

and lawyers,” Shimada said, watching the bathroom door and listening to the shower running. “Look, as you know the production broke up rather suddenly, so suddenly we left without Yoshi’s passport. We’re stuck here until we can get one from the Japanese embassy. I’ll fill you in on all the details when I see you.”

“Passport?” Takashi seemed stuck on this. “Is there anything I can do from here? At the Foreign Ministry or somewhere?”

“Thanks, I think we have it covered,” Shimada said, noting that the shower was still running. “The most powerful man in Vietnam, possibly Asia, is working on it.”

“Let me know if you need me,” Takashi said, sounding somewhat mollified and certainly calmer.

“Well, I always need you, Takashi,” Shimada deadpanned. “Hi to Seiji.”

“I will. I’m hanging up now.” And with that, Takashi hung up.

Yoshi was not a marathon showerer, so Shimada was disturbed to find him, eyes closed, head thrown back, just standing under the steam of water. Never one to be wasteful, Shimada stepped into the shower, bathed and turned the water off. “Okay,” he said, pulling Yoshi in to his arms. “What happened?”

“I...I feel really dirty,” Yoshi said limply against his shoulder.

“Why?” Shimada smoothed Yoshi’s wet bangs off his forehead.

“You saw...you saw the film...” Yoshi was shaking in his arms.

“The rape? Did you get raped?” Shimada asked, momentarily stunned. “I’ll fucking kill all of them, I’ll—”

“I didn’t get raped, I mean, not physically, I guess, um...” Yoshi looked up at him. “Could we get dressed and eat breakfast? I’m cold and hungry.”

Yoshi seemed reluctant to talk about it until after their visit to the Japanese embassy, where they were promised a passport would be waiting first thing the next day. Colonel Tran’s people had been there the night before and all hell was breaking loose in the Japanese press about the famous Japanese journalist and the supermodel being held/stranded/marooned/vacationing—depending on the source—somewhere in Vietnam. Even after Shimada’s paper called for a statement that he and Yoshi were okay and would be back in Japan at the earliest possible moment, the Japanese diplomatic staff were anxious to get them out of Vietnam as soon as possible.

Another paper Shimada freelanced for called and asked, since he was there anyway, if he’d look into some rumors about toxic waste dumping in the Mekong. Shimada told them to get someone else. Then he turned off his phone and put it in his pocket. He and Yoshi were

sitting in a park not far from the Japanese embassy, watching the midday street life of Ho Chi Minh City.

“Who was that yesterday?” Yoshi finally asked after a long silence. “The guy in charge? Colonel Pham?”

“Not Pham, Tran,” Shimada said. “Colonel Giang Tran helped us out of there, although I now think he overreacted a little.” He looked into Yoshi’s stunned, haunted eyes and added, “On the other hand, maybe not.” Shimada would have liked to put his arms around his lover, but he thought they might actually get arrested for it.

“He...he seemed like a strong person,” Yoshi said softly.

“Uh, yeah, that’s a good word for it,” Shimada agreed.

“Um, maybe we should get him a present,” Yoshi suggested vaguely.

“Yoshi, I think throwing those smug, arrogant bastards out of his country and driving away with you and me was the best present we could ever give Colonel Tran,” Shimada said, trying not to laugh and failing. “I think that was the happiest I’ve ever seen Tran in my life,” he blurted between giggles.

It was contagious; Yoshi started to giggle quietly and leaned against Shimada for support. Two Japanese men, helpless with laughter, drew a few looks, but otherwise were ignored by the busy city people. Pulling themselves together, they decided to go back to the hotel for lunch because it was easy. Shimada didn’t have a translator on this trip and his English was good enough for the hotel. He was still tired and not up to any new experiences. And he was certain Yoshi wasn’t up to anything more stressful than a cab ride back to the hotel, which had graciously written directions to and from the Embassy on their stationary for the travelers. They had lunch in their spotlessly clean room and although Yoshi ate, it wasn’t with his usual gusto or conversation. Shimada was glad he had a magazine to read while Yoshi was silent and withdrawn. Reluctant to push him, Shimada figured there wasn’t much he could do until they were back in Japan. The worst thing would be for Yoshi to have a breakdown in a foreign country. “Hm?” Shimada asked when Yoshi murmured something.

“I said, thank you for rescuing me,” Yoshi repeated.

Shimada put down his magazine. “You’re welcome. I’m sorry I had to, I should have come with you.”

“They wouldn’t let you,” Yoshi said. “Remember? They said it wasn’t a—a—a—”

“‘A walk on the beach,’ that’s right, I remember now,” Shimada said softly. “Yeah, I remember. I guess it wasn’t a walk on the beach, was it?”

“No, it was like a bad dream,” Yoshi said, looking at the middle distance and not at his lover. “It was like I had to feel all the fear and sadness I’ve ever felt all in one day, day after day. I just wanted to cry all the time, for my parents, my brother, Koji, those kids who killed themselves in Nagasaki, you know, you wrote about it, I—” Yoshi’s pent-up tears finally spilled and he couldn’t go on.

“Oh, baby, come here.” Shimada drew him into his arms, noticing again how thin Yoshi was, while the younger man sobbed into his shoulder. “Why did they do that to you?” Shimada asked when the sobs died down to sniffles.

“I...because I couldn’t do what they wanted unless I felt what the Boy felt,” Yoshi said. “Everyone said it was brilliant. All I knew is that it was painful. How do people live through that stuff? I would die.”

“I don’t know, Yoshi,” Shimada said, remembering when his world collapsed and how painful it was. Also reminding himself that Yoshi’s world had collapsed once and the movie bastards had cruelly made him live a variation of it again. “I think you just take it moment by moment, until you’re strong enough to go on with life.”

Yoshi sat up and looked at him. “That’s how the film ends,” he said. “The Boy leaves the Americans and goes to work rebuilding Japan. That’s what we shot a few days ago, I had to feel happy I was free, but sad to be leaving the safety or whatever I had with the Doctor and the Sergeant.” Yoshi reached over for his cold tea and took a sip. “Um...nothing happened, I mean, really happened, it was all pretend, you know, the sex stuff.”

“Like the rape?” Shimada asked and Yoshi nodded. “But it seemed real when I saw it. That’s what made me sick, seeing that.”

“I’m sorry,” Yoshi said.

“It’s not your fault, Yoshi,” Shimada said, kissing his forehead. “And it was brilliant acting or whatever, but I love you and it freaked me out. And I’m a little freaked out that you suffered and I wasn’t there for you. I just want to get us back to Japan where I can keep you safe and happy. That’s all I want.”

“I want that, too,” Yoshi said, brightening a little. “I know you will; you always have. I’ll never do another film, I can’t, I won’t.” He started to cry again.

“You’ll never have to,” Shimada said firmly. “That much I can promise you. I’ll fight for you. I should have fought for you—”

“No, you did...you did all you could.” Yoshi laid gentle fingers on Shimada’s lips. “I’ll be okay, I did this, it didn’t kill me, and now I can go on. I’ll be stronger now, for both of us.”

Shimada hugged him tight, fighting back his own tears. “Yeah...we’ll both be stronger, for each other, than we knew we ever could be,” he said.

Yoshi leaned back and kissed him, wiping both their tears away.

They were back in Tokyo the next afternoon. Flounder greeted them with fury, not from hunger or thirst because Shimada had discreetly called the building manager to make sure the cat was provided for those few days, but from sheer rage at being left alone for so long. Perhaps he was reminded of those terrible days before Yoshi adopted him in Nagasaki. After a can of cat food and some attention, Flounder settled down as if nothing had happened. It was, therefore, hoped that at least one of the three occupants of that apartment could get over the past and get on with the future.

However, there was the present to contend with. Tokyo media buzzed with various and ever more lurid versions of the events surrounding the filmmaking in Vietnam. The most outrageous had it that Yoshi had really been gang raped during the filming and that all the sex scenes were real, which made “The Occupation Boy” even more pornographic than it already was.

With the very able assistance of Takashi, Shimada, Kenzu, and even Seiji to some extent, Renge went on the offense with a media blitz that took Tanaka and his production company by surprise. They were even aided by the mysterious editorial writer who decried the work of perverse American authoresses who limned vile and inchoate lusts of repressed and demented modern young women who were so terrified of men and normal sex, they could only be aroused by men on men sexual violence. Neither Shimada nor Takashi nor Seiji had or wanted any contact with Daitaro, but Renge and Kenzu suggested they reconsider because the former partner in the now defunct Shimada Miyagi agency had been cleared by the architect Suzuki’s confession. It had come too late to save Daitaro’s marriage or career and he was eking out a living writing the same kind of tawdry news stories Shimada had written when he’d first come back to Tokyo. Unlike his principled younger brother, Daitaro supplemented his income writing porn and designing lurid ad campaigns for love hotels catering to women and sex toy distributors. This gave him particular insight into and ability to limn the inchoate lusts of repressed and demented modern young women with disposable income.

Although Daitaro’s fall after Koji’s murder had been spectacular, Suzuki, the actual murderer, had lost even more. He was facing life in prison, his wife had committed suicide, his daughter was put into the foster child system, and his parents disowned him. And just to pile on

the misery, Koji's medical records revealed that he was HIV positive, and Daitaro, Suzuki and, it was rumored, Jupiter Li, who was keeping a low profile somewhere else in Asia, were all now HIV positive.

This last fact had at least given Shimada pause. Should he contact his parents and let them know how bad Daitaro's condition really was? Should he look up his former sister-in-law and nephews? If only to ascertain whether his former sister-in-law knew she might have HIV? In the end he decided to leave all of them alone. None of them gave a damn about anything but themselves. They had, in fact done everything in their power to make his life unpleasant. He tried to exempt his father from this damning appraisal, but the best that could be said about him was that he didn't actively conspire against his younger son, which wasn't saying much and certainly not saying enough for Shimada to reach out to him. Maybe after his mother died....But in the present, there was no way his parents and his former sister-in-law could not know about Daitaro's stupidity and its effect: the most lurid details were splashed all over the tabloids and there was even a book being written about it by some hack journalist Shimada only knew slightly.

So Shimada put his family and the past behind him, because he certainly had his hands full in the present with Yoshi. Renge and Company did their best to present Yoshi as the victim of the yaoi craze as realized in America, that wretched land of excess and overkill. They planted stories indicating that Yoshi's delicate Japanese sensibilities had been overwhelmed by an American screenplay so vile that not even the great author Matsui-sensei could tone down its traumatic effects. Japanese history was not a vehicle for the lurid fantasies of strange American women with too much time on their hands. Yuu Tanaka struck back by hiring the Kimura Kano agency to make the argument in various media outlets that Japan was a powerful country able to endure the centuries and that if Yoshi Katayama was such a wimp, he was beneath art and history's contempt. Some of the attacks on Yoshi became so vitriolic, Media Mondial's legal department began rumbling about libel and character assassination. Renge arranged for an interview to surface with a legal expert questioning the legal rights and protections of Japanese actors working outside of Japan, and why it had been necessary for the Vietnamese police to deport Mr. Tanaka and his project from their country. The tone of the Kimura Kano-planted articles became much more civil after this.

"It wasn't the Vietnamese police, it was the army," Shimada said the next time he saw Takashi. They were on their way to meet Seiji and Yoshi for dinner.