

a rather stunning-looking Seiji, who was being chatted up by a gigolo of some kind. “Scram, sharpie,” Shimada growled at the overdressed over-charming young man. Ignoring Seiji’s gasp of surprise, Shimada held fast to him.

“Ryu! What are you doing here?” Yoshi asked, coming up beside Seiji in the now gigolo-free space.

“I’m the Cavalry, I’ve just come over the hill,” Shimada said, not loosening his hold on Seiji, but grabbing Yoshi with his other hand. “Come! Let us lodge with my fleas in the hills! Or flee to my lodge in the hills! Or something!”

“You’re drunk!” Seiji yelled.

“Yes! And the night is young!” Shimada cried, dancing a few steps as they were suddenly surrounded by the Mariachi band. “Oh, shit! And there’s Jupiter Li and I don’t have a free hand!”

In the private dining room, Takashi bowed to the assembled families, but did not sit down. Silently saluting Seiji and all the love he felt for him, he knew he would be brave, but didn’t know if he’d be eloquent. He took a deep breath and looked directly into Yoko Yamada’s feral little face. “Yoko, I owe you an apology,” he said in a firmer voice than he thought was possible. “I’ve been wasting your time. I can’t marry you. I’m homosexual and I’m deeply in love with the man I’ve been living with for two years.” Takashi waited to for the room to explode, but all that happened was Yoko raised her eyebrows and nodded. Puzzled by this, Takashi decided to press his advantage while everyone else seemed to be in shock. “So, I apologize to everyone and I’ll come around and apologize individually tomorrow,” he said in a rush, backing toward the door. “But right now, I have something very important to do, so good night!” And he bolted.

Meanwhile in the Impala Bar, Shimada was still holding Seiji with one hand and Yoshi with the other. He ground his teeth and whined in frustration, “Gah! I’ve never been this close to Jupiter Li and now I can’t do anything about it!”

“Well, you can let go of me anytime, Ryu,” Seiji said sharply. He’d given up trying to get away, it only made Shimada hold on tighter.

“I can’t, I have to protect you,” Shimada said.

“From what!?” Seiji yelled.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Shimada said, watching Li’s body guards fend off the paparazzi. “Yourself, the unknown, whatever Takashi is afraid of for you.”

“What?” Seiji asked, looking stunned.

“Yeah, like what?” Yoshi asked irritably from Shimada’s other

side. “Like what is Seiji in so much danger of that you and Takashi have to protect him?” There was such bitterness in Yoshi’s voice, both Shimada and Seiji stared at him.

“Yoshi?” Shimada asked.

“Look, I’m really sick of all of this,” Yoshi said, his voice rising in anger. “Will you fucking let go of me!” Struggling in earnest, he managed to wrench free of Shimada’s grip and bolted, unfortunately right into Takashi.

“Ow,” Takashi said, staggering against Yoshi to regain his balance.

“Fuck off!” Yoshi pushed free of him and ran into the crowd.

“You’re on your own now, Takashi, old man,” Shimada said, shoving Seiji at him and going after Yoshi.

“Well, excuse me,” Seiji said, trying to get past him, but Takashi took hold of his arm. At least it was the other arm, and not the one Shimada had been crushing thus far.

Takashi sighed. “Look, Seiji—”

“I knew you were gay! Hahahaha!” Yoko yelled over the music at the not-terribly-happy-at-the-moment couple. “I couldn’t figure out why you were doing all this marriage stuff. Oh! Look! Look! There’s Jupiter Li!” She darted deeper into the bar. Her father was on her heels, but he paused to call Takashi a few unflattering names on his way by.

“Who was—?” Seiji began.

“Oh never mind, let’s—” Takashi started to say.

“I CANNOT FUCKING BELIEVE WHAT YOU JUST DID IN THERE!” Daitaro yelled right next to them.

Seiji pulled the startled Takashi behind him. “DAITARO! FUCK OFF!” Seiji yelled as loud as he could.

Daitaro recoiled, and then was distracted by something behind them and ran farther into the bar area.

“Wow, Seiji, you chased him off,” Takashi said in awe.

“I wonder,” Seiji said, looking around Takashi and watching Daitaro head for Koji. “Takashi, I—”

“Seiji, listen, I’m sorry, this is a nightma—”

“Oh here you are, Takashi,” Takashi’s mother hailed him, as she and his father squeezed between some gaudily dressed bodies to get next to them. “Oh, and Seiji, too, that’s good. We were worried.”

“You were?” Takashi asked.

“Yes, this situation with the Yamada family doesn’t suit us,” his father said bluntly. “I’d frankly rather see you dead or with Seiji than married to a creature like Yoko.”

“Gee thanks, dad,” Takashi said.

Seiji looked at the floor. “Is this what your family thinks of me?” he asked his shoes.

“Oh, dear, no, dear, no, we like you very much,” Takashi’s mom said quickly. “But I think we should talk about this tomorrow. This is quite impossible. Come, dear.” She took her husband’s arm and they left the way they came.

“Seiji, we really need to get out of here,” Takashi said, looking for the best way out of there.

“What’s the point, Takashi?” Seiji said. “I think I’ll stay—”

“I really hope you’re happy, Seiji!” Daitaro’s wife screamed at him. “Takashi just embarrassed everyone over you. First you ruin Ryuu’s life, now Takashi’s. What kind of a monster are you?” She didn’t wait for an answer as she stormed off in the direction her husband had gone.

“Takashi! What the fu—?” Seiji began.

“I’ll tell you later,” Takashi said firmly, and put his arms around Seiji. “Let’s dance.”

Further inside the bar area, Shimada finally caught up with Yoshi. “What? What? What did I do to piss you off?” he yelled, keeping firm grip on his boyfriend.

“Nothing, go home, or go back to whatever you were doing!” Yoshi yelled, twisting away from him. “I’ll stay here!”

Shimada pulled him into his arms. “I think not, Yoshi,” he murmured, watching Daitaro and Norboru Suzuki squaring off, apparently over Koji, who was looking on and looking amused. “This place is about to explode.”

Yoshi looked around Shimada’s arm. “Oh my...” First there was Yoko Yamada arguing with her parents and Jupiter Li edging away from them. Not far from them, Koji was sneering and looking really flushed and sexy as Daitaro and Suzuki were shouting at each other about something. He felt Shimada tense and lean forward when Daitaro’s wife entered the scene and Koji melted into the background.

A fight started behind Jupiter Li, and his body guards only made things worse defending him from it. There was a crowd surge: women screaming, furniture trampled, glass shattering. Shimada then did the only sensible thing: he slung Yoshi over his shoulder and ran for it.

Seeing Shimada carrying Yoshi and making a path to the front exit, Takashi grabbed Seiji’s hand and followed in their wake. Originally thinking he’d get his car, he dove into the nearest taxi instead and told the driver to step on it. At the sight of crazed, stampeding party-goers, the driver didn’t need to be told twice.

“What about your car?” Seiji asked, as he looked out the back window at the chaotic crowd behind them.

"I'll get it in the morning," Takashi said, and gave the driver their home address.

Back at the hotel's taxi line, Yoshi was yelling, "Put me down!" Shimada obliged by dumping him into the back seat of a taxi and barking their address at the driver.

"Sorry, driver, didn't mean to be rude," Shimada said. He was sitting on Yoshi who was yelling for the driver to stop the cab and let him out. "Crazy night, just ignore him."

The driver just nodded. "Never seen anything like that at the Hotel Arcadia," he said conversationally. "Very crazy night."

Yoshi went limp beneath Shimada. "D'you think you could get off me, please?" he asked and sat up when Shimada got off him. They rode the rest of the way home in silence.

"Well?" Shimada asked when they were upstairs in their apartment.

"Well, what?" Yoshi asked. "Hi Flounder." He bent down to pet the cat, who very pointedly walked into the kitchen. "Did you feed him today?"

"I must have or he would have torn hunks off of us when we came in," Shimada said, following Flounder to see that he did, indeed, still have dry food in his dish. "Are you feeding him more?" he asked from across the kitchen that was almost as large as their entire previous apartment.

"He wants smooshy food; I can tell," Yoshi said, dumping a small can of designer cat food in Flounder's dish, which was still on the cartoony fish placemat Seiji had given the cat as a housewarming when they came to Tokyo. Yoshi sighed, he scratched Flounder's furry head and then straightened up. "So...why were you there tonight?" he asked, leaning on the cabinets opposite those Shimada was leaning on.

"Takashi called in a panic when he saw Seiji in that freak show," Shimada said, puzzled by Yoshi's scowl. "I guess I owe him."

"It's not a freak show, I knew most of those people," Yoshi snapped. "And who do you owe what? Takashi or Seiji?"

"Takashi," Shimada said blandly, hoping Yoshi was either going to calm down or spin his anger out. "He's been very nice to us since we've been in Tokyo. They've both been very nice to us."

Yoshi sighed and rubbed his hand over his eyes. He looked very young and very tired at that moment. "I'm...I'm not like Seiji," he said softly.

"No, and thank God for that."

"But that's why you're with me, because I remind you of him," Yoshi said. He tensed when Shimada crossed the room and leaned very close to him.

“You did once, Yoshi,” Shimada said softly, his face mere millimeters from Yoshi’s. “But have you looked in the mirror lately? You’re one of the most beautiful men in Asia now; Seiji doesn’t come close.”

“I’m not talking about my looks, Ryuu,” Yoshi said, unable to meet his lover’s eye. “I’m not from the same kind of people you and Seiji and Takashi are from. My family wasn’t rich, I’m not going to university, I’m never going to have fancy jobs like you three do.” A tear splashed on his shirt.

“Yoshi, so what? Being a graphic designer is a cool job, you’ll be great at it,” Shimada said, pulling him into his arms. “Or you can keep modeling and acting, if you want to, that’s fine, too.”

“I don’t.”

“Don’t what?” Shimada asked, stroking Yoshi’s hair out of his eyes. “Modeling or graphic design?”

“Modeling, I hate it,” Yoshi said, sniffing until Shimada handed him a paper towel to blow his nose. “I can’t act either. I could only do the theater thing because there were people to help me night after night.”

“So, you can go to graphic design school like we planned,” Shimada said, and then quickly asked if he still wanted to. Maybe Yoshi wanted to become a jet pilot or something, but the kid assured him he still wanted to do graphic design. “Okay, good. I know we got derailed when we came to Tokyo. It took a while to get back on track, but we’ll be fine, Yoshi. Don’t worry about anything, baby, it’s all under control.” Shimada held him tight and made a vow to himself that this would be true, and, nothing, not even Daitaro, would get in the way again.

Yoshi hugged him back and smiled as Flounder rubbed happily around their calves.

Seiji and Takashi didn’t speak until they were in their apartment and Seiji walked directly into their bedroom without turning the lights on. Takashi followed and turned on the reading light on his side of the bed. Seiji was sitting on the edge of his side of the bed, staring out the picture window at the city. Takashi cautiously walked around the bed to sit next to him. “Look, Seiji, I really made a mistake tonight, I—”

“Your father really hates me,” Seiji said flatly.

Takashi sighed. “My father says unguarded things when he’s stressed and confused,” he said carefully. “Remember the time at my cousin’s wedding when he toasted the bride and groom with the wrong names?” Encouraged by Seiji’s micro-laugh, Takashi put his arm