring their boyfriends. “Speaking of fish, I’m starving. Can we get some food?”

Takashi insisted on paying for the Chinese food take-out order but Yoshi won his bid to pay the delivery person’s tip. Shimada had put a couple of bottles of champagne in the refrigerator before he left, so they were able to toast the new year like civilized people.

“To Ryuu and Yoshi.” Takashi proposed a toast. “Welcome back to Tokyo!”

And although their future in Tokyo was uncertain, Shimada and Yoshi felt it was a little brighter for having at least two friends to make a happy start of it.

It took about a week for Flounder to come out of the closet, but Yoshi and Shimada were too busy to do more than make sure he had food, water and a clean catbox.

Following up on several journal and newspaper leads from Ikoma took up most of Shimada’s time. As Ikoma, blameless and deeply shocked by the Perspectocity mess, had warned him, the word was out that Shimada had abruptly quit what was considered one of the hottest jobs in Tokyo publishing with an up-and-coming magazine and everyone in publishing who cared about such things were looking at him for signs of insanity. Perspectocity had been a mediocre magazine before Shimada’s brief editorial tenure; many editors were wondering if it would maintain its excellence or fade back to what it was. This especially was on everyone’s mind since there was also a rumor that

Perspectocity's funding had dried up with Shimada's departure. This made Shimada a figure of much speculation and a certain amount of suspicion. Still, he managed to cobble together enough free-lance work to cover the survival basics for his little household.

For Yoshi, things were a little simpler. He went to the vocational school he'd hoped to enroll in first thing after the holiday and, apologizing profusely, de-enrolled. But then came the argument over his deposit, which was small, but every yen counted in those lean days. The argument at the cashier's office became quite heated and drew a small crowd, more than three-fourths supporting Yoshi's right to have his deposit back. The other quarter just wanted to make a payment or be reimbursed and had no opinion. Eventually, the cashier gave up fighting with Yoshi and referred him to the Business Manager one floor up. Yoshi bowed in what he hoped was a very arrogant manner and turned to flounce out, but ran smack into a little man wearing a large camera. "Sorry," he murmured hoping he didn't look too stupid.

"Oh, not to worry, I wanted to speak to you."

Yoshi looked up warily and the man snapped a picture. "Hey..."

"Sorry, sorry, my turn to apologize. My name is Shinobu Kurogane, I teach photography here part-time." The man offered Yoshi a sweaty nicotine stained hand that the kid didn't shake too long or too hard. Kurogane had a short frame, bad posture and a pot belly. But he had a nice smile that Yoshi automatically returned with his own shy one. "I think I might have a job for you," Kurogane said, passing a hand over his thinning grey hair and smiling.

Some strange and muted warning bell went off in Yoshi's gut. He considered walking away, but, in fact, as Kurogane had probably heard, he needed a job and badly. "What kind of a job?"

"Let's step out in the hallway, too many bodies in here," Kurogane suggested. "Or perhaps a cup of tea?"

"Sorry, no time, I'm on a tight schedule," Yoshi said as briskly and politely as he could. "And I—"

"Ah! I understand, then let me tell you where the job is," Kurogane said pleasantly with a touch of amusement. He went on to give Yoshi the address of a cheap clothes store in a shopping district not far from the school. Many of the school's students bought their clothes and accessories there, and Kurogane took the shop's advertisement pictures. "The owner's a cheap bastard, but tell him I sent you." Kurogane gave Yoshi a business card. "His name is Norboru Fugiwara and don't let him pay you less than." Kurogane named a sum that seemed high to Yoshi, but according to Shimada, everything was higher in Tokyo." And good luck." Kurogane gave him a fatherly pat on the shoulder and