

staff. He was also pleased that Shimada was writing for his cousin's edgy magazine in Tokyo, *Perspectocity*, even though Shimada insisted on writing under an alias. The magazine was small, but had a loyal readership who devoured the in-depth reporting and analyses Ikoma's cousin, Masao Naganuma, published. Over the months that Shimada wrote for it, the subscription- and advertising-base grew, and so did Shimada's compensation. This was not strictly due to Shimada's contribution, many fine writers were published in *Perspectocity*, but he was still an important part of it, even if it was under an assumed name.

And Shimada welcomed the extra money. He loved Yoshi very much, but keeping a High Schooler was more expensive than Shimada had realized. In addition to pocket money, he'd agreed to pay half Yoshi's school fees so he didn't have to work at the café so much. Then there were school supplies, transit passes, and Yoshi's final school trip, which Shimada insisted he take.

"After all, Yoshi, I won't even be here while you're in Bali," Shimada said, clinching the argument. "I have to go out to the suburbs to cover that arson story."

The story took him to the suburbs for several weeks interviewing people whose homes had been set on fire. Following a lead, Shimada realized that all the victims had sons that went to an elite high school. Furthermore, all the sons were on the soccer team. After interviewing the coach and chatting with several team members whose homes hadn't been arson sites, Shimada went to the police with his suspicions. He now believed the fires were being set by a girl from a not-so-elite school who'd been raped by certain members of the soccer team. Sadly, it turned out that it was she and her boyfriend, and the police found them dead in her bedroom. The boyfriend had strangled her and then hung himself.

Shimada's story caused quite a stir. He offered no prescriptives, he merely recounted the hopelessness of the lovers' suicide pact and the arrogance of the elite rapists. There was much editorial hand-wringing in other papers, and some soul-searching in a few news magazines, and, of course, congratulations when Ryuu Shimada won a very prestigious national newspaper award. And being newspaper people writing about one of their own, and because they were a thorough lot, many stories mentioned Ryuu's illustrious advertising mogul brother, Daitaro Shimada of Shimada Miyagi, one of the most prosperous ad agencies in the country.

"Shit," Shimada said, slumped in a chair in Ikoma's office.

"Maybe he won't notice," Ikoma offered in a reasonable voice.

"Are you kidding, Jun? He has full time staffers who do nothing

but look for references to him in the press,” Shimada said, scowling. “If I’d parachuted onto his terrace, I couldn’t be in his face anymore than I am with this award.”

“Congratulations again, by the way,” Ikoma said. As miserable as Shimada was, Ikoma was ecstatic to have this kind of honor showered on his little local paper. “When are you going to the award ceremony?”

“I’m not, I asked Masao to accept it for me,” Shimada said blankly.

“That’s good for Perspectocity,” Ikoma said approvingly. “He’ll out you as one of his writers.”

“I know, he’s already said he wants me to write under my own name from now on. It was in the PS of his letter of congratulations.” Shimada looked up at Ikoma’s chuckle. “I guess I’ll have to stop hiding from the past.”

“Why not?” Ikoma asked. “You have a beautiful present and a bright future. You have Yoshi, why not just enjoy it and forget all the bullshit that happened in Tokyo?”

“Yeah, okay.” Shimada dragged himself out of the armchair.

“Where’re you off to?” Ikoma asked. They’d just gone over Shimada’s leads for that week and he knew he didn’t have anything until the next day.

“Home, to finish a story for your slave-driver cousin in Tokyo,” Shimada said over his shoulder.

Ikoma had a good laugh about that, knowing his cousin would get as much mileage out of Shimada and his award as he could before what fuss there was about it died down completely.

Yoshi had been very pleased when he read the notice in the paper that Shimada had won some kind of important newspaper award. “Of course you won, that was an incredible story about those kids,” he’d said. “It made me cry.”

“It was supposed to make you angry at the injustice and elitism of our class system,” Shimada had said.

“Really? It all seemed so sad to me.”

“Because it was sad,” Shimada had said, giving in and changing the subject. The story had made him sad and angry in equal measures, but now only the sadness lingered. The soccer players would never be punished now that there was no one to press charges. The parents of the dead girl and boy would never understand why their children chose death instead of asking for help. The schools and community would go on as before, the haves would have, and the have-nots would be their victims. It was an old story, one that never changed, and, in the end, that was what made Shimada sad. “I’m no crusader,” he told himself. “I’m a coward at heart. I can’t fight these battles, only write about

them. I have to leave it to others to fight for what's right and good and they never do. Nothing's going to change because of my story, but at least those two dead kids have the truth as a memorial, for all the good it does them."

Shimada was sad for a few days, but he let Yoshi cheer him up. Then he was nervous for a few days after he won the award, but let Yoshi cheer him up again.

They were in the midst of enjoying Yoshi's summer vacation—sleeping late, taking day trips, making love in the middle of the afternoon—when Daitaro Shimada showed up.

Yoshi answered the door, Shimada being occupied in the bathroom.

"You must be Yoshi Katayama," Daitaro said with a leer, in what he thought was an easy-going friendly voice.

All it did was make Yoshi suspicious. "How do you know that?"

"I'm Ryuu's older brother," Daitaro said, edging closer to the half-open door Yoshi was blocking with his body. "It's an older brother's business to know with whom his brother is living."

"You're his older brother?" Yoshi asked, not moving an inch.

"Yes, Daitaro Shimada, that's me." Daitaro tried a smile, but it only got as far as a smirk. "Do you think I could come in?"

"Maybe." Yoshi merely turned his head to yell over his shoulder, "Ryuu! Your dad's here!"

"I'm his brother, brat!"

"You look like his dad!" Yoshi nearly shouted. "And don't call me a brat!"

"Then don't call me his dad!"

"Then don't-t!" The bathroom door opening cut off whatever Yoshi was about to shout at Daitaro.

Shimada sauntered up to the squabbling pair at the door and pulled Yoshi behind him. He let Daitaro come in, but left the door open. "What are you doing here, brother?" he asked in a cold voice.

"Now, now, bro, I've just come to congratulate you on your award," Daitaro said, strolling around their modest living room. "Nice place, oh, and you have a cat. How nice, how homey."

Shimada felt Yoshi stiffen behind him as Flounder, the traitor, rubbed around Daitaro's expensive pant legs. "Thank you. Now get out."

"Brother, how unkind," Daitaro said, not moving. "After all this time, and I see you've found some consolation—"

"Hey! Does he mean me?" Yoshi broke in.

"Well I don't mean the cat, kid!" Daitaro snapped.

"Why you-!"

“Daitaro, leave!” Shimada was holding Yoshi back with some difficulty.

“Well, at least this one has some spirit,” Daitaro drawled as he headed for the door.

“You jerk,” Shimada snarled, and gave him a good shove into the hallway before slamming the door in his face. He wrapped his arms around Yoshi to calm them both down. And then he started to laugh softly.

“What?” Yoshi, still angry, asked.

“You found his weakness right away, didn’t you? My brother hates anyone to think he’s old,” Shimada said, leaning down for a kiss.

After kissing him back, Yoshi asked, “Why did he come here?”

“To let me know he knows everything about me,” Shimada said, sadly.

“He knew my name,” Yoshi told him.

Shimada frowned and then shrugged. “Then it was to let me know he knows everything about us,” he said. “But it doesn’t matter. He’s in Tokyo and we’re here. It doesn’t matter,” he repeated, as if to convince himself.

“Your brother dropped by yesterday to congratulate me on your award,” Ikoma said before Shimada sat down. “He said you threw him out.”

“I did. What’s it to ya?”

Ikoma didn’t pursue it; this was the old Tokyo Shimada in front of him again: mean, cold, and angry. The editor in Ikoma rose up and decided Shimada was in exactly the right mood for some crime reporting. “Try not to get arrested,” he said by way of farewell. He got a grunt as a response. Ikoma hoped Shimada was not taking his mood out on Yoshi. The poor kid probably wouldn’t understand a bit of it. Ikoma wasn’t sure he really understood how Shimada let Daitaro and Takashi ruin his life with Seiji. Seemed to him like Shimada did most of the damage himself.

Shimada’s mood was in direct proportion to how much he wasn’t taking it out on, or confiding in, Yoshi. He was half annoyed and half admiring that Yoshi had provoked Daitaro so quickly before Shimada got there and the only thing left for him to do was to throw his brother out. He felt Yoshi had limited his options, even though throwing Daitaro out was at the top of things Shimada wanted to do before one of them died.

He was proud of Yoshi for not being intimidated by this brother as most people were. But Yoshi had lost so much: he was fearless and sometimes reckless, and would fight to keep Shimada any way he had to. As much as Shimada welcomed this kind of love, and was damn

glad he could feel this way again, Yoshi's love weighed heavily on him. At least Yoshi wasn't going to be charmed into caving in to Daitaro like Seiji had been. That wasn't exactly fair to Seiji; Takashi was Daitaro's rising star in the agency. Seiji would have to be at least polite to his lover's boss.

After several hours of interviewing policemen, witnesses, victims of the burglaries, and chasing a few leads to dead-ends, Shimada fell by the paper to write up what story he had and be more civil to Ikoma. The crime beat was not Shimada's forte, but since he'd just won a big award for it, he thought he ought to make some kind of effort to please his new-found fans. They'd get sick of his cynicism and angular prose soon enough. But being hard-headed with hard-headed people had gotten most of the bitterness over Daitaro out of his system.

"So what did Daitaro say?" he asked without preamble.

"You won't like it," Ikoma said, watching Shimada curl his lip. "He said he was glad you were succeeding at something."

"That fucking jerk." But Shimada didn't get much oomph into it. Daitaro's put-down was to be expected. Shimada was no longer under his thumb, so all Daitaro could do was jab ineffectually at him.

"I think he's jealous." Ikoma broke into his meditations when they'd gone on too long.

"Huh?"

"You won a real award for real world serious reporting on a contemporary problem that no one else has had the guts to face, let alone splay out for everyone to see," Ikoma said slowly. "You took a risk in standing up for those dead kids; you took the side of all the victims of bullying. It could have gone very wrong, but you made heroes out of what society considers losers, and villains out of the usual heroes."

"Please, Jun, you're making me blush," Shimada said. That got a laugh, so he figured it was good to leave 'em laughing. "So—"

"How swamped are you with Perspectocity stories?" Jun asked, rising to his feet with Shimada.

"Very, can't take anymore work from you this week, sorry," Shimada said. "And I'm negotiating articles with *Moda Weekly* and *Journal Nouveau*."

"My poor cousin," Ikoma said with mock sadness. "His discovery is being stolen away. I'll miss you if you dump the paper. Ah, such is the tragedy of the clan Ikoma."

"Oh relax," Shimada said, laughing a little. "I'm not doing anything that takes me out of Nagasaki for more than a day or two. Preferably somewhere I can take Yoshi."