

it's more than what Fugiwara pays you an hour," Shimada said when Yoshi and Kurogane got to the store as it was closing. "And no more pictures until I get you a better deal." Yoshi nodded but remained silent; he and Kurogane seemed subdued. "What the hell is wrong with you, two?" Shimada demanded when the wordless brooding became too much.

Kurogane cleared his throat. "We didn't get any good pictures tonight," he said. "And Yoshi did his best, but he's not a model."

"I could have told you that," Shimada said bluntly, but put a protective arm around his not-a-model boyfriend. "How bad was the shoot?"

"Bad, but it's too dark here to show you prints," Kurogane said.

"Well, I just got paid, so let's go in this bar and have a drink," Shimada suggested. "If you'll be my guest, Kurogane-san."

Kurogane-san said he would be delighted, and soon they were huddled around a fairly well lit table looking at the pictures. Shimada's inner ad man surfaced to note that there were better set and lighting arrangements for shooting this particular product—the pajamas—but that the problem really was Yoshi, who had no idea how to project through his eyes. Yes, he was cute, but his gaze bounced off the lens instead of penetrating and seducing the viewer. This was something most models worked hard to learn and a few were freakishly blessed with, seemingly from birth, and so not something a sweet normal kid like Yoshi would know how to do. At least the non-ad man part of Shimada was glad Yoshi wasn't a natural model. That would have creeped him out. The natural models he'd worked with in his horrible ad agency days were narcissistic to the point of sociopathy. It would have been a bad shock to find that in the man he loved. Shoving his inner ad man back into a dark crevice in his psyche, Shimada, the normal guy journalist, said. "You're cute, Yoshi, but you're not a model."

"I know, I just feel like I let everyone down," Yoshi said, or rather, slurred, as he knocked back some more sake.

Shimada and Kurogane exchanged looks, and mentally took stock of how long they'd been talking to each other about the photos relative to the diminished level in the sake bottle of which they'd only had two drinks each.

"Yoshi, are you smashed?" Shimada asked, dividing the rest of the sake between himself and Kurogane.

"No-oo," Yoshi said, swaying a little, but staying upright.

Kurogane chuckled. "Ah, but it is late," he said. "Thank you very kindly for the sake and pleasant company. And Yoshi-kun, you're not

letting anyone down. Fugiwara and I asked you to try something new and we appreciate that you tried your best for us.”

As he paid the bill, Shimada thought that was a very nice thing to say, much better than that Yoshi had tried and failed. He would remind Yoshi of Kurogane’s tact and kindness when the kid sobered up. As it was, Yoshi was too smashed to walk properly, so Shimada had to carry him piggy-back. “Good thing he’s skinny,” Shimada observed to Kurogane as they ambled down the street.

The night was mild, like a spring night should be. Kurogane had hoped to capture the softness of spring and youth in the pajama pictures, but whatever spontaneous magic Yoshi had possessed the day before was stunted in the studio. It was a shame, really, the shots of Yoshi looking away from the camera were almost useable, but didn’t quite hit the mark. Kurogane was mulling over what he was going to do about the ads when he glanced over at Shimada carrying the sleeping Yoshi and was thunderstruck.

“What?” Shimada asked, looking around.

“What do people do in pajamas?” Kurogane asked, unable to hear his voice over the roaring in his ears.

“Lots of things,” Shimada said, adjusting Yoshi, who mewed, but didn’t wake, on his back. “Is this a trick question?”

“They sleep in them!” Kurogane cried. “Shimada-san! Please let me take more pictures of Yoshi, in pajamas, just like you and he are now, please!”

“Now? He’s hardly in any shape—”

“He doesn’t have to do anything but wear the pajamas and pretend to be asleep!”

“Who can sleep with all this noise,” Yoshi grumbled. “Put me down. Please.” Adorably mussed and rumped, Yoshi stood slouching but upright and steady. His eyes were closed and there as a shadow of a weary smile on his lips.

Shimada looked away from this vision to find Kurogane equally enraptured with it. “Where’s your studio?” he asked, looking at his watch.

“Not far,” Kurogane sighed and led them there.

The shoot finished just shy of dawn. Shimada’s back protested from carrying pajama-clad, relatively-sober Yoshi around the studio and then through a pocket park near the train and on certain well-lit streets around it. Kurogane was a one-man-show and didn’t have a very elaborate or portable lighting set up, so they had to rely on flash, available light, and one spotlight on a tripod. Shimada’s back got a break when Kurogane had Yoshi lay on park benches, or stand on

subway platforms. Many of the photos had Shimada standing or seated nearby reading a paper or, in one shot, holding an umbrella over the sleeping Pajama Boy. As dawn was starting to break and the trio was too tired and elated to think straight, Yoshi leaned wearily into the shelter of Shimada's arm. And this was the shot on which Fugiwara spent money buying the back cover of a weekly give-away magazine. It and the half a dozen other ads brought so much business into the store, the pajama stock was gone very quickly. Fugiwara was so pleased, he thanked Yoshi for all his hard work. He didn't give him any more money than Shimada had originally negotiated, but he did thank him most sincerely.

"I should not have agreed to that late night shoot without getting an agreement in place first," Shimada said when Yoshi handed over the pittance from Fugiwara. "I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's okay," Yoshi said, snuggling into his arm. "Kurogane-san was so happy, that made it worth it."

"Yeah, but are we stupid or what?" Shimada laughed. "We kill ourselves so that old burnout can be happy. He did get some great shots, though."

"Yeah," Yoshi agreed. "And he was all lit up and happy during the shoot. I've never seen him like that."

"He was being an artist."

"What?"

"I've only seen it a few times because most artists work alone or in small groups away from the public eye," Shimada said thoughtfully. "But that night, I could see that old Kurogane-san still has a little of the artist spark or magic or blessing or whatever. That's why I couldn't really be a bastard and say no." He looked into Yoshi's smiling face that was shining with love.

"That's because you're a nice guy, Ryuu," he said.

"Shhh, that information is supposed to be heavily suppressed," Shimada said, and spent a long time thereafter pressing his mouth on Yoshi's.

The Pajama Boy ads caused Kurogane's photography business to pick up. In addition to being quite busy with product and fashion shoots that spring, he was approached for ads by a mid-sized manufacturer of casual wear, including pajamas, and they were adamant that they must have the same model as the other pajama ads. Kurogane had been a photographer for a long time, although he'd never really mastered the business end of it. But he felt Shimada was on his side and asked Yoshi if his boyfriend would help him.

"Ohhh, Kurogane-san, he's on a story in Vietnam for a week,"

Yoshi said sadly, but then brightened. “But I know someone else who could help us!” He whipped out his cell phone and called Takashi, who said he’d be delighted to work on the deal. His fee was that Yoshi be his and Seiji’s guest for a celebratory dinner even if the deal fell through.

On his way out to lunch, Takashi mentioned to Daitaro that he’d be leaving early the next day.

“Really? Why? Meeting your mistress?” Daitaro asked.

“I haven’t the time or inclination, Daitaro,” Takashi said, waiting for the inevitable next question.

“Well, if not that, what pure and boring thing will you be doing?” Takashi told him. “Really? This Pajama Boy thing is really catching on. Who’s the company?”

“Nagato Fashions.”

“Never heard of them,” Daitaro said, losing interest.

“They’re pretty far down the food chain,” Takashi admitted. “But your brother’s out of town, so I’m pinch hitting for him.”

“What an interesting choice of words,” Daitaro said, getting interested again. “Want me to come with you and help out?”

“No.”

“I could cut this deal with my eyes closed,” Daitaro went on, warming to the subject. “My secretary could cut this deal over the phone.”

“Daitaro—”

“And I could art direct!” He clasped Takashi’s arm. “It would be the pajama campaign of the century!”

“No.”

“Oh, please let me come with you tomorrow!”

“No.”

“Please?”

“No.”

Shimada came home from his journalist travels to an empty apartment, after being kidnapped at the airport by his editor’s minion and held hostage at the newspaper until he’d finished his story. And that was okay because the paper moved the deadline up and needed it an hour ago. Then he was dropped at his apartment, the humble apartment he shared with the adorable Yoshi, who was not home. But this was also okay because Shimada needed a shower and wanted a nap. He found the yukata in the closet and felt glad to be home, and that even if Yoshi wasn’t there now, he would be eventually, and that was a nice feeling, too.

Flounder seemed glad to see him and not even hungry as Shimada noted he had dry food and plenty of water on a placemat in the corner of their tiny kitchen. The mat was a glossy plastic oval with a non-skid backing with a cartoony fish on it that Seiji had given them a few days after he learned the cat's name was Flounder. Yoshi had been very pleased, but Shimada had felt a small pang that it somehow locked Flounder into a noun at the expense of the verb. He hadn't felt this pang was worth extensive examination, but he had silently acknowledged Flounder's lost ambiguity nevertheless. Although Flounder's weight on his chest wasn't lost on Shimada, it didn't affect his ability to fall into a deep sleep.

The door didn't wake him, but Yoshi's soft kiss did. Shimada was dimly aware of Flounder's annoyed meow as he was driven off the bed by Yoshi, who was crawling into bed with his lover, and gently sighing, "Welcome home."

"Yeah, I wish I wasn't so tired," Shimada sighed, laying on his back, stroking Yoshi's hair, feeling Yoshi's erection against his thigh, and wondering if he was up to a sixty-nine. It wasn't that Shimada thought he couldn't get it up, or at least get Yoshi off, but that it wouldn't be much good for either of them. But any sex is better than no sex, so-

"Oh, just lay there," Yoshi said cheerfully. "I'll do everything."

Shimada momentarily wondered what he meant, but was reassured when, after a preliminary blowjob, Yoshi slid a condom on Shimada's erection and lubed it. "Oh, let me do that at least," Shimada said, putting a little lube on his fingers and sliding them inside Yoshi and gently stretching him. "Ready?" he asked.

"Yeah..." Yoshi positioned himself over Shimada's hips and eased himself slowly onto his lover's cock. He arched prettily as he hit his sweet spot and then shivered with pleasure when he hit bottom. Even more so when Shimada began to gently pinch Yoshi's nipples. And even more when Shimada began to stroke him in the rhythm of his own movement up and down on Shimada.

"We're not going to last very long like this," Shimada panted before he lost the ability to speak.

"Good!" Yoshi practically wailed this as he flung himself down the length of Shimada's manhood one last time and came with a pent up kittenish roar.

Deeply impressed and nearly as crazed, Shimada held tight to Yoshi's hips and came himself, arching off the futon. He flopped back down and pulled Yoshi into his arms, stroking the shaking kid's back and kissing his neck.