Unspoken

by learashi

Summary

After having his heart broken, artist Ohno Satoshi flees to the country in search of peace. He buys a coffee shop and settles into a quiet routine.

But when Satoshi stumbles across Jun hurt and half frozen in the forest he has no idea that his life will never be the same again.

Slowly he comes to love the beautiful and fragile young man, but will the difference in their ages and Jun's dark past keep them apart forever?
An unexpected find

Chapter Summary

Satoshi stumbles over an unconscious stranger in the snow.

Heavy snow began to fall as the hunched figure trudged across the field. Satoshi had been enjoying his day off by attempting to fish in his favourite stream. His friends had told him that he was crazy trying at this time of year, but the weather had been perfectly fine when he set out.

Since he had bought the coffee shop deep in the forest he hadn’t found much time for himself. During winter it was packed with skiers on their way up or down the mountain nearby and during summer it was full of hikers, tired and thirsty from carrying too much gear in their packs.

He was happy enough with his life though, away from the city. His main source of income had always been his art and since he had moved he had hoped to find inspiration in the wild landscape which surrounded him.

The failure of his last relationship had been the catalyst for the move. He wanted to escape the memories of the last twelve years – happy memories which had been destroyed when he’d returned home early one day and found his boyfriend “entertaining” a strange man in their bed. After a lot of shouting, crying and broken crockery, he’d realised this had not been for the first time. He’d packed some essentials and fled to his manager’s apartment. He had more than enough money to buy the business and had left the apartment and its contents to his ex, since everything they’d shared, even the furniture and especially their bed seemed tainted.

He would have been happy to just buy a small house somewhere in the country, cut himself off from the rest of the world and paint for the rest of his days, but his always wise manager had reminded him that at only thirty five he would be facing a very long time alone. It had also been his suggestion for Satoshi to buy the coffee shop as it meant that he would be his own boss and it would give him contact with other people on a regular basis. The business was successful enough for him to employ part time staff which allowed him the freedom to paint when he felt like it, but lately he had been in a dry spell. Even the ever changing beauty of the mountains hadn’t been enough to stimulate him and he hadn’t felt inspired enough by anything to start a new piece for far too long.

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The snow was really getting worse and it was hard to see where he was going as he had his eyes scrunched almost shut to protect them from the wind which was driving it with some force. The weather conditions combined with the fact that as he walked he was spacing out thinking about how every snowflake was different and wondering if it would be possible to paint them accurately led to him tripping over a large bump in the path. As he landed he was shocked to hear the “bump” groan as he landed on it. He soon realised that he had landed on a person. Exactly what type of person it was kind of hard to tell, since it was coated in a thick layer of snow. As he brushed the snow away he realised that the figure was male, with lips that were blue from the cold.

He knew that he would have to get him out of the weather before hypothermia killed him. Satoshi was only a small man in stature but with a strong muscular body so picking up the man wasn’t too
difficult. In fact he realised as he picked him up, he seemed to be much lighter than expected. Fortunately they weren’t too far from his shop which had obviously closed early due to the foul weather and he managed to stagger there without dropping him.

Even though his burden wasn’t excessively heavy, it was quite hard to walk through the snow. He was almost completely exhausted by the time he managed to unlock the door and could only manage to carry the unconscious man as far as the bench seat next to the fireplace. He hastily stoked up the fire and went upstairs to his apartment in search of towels and blankets.

As he began to remove the wet clothes from the stranger’s body he realised why he had been so easy to carry, he was far too thin with prominent ribs and fresh bruising on his torso and down his arms and legs. After rubbing him dry he wrapped him in his warmest blankets and gently lifted him once again and placed him closer to the fire while he went to make some hot drinks for them both.

The tightly wrapped bundle stirred and coughing sounds emerged from its depths. Satoshi hurried back and loosened the blankets slightly. A head covered with wavy black hair emerged. He guessed that his visitor was probably only around seventeen or so, with pale white skin and two flushed red cheeks. Satoshi placed his hand gently on the pale forehead, horrified as realised the colour was being caused by a high fever.

Two large brown eyes framed with long dark lashes gazed up at him with a slightly glazed expression. In between coughs Satoshi managed to get some hot tea laced with honey down his patient’s throat after he placed a fever patch on the young man’s forehead.

“You fell on me,” the teenager rasped in a strained voice.

“I didn’t see you on the path.”

“You almost squashed me. Perhaps you’re too old to be wandering around by yourself without a guide dog.”

“If I hadn’t, you could be dead by now, and I wasn't too old to carry you all the way here. So I think you should be at least a bit grateful.”

The two large brown eyes were glaring at Satoshi now with a fierce intensity in between more coughing.

“Thanks, I guess.”

Satoshi introduced himself to his truculent guest who responded with “Jun”.

“No family name?”

“I don’t have a family anymore.” Jun replied in a flat voice.

Satoshi would have enquired more but the young man’s eyes had already closed again as he fell into a feverish sleep. He once again lifted Jun and carried him upstairs and placed him in his own bed, without pausing to wondering why it felt so natural to be once again holding the fragile young man in his arms.

Jun was bathed in sweat underneath the blankets so Satoshi stripped him down once again and wiped his body with a damp cloth, hoping to reduce the fever. As he did so Jun began to toss restlessly, his murmured words gradually becoming louder in his fever driven haze.

"Please, don't hurt them. I don't care what you do to me, just leave them alone. Please father, I'm
sorry, I'm so sorry..." Jun's voice trailed off into heaving sobs as he lifted his arms in front of his face as if to ward off heavy blows.

Satoshi's heart hurt to see the absolute despair and distress that was weighing down his visitor. Smoothing back the sweaty hair from his forehead, he hummed a barely remembered lullaby as he soothed him into a calmer sleep.

After once again tucking him under the covers Satoshi went and called the local doctor who also happened to be one of his best friends.

Toma came round immediately and wanted to take the young man to hospital but Satoshi had a feeling that after hearing the fear in his voice, it would perhaps be best to care for Jun himself. Toma reluctantly agreed but made his friend promise to call him immediately if Jun's condition worsened.

"Satoshi, you don't know anything about him. Are you really sure that you want to do this?"

"Something about him makes me feel like he needs my help."

"He has recently been badly beaten by someone. You've seen the bruising. Do you think it's wise to get involved? What if whoever did it comes here looking for him?"

"That's exactly why I want to protect him. Please don't tell anyone that he's here."

"Okay." Toma reluctantly agreed knowing that when Satoshi was in stubborn mode then nothing could persuade him to change his mind, adding "You know I'll do anything for you. Just make sure you remember to ask for help if you need it."

Satoshi smiled his thanks and showed the doctor out, before returning to his bedroom and the feverish young man. Jun was stirring restlessly in his sleep, coughing so hard that he was having trouble breathing. Satoshi sat on the side of the bed and woke him gently helping him to sit up before giving him a dose of the medicine that Toma had left for him. Jun unconsciously leant into his body as if seeking comfort. Satoshi hugged him until he fell asleep again before gently laying him back down on the bed. He spent the rest of the night monitoring his temperature and wondering exactly what his story was.

Note: Soooo, a chaptered Juntoshi... *shuffles feet nervously*

Just a short opening chapter to set the scene. I haven't really thought this one through properly so posting might be a bit erratic, but I have been sitting on this for ages and figured that if I don't start posting it I will never finish. I hope you can bear with me.
Chapter Summary

Under Satoshi’s gentle prodding, Jun reveals the events that led to his collapse in the forest.

It took a full two weeks for Jun to be well enough to climb out of bed on wobbly legs that could barely support his slight weight and sit in the comfortable armchair that Satoshi had thoughtfully placed within easy reach under the bedroom window.

Satoshi had cared for him over this time, gradually learning more about his guest as they talked quietly together during the brief periods when Jun was awake.

He had handed over the day-to-day running of his business to his staff so that he could care for Jun. They were used to being left alone while he was on one of his painting binges and thought nothing of it.

Nobody else was aware of Jun’s presence except for Toma and Satoshi wondered to himself why he was so reluctant reveal his presence to others. Even though the official reason was his fear of those who had harmed Jun hunting him down, deep down he knew that it was because he was unwilling to share him with anyone else just yet.

It turned out that Jun wasn’t as bratty as he had appeared on that first night. Once his fever had broken he became a much more reasonable person and was actually quite shy.

Jun wasn’t as young as Satoshi had thought and had turned twenty at the end of August. It was his thin frame and innocent face that has mislead him. And what a face it was; Satoshi thought that he had never seen anything as beautiful. His fingers itched to be able to capture the perfect bone structure and strong features and most importantly the fleeting expressions he saw flickering across the beautifully luminous large brown eyes perfectly framed by long lashes.

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"Jun, you need to eat more than that if you want to recover quickly," Satoshi said as Jun picked at the food on the tray resting on his lap. "I don't want you relapsing on me after all the effort Toma and I put in getting you this far. My back is only just recovering from carrying you through the snow." He was hoping that a little humour might pull Jun from the depression he had sunk into as he slowly recovered from his injuries.

"It would have been better for you to leave me there to die," Jun replied sadly. "I'll only bring trouble to you; like I do to everyone I come into contact with."

"Jun..."

"It's true. I should get out of here as soon as I can; I don't want you to suffer for helping me," Jun said in a determined tone.

"When you were delirious you cried out as if you were trying to protect someone," Satoshi replied. "Was it a family member?"
Jun still didn't want to talk in detail about his family even after Satoshi mentioned the words Jun had cried out during his fever, but Satoshi's gentle concern had worn down his resistance to sharing his problems.

"I'll tell you, but you'll probably want to throw me out too after you hear my story," Jun replied with a scowl.

"I promise that no matter what you tell me you are welcome to stay here as long as you wish," Satoshi said as he squeezed Jun's hand encouragingly.

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Jun took a deep breath and began to recount the events that had led to him ending up in the snow in the middle of the forest.

Leaning forwards and staring sightlessly ahead he began to speak in a soft monotone, "I always knew that I liked boys, right back to kindergarten. I tried not to because I knew what would happen if my father found out."

Jun paused, looking at Satoshi as if expecting disgust to be painted across his face. The look of gentle encouragement that he saw there gave him the courage to continue.

"When I turned twenty I finally plucked up the courage to tell my family that I was gay. Even though I've never even done much more than kiss anyone, I wanted them to know the real me. It turned out to be the stupidest thing I've ever done. My father went wild. He beat me down to the ground and then disowned me. My mother tried to stop him, but…"

Satoshi was tempted to intercede in case Jun became too upset but it seemed that the young man wanted to continue his painful story to the end.

Jun's voice wavered, "My father threw me out of the house and withdrew my enrolment to the art school where I was studying photography. For a while after that I slept on a friend’s couch while I tried to sort out my life. I had no money for food and could hardly sleep; my friend liked to party a lot."

Satoshi could see by the look of disdain on Jun's face that he didn't approve of his friend's nightly activities.

"I tried hard to find a job, I really did, but Father’s influence was strong and as soon as people realised who I was, they turned me away with a frightened expression, saying that they had been mistaken about needing to hire someone.

I was on the way back to my friend’s apartment late one evening after another wasted day looking for a job when I was jumped by two men. They punched me in the stomach, bound my hands and feet together and gagged me. I tried to fight them but they were too strong."

Jun's face paled as he recalled the feeling of their hard knuckles pounding into his tender flesh. "They tossed me into the boot of their car and it was so dark and so cold...I thought I was going to die."

Satoshi knelt at Jun's feet and gripped his trembling ice-cold hands between his own warm ones. "Jun, you can tell me the rest later. I'm worried that this is too much for you."

"No! I need you to know what you're getting yourself into," Jun replied, before continuing his story.
"They drove for hours, before finally stopping and dragging me out and throwing me onto the ground. They kicked me a few more times for good measure. We were in a forest, a long way from anywhere. I recognised the men as employees of Father and knowing what they did for a living I became afraid that I was going to die right there and then. But instead of killing me they untied me and told me to go away and stay away, because if Father found out that I was still alive then their lives would be forfeit as well. They were men who had known me since I was small and couldn't do what my father ordered them to. That was when I knew that as long as my father is alive I would never be able to see my mother and younger sister again."

Jun finally broke down and his body was wracked with sobs as he recounted that and Satoshi held him in his arms, gently rubbing a soothing hand over his back.

Satoshi realized that after being dumped Jun had gotten completely lost and had wandered around for at least two days in the forest before he literally stumbled over him.

By the time he had finished telling the whole story Jun was completely exhausted and had no tears left to cry. Not wanting him to relapse, Satoshi immediately made him return to bed and he sat holding his hand until he fell asleep.

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The next morning when Jun woke he found Satoshi still sitting beside the bed, slumped asleep in an uncomfortable looking heap.

"Satoshi?" Jun asked softly as he touched the older man's shoulder.

"What? Are you okay?" Satoshi mumbled as he slowly sat up and tried to pry his eyes open.

"I'm fine, but you look terrible," Jun replied, reaching out to tentatively run the tip of his finger over the crease mark that had been imprinted in Satoshi's face by the crumpled linens he'd been resting on.

"I didn't want to leave you alone. You were so upset last night," Satoshi said as he stretched his stiff back.

"I was more worried about you being upset after what I told you. I can leave today if you want me to," Jun said in a dull voice.

"Why should I be upset?"

"Because of me being gay. Most people don't approve."

"Jun, you have probably been too sick to notice, but we are playing on the same team," Satoshi replied with a small chuckle.

"What?"

"My boyfriend and I broke up six months ago," Satoshi replied with a deep sigh. It still hurt him to remember the act of betrayal he'd walked in on.

"So you don't mind?" Jun felt a weight lifting from his shoulders for the first time in months.

"Why should I mind? Your sexual orientation is nobody's business but your own," Satoshi replied soothingly. He was amused that Jun seemed to have missed an important point. "And in case you didn't get what I just inferred let me put it in simple terms. I'm gay too."
Jun blushed, embarrassed that he had been so wrapped up in his own problems that he hadn't fully taken in what Satoshi was trying to tell him.

"But you have friends," Jun said in puzzlement.

"Of course. Being gay doesn't mean that you can't have friends."

"It does in my case."

"But now you have me and Toma too," Satoshi said.

The smile that Jun gave him in response went straight to his heart.

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"So his family is actually "family"?" Toma asked, using his fingers to form air quotes.

Jun was asleep upstairs while Satoshi and Toma sat in front of the cracking fire that was the centrepiece of this coffee shop deep in the woods. The business was finally closed for the night and they were able to enjoy their drinks in peace.

"I think that his father is a very scary man, and that we have to make sure that Jun doesn't fall back into his hands," Satoshi replied as he sipped his steaming mug of coffee.

"He sent two men to kill his own son, what do you think he will do to you and this place if he finds out that you are hiding him here?" Toma asked with a worried frown.

"Do you want me to throw him out? To abandon him?"

"Of course not," Toma replied indignantly. "He needs our help, but we have to be careful."

"At the moment only the two of us know that he's here, but once he is well enough to come downstairs people will start asking questions," Satoshi said. "We need to pass the word around."

The village was small and isolated and the locals liked to keep things between themselves if possible. The local police officers mostly turned a blind eye and allowed the people to work things out in their own time without too much official interference.

Satoshi's business had bought jobs and wealthy tourists to the area, increasing turnover for all of the other small business owners in the vicinity as well. The building was crafted out of local timber and fitted harmoniously into the rugged landscape perfectly. One side of the building was entirely filled with glass panels which showed off a perfect view of the nearby mountains, the other side had a shady balcony that was extremely popular in summer. It was not just a place for tourists; it was also the hub of the village with locals dropping by for good coffee and equally good gossip on a daily basis.

"I think we need to speak with Inspector Sakurai first and ask him to make sure that his men keep an eye out for any suspicious characters," Toma said. "He still owes me for delivering his twins last winter when we were snowed in."

"I don't want to cause any trouble for Jun." Satoshi replied hesitantly.

"Since when would Sakurai-san do anything to hurt an innocent person? From what you've told me Jun is completely blameless in this and I'm sure that the Inspector would agree with us too," Toma insisted.
Satoshi was about to reply when he heard soft footsteps on the stairs leading down from his private quarters. It seemed that Jun was awake and looking for some company.

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"You don't have to go," hissed Satoshi as Toma quickly shrugged on his coat.

"The sooner I speak to Sakurai-san the better it will be for all of us and I don't think your guest is ready to socialize with anyone but you just yet." Toma squashed his hat on his head and shot out the door leaving Satoshi alone with Jun who was slowly walking around the room his eyes wide with wonder at the beauty of the space.

Jun faintly heard Satoshi mutter something about making tea, but his attention was entirely taken up by the flickering flames of the huge circular fireplace that filled the centre of the room. The walls, floor and furniture were all made of the same mellow timber that glowed dark amber by the light of the flames. He had never been anywhere as calm and peaceful as this in his entire life. The effort of walking this far made him slightly dizzy and he sank gratefully into a squat hand-carved chair placed at a comfortable distance from the fire.

"Ah, you found my favourite chair," Satoshi chuckled as he returned with a tray of tea and some cookies.

"Oh! I'm sorry to take your chair. I'll move somewhere else," Jun exclaimed as his cheeks blushed a faint pink.

"No! Stay where you are. You look so comfortable." Satoshi was pleased to see the colour in Jun's pale cheeks; he was looking much healthier now that the bruises were fading.

As they drank their tea they lapsed into a companionable silence, watching the flames create patterns on the walls as they danced in the hearth.

Satoshi reached for his sketch pad and pencil which he kept in his pocket at all times, his hand flying across the page as he attempted to capture the beauty of Jun's features, emphasized by the soft lighting.

Jun was unaware of his close scrutiny. As he sat there his eyes darkened with the remembrance of recent events as his loneliness threatened to overwhelm him.

Satoshi sensed Jun's withdrawal and slid the book back into his pocket. He stood and moved to stoke the fire, squeezing Jun's shoulder comfortingly as he passed. Jun looked up at him with eyes made huge by sadness but he seemed to gain some strength from his touch.

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Sakurai Sho was dressed in his usual jeans with a camouflage patterned jacket on top. He pulled off his red knitted cap and sat in his usual place at the counter.

"Do you even own any other clothes?" Nino, Satoshi's Assistant Manager asked sarcastically.

Nino had a sharp tongue but it was combined with an equally sharp business sense that made him invaluable to the often absent-minded Satoshi.

"I have lots of different clothes," Sho protested. "This jacket is brand new."

"Maybe, but they all look the same to me," Nino said as he plonked down a mug of coffee and a
doughnut in front of the police officer.

Satoshi came down the stairs from his apartment carrying Jun's empty breakfast dishes. He almost dropped the tray when he saw Sakurai-san, the dishes saved from breaking by Nino's swift action.

After Nino disappeared into the kitchen the two men exchanged a look.

"Toma has explained your visitor's problem but I need to speak to him myself before I agree to help," Sakurai said before taking a huge bite of the doughnut.

"He's very fragile. I don't want him to be hurt," Satoshi replied.

"I have children of my own; do you really think that I would hurt someone so vulnerable?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to imply..." Satoshi didn't quite understand why he was feeling so overprotective of Jun.

"Toma told me that he was very ill and only just recovering and I don't want to distress him but if his father is who I think he is then he will need all the protection he can get and to do that I need to hear his story directly." Sakurai gulped down the last of his coffee and wiped the powdered sugar from his lips before looking at Satoshi as if asking his permission.

Understanding the truth of Sakurai's words Satoshi nodded and led the policeman upstairs to speak with Jun.

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Jun struggled for breath, his chest rising and falling rapidly, his mouth opening and closing like a fish as he gasped for air. His cheeks were red and streaked with tears, his lower lip bleeding where he had unconsciously bitten down on it in his distress.

Satoshi attempted to hold him still but Jun pushed him away, screaming and hitting out at him wildly with shaking hands as sobs continued to wrack his entire body, his eyes wild with fear.

Footsteps could be heard rushing up the stairs a moment before Toma burst into the room, his medical bag swinging from his hand. Sakurai followed close behind, his own breathing quite rapid after his rush to fetch the doctor after Jun had reacted so badly to his probing about his father and the events leading to his abandonment in the forest.

"Jun, I'm just going to give you something to calm you down," Toma said as he pulled a syringe from his bag. "You'll feel much better in just a moment."

Jun whimpered and curled himself into a tight ball in the far corner of the room, wrapping his hands protectively over his head and cringing away when Toma approached. But Toma persisted, moving slowly and calmly until he could reach Jun's trembling arm, glaring at Satoshi who made a move to help.

After the sedative was administered, Toma jerked his head in the direction of the door, indicating that the other two should leave him alone with Jun until the drug took effect.

Satoshi looked as if he was about to explode as he looked at Sakurai with a venomous glare.

"I need you two to leave right now," Toma whispered as he took Jun carefully into his arms, holding him against his shoulder as his breathing calmed. "I'll be down to talk to you both in a minute."

"Let's discuss this somewhere more private," Sakurai said, trying to deflect Satoshi's anger.
Satoshi nodded, his eyes glittering with repressed rage, his fists tightly balled up by his sides, but by the excited murmuring coming from the coffee shop below, Jun's presence was no longer a secret.
A kind gesture

Chapter Summary

Jun is slowly recovering from his ordeal but faces an uncertain future.

Seemingly oblivious to the interested gazes of the customers dotted around the room, Satoshi and Sakurai began to argue with each other.

Nino leapt in at the last second, grabbing Satoshi’s arm to prevent him from punching the officer in front of a dozen witnesses. He pulled the pair of them behind the counter and shoved them into the kitchen, following immediately behind to try and keep the peace.

“I told you that he was fragile and you promised to not hurt him!” Satoshi grabbed the front of Sakurai’s shirt pulling his face close to his own.

“And I didn’t. He was telling me what happened and then suddenly he started crying and screaming,” Sakurai said as he gripped Satoshi’s collar in retaliation. “I have no idea what happened. I tried to calm him down and when I couldn’t I fetched you immediately. I’m not some sort of monster.”

“I know this village lacks excitement but you two don’t have to try and keep everyone entertained,” Nino complained as he whacked the pair of them with a spatula, unsuccessfully trying to separate them before an actual physical fight broke out.

Fortunately for all Toma walked in a moment later and manhandled Sakurai to a safe distance away from the enraged artist.

"Stop it you two," Toma said angrily. "Do you think that the sound of you two fighting will make Jun-kun feel any better?"

"It's his fault for harassing Jun," Satoshi protested, wriggling free of Nino's grasp and straightening his shirt.

"I did no such thing," Sakurai huffed.

"Neither of you two idiots are responsible for Jun's meltdown, although you're both severely stressing me right now," Toma complained as he gingerly released his friend. "Jun went through an extremely traumatic experience that he perhaps still hasn't fully explained and it was highly likely that he would have had this breakdown even if Sakurai hadn't questioned him."

"How is he?" Satoshi asked, itching to go upstairs and see for himself.

"He's asleep and he'll stay that way for the next couple of hours. I think that he has to come to terms with what happened to him and the way his life is now and I hope that we can help him," Toma replied.

"And the first thing we need to do is make sure that everyone knows that his presence here needs to be kept a secret. If the wrong people find out about him being here we could all be in danger," Sakurai said. "His father is a very rich and powerful figure in the underworld. He has tentacles
Nino looked at the other three with wide eyes, astonished that he hadn't realized what was going on under his nose. "I don't know how you plan on keeping things a secret when the entire coffee shop just heard this conversation," he said with a roll of his eyes.

Sakurai chose to ignore Nino. "I will send my men out as soon as possible to pass the word around. This village has always been good at protecting its own."

Satoshi felt his face getting hot at the implication of Sakurai's words. The policeman had grown up here, moved to Tokyo to begin his career and recently returned with his wife, wanting his children to grow up in the countryside. The thought that he now considered Satoshi a local meant a great deal.

"What do I need to do now? For Jun?" Satoshi asked Toma after Sakurai headed out.

"Just be there for him. If he wants to talk, then listen to him, but don't try and force anything. He may just need to know that you are there and on his side," Toma replied. "If he becomes distressed again call me and I'll come over immediately, but I think he is over the worst."

"Would you like me to bake some more cookies and bring them up?" Nino asked with feigned innocence. He wanted to feel part of things, and he was also dying to see this mysterious visitor.

Satoshi looked suspiciously at his employee; Nino was not known for his altruism. "Thanks for the offer, but I think that maybe it's best to give Jun some space. I'm sure he'll come downstairs when he's feeling better."

Ignoring the curious stares directed at him by his customers, Satoshi quickly made his way back upstairs, not wanting Jun to be alone when he woke.

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Jun pried his eyes open; his head was throbbing and his throat so dry that it was hard to swallow. He vaguely remembered talking to the Inspector about his father and then it was all a bit of a blur. The bad memories had snuck up without warning, and he had felt panic overwhelming him. As he recalled hitting out at Satoshi he wanted to cry. The older man had been nothing but kind and generous to him and he, in return, had struck him repeatedly as he attempted to calm him down.

Satoshi was sitting in the armchair under the window, once again sketching in his pocket-sized notebook. His brows were knitted together in concentration and the tip of his tongue was poking out of the corner of his mouth as he focused on his work.

The familiar sight was somehow calming to Jun. Even though he had known Satoshi for such a short time he trusted him completely and had come to know him as a man to rely on. His feelings were a muddle of gratitude and something much deeper; something that he was afraid to examine too closely in case it led to rejection.

Jun attempted to speak, but all that came out was a croak.

“You’re awake.” Satoshi smiled broadly as he hastily packed away his sketching materials. He made no move to come closer to Jun, worried that he might spook him with any hasty movements.

Jun nodded; embarrassed by the scene he had created earlier. “Inspector Sakurai must think I'm crazy,” he mumbled.
“Of course not; he understands completely. Toma said that it was a delayed reaction to all of the stress you’ve been under for the past few months and absolutely nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Now that everyone knows about my family I should leave. I don't want to put any of you in unnecessary danger,” Jun replied, his fingers picking nervously at a loose thread in the quilt.

“Believe me, there have been much worse secrets in this village in the past,” Nino said as he bustled uninvited into the room carrying a glass of warm milk and honey and a plate of small cakes which he thrust into Satoshi’s hands. “I'm Nino by the way, but I guess that Oh-chan here has already mentioned his most valuable employee in glowing terms?”

Satoshi made a move to chastise Nino, but instead of being distressed Jun’s face was almost split in two by a beaming smile.

Jun gratefully reached for the milk, gulping it down to ease his parched throat as he laughed along with Nino as he described the local characters that he would run into when he eventually ventured downstairs.

It was only natural that the two young men who were close in age should get along with each other, but it didn't stop a sudden and unexpected stab of jealousy to pierce Satoshi’s heart.

“And you don't have to worry about a thing. Sakurai-san has the world’s worst dress sense but he knows how to do his job. He’ll make sure that you’re completely safe,” Nino said as he made sure that Jun ate at least one of his cakes. He himself was extremely thin but Jun looked completely emaciated next to him.

Nino was so kind and reassuring that Satoshi almost forgot his jealousy as he watched Jun’s tense expression momentarily revert back into the bright expression of a twenty year old for the first time since his arrival.

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Another week passed and winter set in with a vengeance before Jun was returned to anything near to full strength. As he slowly recovered he wanted to pay back the kind man who had saved him from almost certain death. One morning he appeared downstairs in the coffee shop with an eager smile.

“What can I do to help?”

Satoshi, surprised and pleased to see the young man looking so energetic set him to doing some simple jobs that wouldn’t tire him out too much.

The group of middle-aged women enjoying their morning coffee stopped their chatter as he brought them a plate of warm apple strudel that Nino had somehow managed to conjure up in the tiny kitchen. They instantly turned their attention to Jun, surrounding him with a cloud of motherly affection, exclaiming over his thin body and the shadow of sadness that lingered in his eyes.

Tears welled in his eyes as he remembered his own mother; he missed her and his sister deeply. When she first married his father she had loved him and been blissfully unaware of his true business. Over the years she had endured a lot, ignoring Jun when he suggested that she leave, taking his sister with her to a safe place. She had always said that nowhere was safe and he was finally coming to realize what she meant. It didn't stop him hoping that one day he might be able to meet with her and his thirteen year old sister again away from the control of his father.

As much as Jun wanted to be helpful, he only lasted for a couple of hours on that first day.
Satoshi found him ashen-faced and swaying as he attempted to wipe down one of the tables on the far side of the room. He immediately snatched the cloth from his hand and made him take a seat while he brought him over a hot chocolate.

“I’d prefer a coffee you know and I’m not really hungry. Plus I’m capable of getting it myself,” Jun said with more than a hint of the truculence he’d shown when he’d first arrived as Satoshi placed the cup down on the table in front of him along with a sandwich.

Satoshi knew that Jun was embarrassed to still be so weak and was trying to hide it with this show of defiance.

“I’m sure that you are perfectly capable, but I can’t be having you faint in front of the customers. It would put them off their lunch, and hot chocolate is better for you than coffee,” he responded with a chuckle, hoping to put the younger man at ease.

Jun glared back at him but said nothing further, finishing his snack before surrendering to Satoshi’s wishes and going back upstairs to rest.

++++

Jun was helping Nino behind the counter when a mound of padded clothing waddled through the door. The man knocked the snow off his boots and headed to the counter, unwinding his scarf as he went. He left a wet trail of slush along the polished timber floor as he walked before he collapsed onto one of the stools with a deep sigh.

“Aiba, how many times have I told you to not drip on the floor?” Nino grumbled as he eyed the mess.

“Sorry, but you have no idea how hard it is to deliver the mail in winter,” Aiba replied as he wiped his red nose with the end of his scarf.

“Yeah, well, but at least it’s too cold for the dogs to be out, so that’s one less worry,” Nino replied with a distinct lack of sympathy.

Jun was watching this interaction with great interest. Nino was grumbling as usual but he was also wearing an affectionate smile.

“So, you’re the hottie that Ohno-san has been keeping to himself for the last few weeks?” Aiba asked, looking at Jun with a twinkle in his eye. This comment earned himself a smack in the head from Nino.

“Manners Aiba-shi,” Nino hissed before adding, “Sorry Jun-kun, just because this idiot friend of mine knows everyone and everything that happens in this village he sometimes thinks that he is on personal terms with them as well.”

“I don’t mind, really.” Jun was happy to be having a normal conversation and not being treated as someone in need of special treatment. “Have you two known each other long?”

“Since the first day of kindergarten,” Aiba said. “Nino was so small he needed someone to protect him.”

“And Aiba needed someone to fetch the teacher when he got his head stuck between the iron bars of the fence around the playground,” Nino responded with a smirk.

Their easy and longstanding friendship made tears well in Jun’s eyes. He hastily hid the fact by
going to fetch a mop to clean the wet floor.

“Don’t run away Jun-kun, it was you who I came to see.” Aiba hopped down off his stool and rummaged in his huge shoulder bag that was sitting on the floor beside his feet.

“Me?”

“Yep.” Aiba said as he held out a bulging paper bag towards Jun.

Jun took it carefully, intrigued as to its contents. He placed it on the counter and pulled out a soft dark blue sweater followed by three almost-new looking shirts and two pairs of jeans.

“Word got round the village about you being here and the circumstances behind your arrival. People knew that you had nothing with you and wanted to make sure that you had some warm clothes to wear,” Aiba said with a kind smile. “There’s no underwear but perhaps you can share Ohno-san’s,” he added with a suggestive eyebrow wiggle which earnt him a slap on the head from Nino.

Jun cuddled the sweater to his chest, his eyes stinging with unshed tears, overwhelmed by such generosity from total strangers.

“The other clothes are second-hand but the sweater is new. My grandmother knitted it for you. She had to guess your size so I hope it fits.” Aiba said with a proud smile.

“Thank you,” Jun muttered willing himself not to cry. “It’s perfect. Please thank her for me and everyone else too of course.”

It was a rare day that Nino treated anyone to freebies, but that day Aiba earned himself a large slice of chocolate cake to go with his coffee, which was, of course, never mentioned between him and his best friend ever again.

++++

That evening a blizzard was forecast and Satoshi closed up early so his staff could reach home safely before the worst weather struck. He pottered around inside the warm building, watering the indoor plants, checking the contents of the freezers and making sure that there was enough firewood safely under cover. When the snow became too deep the village could be cut off for several days.

Jun was standing in front of the glass walls watching the swirling patterns of snow that obscured his view of the nearby mountains.

Satoshi made some tea and went to fetch Jun to sit with him closer to the comforting warmth of the fire. To his dismay Jun shrugged off his hand when he touched his shoulder. “Jun? Is something wrong?”

Jun responded sinking to the floor in a crumpled heap as sobs shook his body.

Satoshi knelt beside him and snatched him into his arms, pulling him into a tight hug as Jun cried on his shoulder.

After a few minutes Jun straightened up, returning his gaze to the snow and began to speak, the words tumbling out as if he was unable to stop them.

“My father took me to the mountains once. It was my fourteenth birthday. He said that I was a man
now and should spend more time with him and less with my mother. He said that she was making me soft...turning me into a sissy.”

It was hard for Satoshi to just sit passively by and watch Jun suffering, but he remembered Toma’s advice to simply sit and listen if Jun wanted to speak.

“I remember now that the two men who dumped me here were there with us too and some of his other men as well. He wanted me to drink whiskey with him. To keep him happy I tried some. It took my breath away and made me cough. He laughed and hit me hard on the back to stop me choking.”

Jun took a deep breath and shrugged, “He was right though, wasn't he? I am a sissy, an embarrassment, an abnormality.”

Satoshi pulled Jun around to face him, angry at the self-loathing that he heard in the younger man’s voice. “Don't you dare say such terrible things about yourself. If you're abnormal then I am too.”

Jun’s eyes widened as he realized what he had said. He could see the hurt in Satoshi’s eyes. “I..I didn't mean to insult you. You are the kindest and most generous man I have ever known. I'm so very, very sorry.”

Jun clutched at Satoshi’s hand, his heart racing out of control; he couldn't believe how stupid he’d just been. “Please forgive me.”

“Do I look like a sissy to you?” Satoshi asked, pulling away from Jun’s grasp. Jun’s imprudent words had hurt him more than he could have ever imagined. “Do I look abnormal?”

“Of course not!” Jun protested as he looked at Satoshi’s compact muscular body.

“Then you aren't either,” Satoshi said as he helped Jun to his feet. “Don't let your father’s poisonous tongue ruin your life.”

“Thank you for being so patient with me,” Jun said, bending forward and kissing Satoshi on the cheek.

They both instantly froze, faces flushing a deep shade of red.

Satoshi cleared his throat and Jun abruptly turned back to face the window, hoping that somehow the drifting snow on the other side of the glass would be able to cool down his burning skin.

“Did you want some tea?” Satoshi asked, gesturing awkwardly towards the tray next to the crackling fire.

“Um, yes thank you. I'll be right back,” Jun said as he bolted to the bathroom.

Jun locked himself in, splashing water on his face and trying to calm his breathing. He couldn't believe what had just happened. It wasn't the fact that he had chastely kissed Satoshi that was the problem; it was the jolt of electricity that had shot through his body when he did so that had him so rattled.

++++

Gradually, as Jun grew stronger he moved on to harder tasks, like sweeping the snow away from the front path and steps and eventually chopping the wood for the large fireplace that kept the coffee shop cosy in the coldest weather.
They lived companionably with each other and soon the villagers had accepted Jun as if he had lived there for his entire life, never questioning the need to keep his presence a secret, just happy to see Satoshi smiling across the floor at Jun as he worked.

Jun and Satoshi’s favourite time was before opening or after closing time when they had the chance to be alone. They didn’t speak to each other much, spending most of their time sitting companionably together sipping coffee or hot chocolate, looking at the ever changing mountain scenery beyond the window.

When they did talk they only spoke of trivial things, looking at each other with affection but each one afraid that the other was going to bring up the subject they were both avoiding with all their might. The subject of what the future might hold for them.
Jun knew that he was falling in love with the artist, but he was scared that he thought of him as too young and immature to even consider having a relationship with. He was afraid that he would soon get tired of him staying there and ask him to leave. He was trying to be indispensable and pay Satoshi back by working as hard as he could to help his business and home life run smoothly.

Satoshi was so caring and gentle, he put up with his sudden emotional outbursts without a complaint and his soft and pouty lips were just asking to be kissed. And as the weeks went by it was becoming harder all the time to prevent himself from doing so.

One day when Jun was bringing in yet another load of firewood he managed to drive a large splinter deep into the palm of his hand. As he dropped the wood with a yelp Satoshi came rushing over to help.

"Jun, what's wrong?"

"It's nothing," he winced in reply, gulping as Satoshi snatched up his hand to see for himself.

"It doesn't look like nothing to me."

"I'm fine," Jun protested, suddenly feeling quite hot as the older man gently stroked his wrist in a soothing gesture.

"Let me help. You don't want it to get infected do you?" Satoshi said, deliberately avoiding his eyes, afraid that Jun would recognize the tenderness in them.

Jun tried to pull his hand away but Satoshi’s grip was too strong and a tug-of-war commenced, tears springing into his eyes at the stinging pain in his palm as his hand went back-and-forth between their bodies, droplets of blood dripping onto the floor.

Seeing that he was hurting Jun, Satoshi instantly released his hand. "At least let me pull the splinter out for you."

"I can do it myself," Jun protested. He knew that he was acting childishly but he didn’t want Satoshi to touch him; he was afraid of embarrassing himself even further if he felt those beautifully formed and nimble fingers brushing over his skin.

Fortunately Toma walked in five minutes later in search of coffee, while they were still arguing.

When Satoshi saw him he dragged a protesting Jun over to him and watched closely as Toma removed the splinter and dressed the wound.

Toma looked at the pair of them, shaking his head in dismay at their poor attempts to disguise their feelings.

For the rest of the day Satoshi made a fuss over Jun, plying him with small treats as if he was a small child in need of comfort.

"Cookie?" Satoshi asked, holding a plate under Jun’s nose.

"No thanks," Jun said with a sigh. It was the fourth time Satoshi had offered them to him in the last five minutes. His hand was still stinging but he was sure that he could find some sort of work to
do, but Satoshi was insisting on him sitting at the table nearest to the counter so that he could keep him under his watchful gaze.

“Are those Nino’s special cranberry cookies?”

Satoshi slapped Inspector Sakurai’s grabby hand away from the plate, causing the policeman to pout and whine dramatically.

Jun instantly picked up the plate and offered to the officer who grabbed two cookies at once and stuffed them into his mouth, making his cheeks bulge out like a squirrel with a mouth full of nuts.

After Sakurai swallowed his mouthful and brushed the crumbs from his lips he looked at Jun with a serious expression. “If you have a minute I need to talk to you in private please Jun-kun.”

Biting down nervously on his bottom lip Jun nodded his agreement, looking questioningly at Satoshi who indicated that they should go upstairs where they could speak without being disturbed.

Satoshi desperately wanted to join them, but he had come to realize that Jun needed to build his confidence and to do that he needed to be treated like an adult, not a child in need of a substitute father.

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“There have been reports of suspicious looking strangers in the area over the past few days. They told the hotel that they are here to enjoy some winter hiking and maybe that’s actually why they’re here. But they seemed to be paying a lot of attention to the area where you told me that you were abandoned,” Sakurai said.

Jun felt panic rising and his palms were suddenly slick with sweat. “Are you sure they are looking for me?”

“No, not at all. I just wanted to warn you to be careful.” Sakurai’s large round eyes conveyed his concern.

“What should I do? Should I hide? Should I leave?” Jun was terrified by the prospect of leaving but he didn't want to bring trouble to not only Satoshi, but to the wonderful people of the village. He rubbed his fingers over the soft wool of the sweater knitted by Aiba’s grandmother; it seemed to embody the caring nature of the villagers.

“Don't even think about it,” Satoshi said loudly from the doorway. He had quickly forgotten his resolve to stay out of their conversation. “There’s no way that you're going anywhere."”

“But if they have been sent by Father and discover that you've been sheltering me then you could be in terrible danger,” Jun said agitatedly. He had seen with his own eyes exactly what his father was capable of and he didn't want to bring that sort of rage and violence down on his friends.

“My men and I will protect you,” Sakurai said confidently.

“I'm sorry Sakurai-san, but I don't think you can,” Jun said. A cold sweat prickled his skin as he felt dizziness threaten to overwhelm him. “When I was small, my mother made me stay home from school because I was sick. She went out to buy me some cough medicine and while she was gone I came out of my bedroom and wandered around the house. There was a whole section that was off limits to me and I was bored and curious so I took the chance to explore.”
Sakurai and Satoshi exchanged worried glances behind Jun’s back. They could hear the fear and pain in his voice and see the trembling of his hands as he recounted his story, speaking as if he was in a dream, or to be more accurate, a nightmare.

“The door to the forbidden part of the house was ajar; someone must have been in too much of a hurry and forgot to lock it. I snuck in...the rooms smelt funny...almost sickly sweet and I could hear raised voices coming from the next room. And then I heard someone begging...begging for his life...pleading with Father to stop hurting him. I wanted to run, but I was frozen to the spot...no matter how hard I tried I couldn't make my feet move.’’

Jun began to pace restlessly around the room as if to make up for his inability to move all those years ago.

“Then I heard a noise and the man’s pleading just stopped mid word. There was silence and then Father came out of the room. He had these little red dots on his face and the collar of his white shirt. His hands were red...red like blood...blood red...so much blood. He saw me and he got so angry...he hit me...hit me again and again…”

“Jun!” Satoshi reached out for him, but was restrained by Sakurai who knew that this was something that Jun had to get out of his system.

Jun was oddly unemotional as he continued to speak in a dull voice, “He kept hitting me and told me that it was all my fault for being where I shouldn't be...he said that if I ever told anyone about what I’d seen or heard then he would lock me in the basement and never let me out...his men just stood by and watched… they were scared of him too...I was only six years old…”

Jun turned to face the two men, his face looking as if all the blood had been drained from it, “Do you understand now what you're facing?”

Before either could respond Jun crumpled to the floor and lay there unmoving.

++++

Toma checked Jun’s pulse and frowned at what he felt. Satoshi and Sakurai were arguing quietly with each other on the far side of the room.

“I would really prefer it if I could transfer Jun-kun to my clinic. I have the equipment there to monitor his condition more closely.”

“No,” a small voice whispered from the bed. “Please don't make me.” Jun was barely awake but already showing signs of distress at the thought of being forced to leave the familiar surroundings of Satoshi’s cosy apartment.

“We aren't going to make you do anything that you don't want to,” Toma replied in a calm voice. “We just want to make sure that you are quite well.”

“I'm sorry to worry you all, but I'm perfectly fine,” Jun said. He tried to lever himself up out of Satoshi’s bed but nausea threatened to overwhelm him.

Toma saw Jun’s face turn to a shade of pale green and hastily snatched up the waste paper bin from beside the bed and held it out towards Jun just in time. He rubbed Jun’s back as he threw up in the bin, shoulders heaving, until there was nothing but bitter bile to eject from his trembling body.

Jun sank back on the mattress and allowed Toma to wipe down his face with a damp cloth. “I forgot that ever happened. How is that possible?”
“Sometimes when something is too terrible for us to handle our brain just shuts down. It was impossible for a child as young as you to be able to deal with that sort of trauma. The only way for you to cope was to lock the memory away,” Toma said gently.

“Does this mean that Jun knows more about his father’s activities? That he might be able to assist us to finally take that monster down?” Sakurai asked eagerly.

Toma hastily glanced at Jun, relieved when he saw that he had fallen back into a restless doze. He grabbed Sakurai with one hand and Satoshi with the other, dragging them both out the bedroom and out of Jun’s hearing.

“You can't make Jun do that!” Satoshi protested angrily, keeping his voice low.

“I agree,” Toma said, earning an angry squawk from Sakurai.

Toma made hushing motions to the pair before continuing, “I think that Jun probably has a lot more repressed memories, but he needs to be handled with great care.”

“You can't seriously be agreeing with this,” Satoshi protested. He was tempted to gather Jun up into his arms, throw him in his car and just keep driving until they were far away from anywhere.

“The police force has psychologists who would be able to gather the information from Jun and help him at the same time,” Sakurai said. “I want Jun’s father to pay for what he’s done, but I also want Jun to be safe.”

“It’s too dangerous,” Satoshi said. “If Jun’s father gets wind of this then Jun could die.”

“He already wants me dead.” Jun was standing in the doorway on legs that looked too wobbly to support him. “I want to try.”

“I can arrange for the psychologist to come here,” Sakurai said, helping Toma to half carry Jun over to the sofa before he fell down.

“I…I think that I would like to try,” Jun said. He was sick of being afraid and jumping at shadows; if there was any way that he could help to get his father away from his mother and sister then he was going to find the courage to do it no matter what the cost to him personally.

Satoshi found himself frozen to the spot listening to the others making plans, his fear for Jun rendering him almost completely helpless.

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“Jun, are you sure about this? I saw how that horrifying memory affected you yesterday; do you really want to put yourself through that?” Satoshi pushed the plate of fried chicken that he’d prepared for their dinner further over towards Jun, trying to tempt him to eat just a little.

Jun, who was still looking extremely pale, reluctantly took one small piece and placed it on his mostly untouched bowl of rice. “I have to. Who else can save my mother and sister?”

“I’m just worried about the effect it will have on you,” Satoshi said. He understood that Jun was probably right, but he didn’t think that he could stand watching Jun suffer any further without saying something.

Jun scowled and looked down at his food, “There’s no need for you to worry about me.” He stood up abruptly, pushing his chair back noisily as he prepared to flee. Satoshi’s gentle concern was
more than he could bear right now.

“But I do,” Satoshi said. He put down his chopsticks and stood up catching hold of Jun’s arm. “I can’t help it. I do care about you very much.”

Satoshi pulled Jun into his embrace, hugging him tightly against his chest. He could feel the rapid beating of Jun’s heart as he struggled slightly before relaxing into his arms. Jun dropped his head down on Satoshi’s shoulder and wrapped his arms around the older man.

“I couldn’t live with myself if anything happened to you,” Satoshi whispered in Jun’s ear.

Jun pulled back slightly and that stood gazing into each other’s eyes for an endless moment before they moved as one, their lips meeting in a tender kiss.

Satoshi pulled Jun closer as he explored the soft texture of his plump lips feeling his own heart racing as Jun sighed happily against his mouth and returned the kiss with equal feeling.

When Jun eventually pulled away his lips were red and his eyes were brimming with unshed tears. “That’s exactly how I feel about you and that’s why I have to go through with this,” he said, unconsciously standing a little straighter as he spoke. “I need to be able to put the past behind me and carve a future for myself where the people that I’m close to aren’t in any danger.”

Satoshi was still desperately worried, but he knew that there was no way to dissuade Jun from his chosen course of action. He only hoped that Inspector Sakurai and the police experts knew what they were doing; if anything happened to Jun he wouldn’t be responsible for his actions.
A stunning discovery

Chapter Summary

Too late, Jun tried to run but a fist struck him from behind and his world turned black even before his body hit the snowy ground.

Jun tried to run, but the snow was too deep, swallowing his momentum and causing him to almost fall with each labouring step. The one advantage that he had was the time that he’d spent in the forest recently, walking daily in an attempt to build up his fitness. Luckily this enabled him to know roughly where the path was even though it was now invisible. His pursuers had no idea and could only blindly follow his tracks which were gradually being obscured by a layer of fresh snow. The best he could do was to try and hold them at bay until somebody realized that he was missing.

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“Did you just tell me that you don’t know where Jun is?” Satoshi was trying very, very hard to control his panic. He’d taken himself out to his studio during Jun’s meeting with the therapist so as to not place any more pressure on him than he was already feeling, but now it looked like it had been a huge mistake on his part.

“The therapist said that he got upset towards the end of the session and ran outside,” Sho said in between calls on his mobile.

“Of course he was going to be upset; he is remembering terrible things that nobody should ever have to experience in their lifetime, especially not a child. Why didn’t she stop him?”

“She said that he was too quick and that it’s against her policy to restrain someone against their will.”

“I wasn’t asking her to tie him to a chair, just stop him from leaving the building.” Satoshi was yelling at Sakurai by now, but he just couldn’t help it. “What if those men from the other week are out there? What if his father catches him? What if he falls down and hurts himself out there in the forest?”

“Aiba is busy mobilizing the men of the village to conduct a search, my men are already out there looking for him, and I’m about to join them,” Sakurai said, looking more serious than Satoshi had ever seen him. “Perhaps you should wait here in case he comes to you.”

“No chance. I’m joining you. Nino is here and can call us if he comes back here first.” There was no way that Satoshi could sit idly by when Jun was out there in the worsening weather and very likely in danger.

Inspector Sakurai was about to argue when he received a call that made him halt his preparations to leave and stand frozen with an ever deepening frown on his face.

“There have been reports that the men that were sighted in the forest are back, but accompanied by an older man this time. They’re driving a heavy duty four wheel drive that isn’t bothered much by the snow.”
“Jun’s father?” Satoshi suddenly found it hard to breathe.

“By the description, it sounds very much like it might be.”

“Then we have to move quickly. There is no way in the world that I will let Jun fall into his hands.”

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It was becoming colder with every passing minute and Jun was thankful for the thin coat he’d grabbed from beside the door on his way out. It belonged to Satoshi and he found the scent of the older man extremely comforting. He’d even found a flimsy pair of work gloves in one of the pockets that offered at least a tiny bit of protection to his fingers.

His body had fled from the therapist and the overwhelming memories before his brain had a chance to catch up and he’d found himself outside and running before he even realized it. When he first saw the two figures silhouetted against the snow he had assumed they were customers, but then one had called him by name and the familiar voice had almost made his heart stop.

He knew that it was stupid of him to have run away from the coffee shop when he saw who the men were, but his only thought was to lead them away from Satoshi, not wanting him to get hurt.

As Jun stopped and tried to catch his breath, cursing the fact that he was still so unfit, it was Satoshi that his thoughts ran to. Since their kiss nothing more had happened between them; Satoshi was spending a lot of time in his studio and he was so busy with the police that it had been impossible for him to process the fact that his feelings were reciprocated.

Unfortunately, it was also his thoughts of the feeling of Satoshi’s soft lips pressing against his own that made him oblivious to the men creeping up behind him.

“Long time no see.”

Too late, Jun tried to run but a fist struck him from behind and his world turned black even before his body hit the snowy ground.

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“His tracks definitely led in this direction,” Sakurai said as he bent down to inspect the ground. “But it’s hard to see where he went next. The snow is making the trail vanish.”

“If he keeps going this way he’ll end up at the river. There’s a really steep drop where the bank has fallen away. If he doesn’t see it in time…” Satoshi was becoming more agitated with every passing moment. It was quite clear that Jun was being pursued and he was terrified that they would be too late.

“Don’t worry,” Sakurai said. “I know a shortcut.”

Both men climbed onto the snowmobile and Sakurai started the engine. “Hold tight. This is going to get a little rough,” he yelled over his shoulder as he headed towards a small gap in the trees.

++++

Jun winced as a hand gripped his hair, pulling his head up.

"And just like that he returns from the dead," an all too familiar voice said close to Jun's ear.
"F-Father," Jun stuttered, his blood turning to ice.

"That's what your mother would have me believe, but I've never been convinced."

"W-what?"

"Not long after we married your mother thought she was in love with someone else. How ungrateful can a person be? I gave her a house and money and then she wanted love as well? She planned to leave me for him. It was very unfortunate that one day he disappeared never to be seen again."

Jun wished he could wipe the smug look off his father's face but Jun's hands were tied tightly together behind his back. "My mother isn't like that!"

"You've always been a mummy's boy," his father sneered. "Just as well since you certainly aren't mine. Literally, in fact. That's why it makes it so much easier to get rid of you; even I couldn't kill my own son."

If Jun's father thought that his words would upset him then he was wrong; finding out that he wasn't his father's son made him feel nothing but relief. He felt no anger towards his mother, only a sadness that she had lost her lover and been forced to spend the last twenty years of her life with the man who killed him.

"You have no idea how happy you just made me," Jun said, enjoying the look of surprise on the cold-hearted man's face.

"You brat!"

Jun tasted the metallic tang of blood in his mouth a second after he felt the sting of a large hand slapping his face.

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"I can hear a car!" Satoshi had to shout over Sakurai's shoulder to make himself heard.

"It's definitely heading towards the ravine. If it loses traction there's no way they'll be able to stop in time." Sakurai increased their speed as he tried to cut the car off. "I need you to get off and I'll put the snowmobile in their way."

"That's too dangerous!"

"Don't try and tell me that you wouldn't do the same," Sakurai yelled back.

"But I love him," Satoshi blurted, the wind whipping his words away.

"What? I couldn't hear you," Sakurai called over his shoulder.

"Never mind. Let's just get there."

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Jun gulped and desperately tried to wriggle away from the knife glinting in his father's hand.

"Don't worry. It won't be painful. I know what I'm doing."

With his hands tied behind him and pressed up against the door, there was nowhere left for Jun to
go. What happened next seemed to take place in slow motion leaving no space for thoughts, except for a regret that he didn't get the chance to tell Satoshi that he loved him.

As his father struck with the knife the car began to slew sideways, the driver calling out that there was someone blocking the road. Jun felt a burning pain in his chest and side as his father was flung forwards to land almost on top of him.

And then the door behind him was wrenched open and he was falling out of the car and onto the snow with enough force to knock all of the air from his lungs. He could hear an angry yell from his father that turned into an anguished scream followed by loud crash.

Jun lay facedown in the snow, lacking the strength right himself, slowly suffocating as he felt the warmth leaving his body.

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Satoshi saw the car coming closer, on a path that would lead it to fall down to the icy river. Jun’s terrified face was pressed sideways against the window as a heavily built man leaned threateningly over him.

Acting on sheer instinct and adrenaline, he jumped forwards as the car slowed to avoid the snowmobile that Sakurai had used to partially block the path. Even though the car was still moving he grabbed the back door handle, ignoring the pain that shot though his body as his arm was wrenched by the motion. The door came open, flinging him across the snow and throwing Jun onto the ground a moment before the heavy vehicle plunged off the trail and over the edge of the ravine.

There was the sound of trees breaking and the screech of tortured metal, followed by a loud crashing sound and then silence.

Satoshi tried to stand up and run to Jun, but his left arm hung uselessly by his side and pain shot through his body, slowing his movement.

Inspector Sakurai was faster, noting that Jun was lying limply on his face with his hands bound behind his body. He rushed over and turned him onto his left side, cutting the ties on his wrists and brushing the snow away from his mouth and nose, relief flooding his body as Jun took a shuddering breath and blinked dazedly up at him.

Satoshi slowly made his way over to Jun with legs that seemed to belong to someone else as they stubbornly refused to move any faster.

Sakurai was on his phone, calling for assistance as he walked over and peered down at the wrecked car. It was probably inaccessible by foot and to perfectly honest he wasn't overly inclined to help the men trapped inside it; his main priority was the wellbeing of his two friends.

++++

“Jun, thank goodness you're safe,” Satoshi almost sobbed as he knelt beside Jun, pulling his head onto his lap with his one functioning hand.

“S-Satoshi?” Jun couldn't believe that he was actually there and holding him in his arms; he thought that the cold was making him hallucinate.

Jun’s skin was icy and his face was almost as white as the snow that surrounded them.

Sakurai walked back, happy that things had been set in motion to sort out the wrecked car and its
occupants. He had also been able to get hold of Aiba who had promised to pick up Toma and bring him there immediately.

Satoshi and Jun were gazing at each other in teary wonder, each obviously relieved that the other was safe, their emotions raw and undisguised for once. Sakurai was about to turn away and leave them some privacy until the rescuers arrived, but his attention was drawn to a discoloration of the snow beneath Jun. The white was gradually turning red; the bright red of fresh blood.

Instead of turning away, he began to run towards them.

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The first thing that Jun saw when he opened his eyes was a pair of concerned dark honey-coloured eyes gazing down at him from a familiar face.

“Satoshi?” Jun was surprised that his voice sounded so croaky, as if he hadn't used it for a long while. Something was wrong with the vision in front of him, but he couldn't quite place it, until, “You're hurt? Why is your arm in a sling? Are you okay?”

Jun hadn't realized that he was also hurt until he spoke sending a wave of pain down his left side that almost took his breath away.

Satoshi instantly sat carefully on the edge of the bed, stroking Jun’s cheek, calming him with his touch. “Shh, don't over exert yourself. It's just my shoulder. Toma popped it back in and it's as good as new.”

It all came back to Jun in a rush, his abduction, the car, the knife, his father. His father?

“Father! He was in the car. He wanted to kill me. What happened to the car?”

“Don't worry about that now. Just try and sleep,” Satoshi said, trying to deflect Jun’s attention. He wanted some support around when he told Jun the news.

Jun wanted to argue, but his exhaustion was overwhelming, dragging him back down to a dreamless sleep.

++++

The next time Jun woke, he was much more alert, the pain in his side already lessening. Toma and Sakurai were hovering near the door and Satoshi was still sitting in the same spot, dark circles under his eyes showing that he had refused to move from his position and get some rest of his own.

Upon seeing that Jun was awake Toma came over and gently checked his dressings asking, “Jun, how are you feeling?”

“Confused. What happened to my father?” Jun asked with a wince.

“Firstly let me tell you that you're going to be fine. Luckily the knife hit your rib rather than penetrating your chest and slipped down into your side. We did an exploratory surgery and there's no damage to any major organs. You lost quite a bit of blood so you'll probably be feeling a bit weak for a while though,” Toma said gently.

Sakurai stepped up and continued, “The two men in the car have some broken bones, but they'll soon mend enough to stand trial for kidnapping and assault.”
Jun looked around at the three of them, “And Father?”

Satoshi squeezed Jun’s hand. “He wasn’t wearing a seat belt. His head hit the window.”

Jun was suddenly afraid, “He’s not here somewhere is he? In another room?”

“Jun, your father died,” Satoshi said, bracing himself for Jun’s reaction.

But Jun’s response wasn’t what anyone was expecting; he burst into uncontrollable laughter.

++++

“I’m not hysterical,” Jun protested as Satoshi clutched at him and Toma pressed the buzzer to call for a nurse.

Sakurai was the only one who looked as if he understood.

“My father was an evil man, who was responsible for so many deaths. The world is better off without him. My sister and mother are finally free.” Jun’s smile was brittle. “I’m finally free.”

“He was still your father, it's okay to be sad,” Satoshi said.

“My father? That's the one thing I am grateful for,” Jun said with tears welling in his eyes. “He told me that he wasn’t my father. I'm someone else's son. Do you know how happy that made me? How relieved? I’ve spent half my life worrying that I will turn out just like him, that my blood is bad, evil even and now I don't have to worry anymore. I should be celebrating…”

Jun’s words dissolved into hiccuping sobs as a mixture of relief and guilt flooded through his body. His father was dead and all he felt was happiness for his own family and for all the other families out there who had suffered at the hands of that evil monster.

++++

Jun was safely asleep in Toma’s clinic after crying until he could no longer keep his eyes open, so Satoshi took the chance to go home and shower and get some sleep.

Now that he was sure that Jun was safe he could finally allow himself to rest, but sleep proved to be elusive. Every time he closed his eyes he relived the moment when he realized that Jun had been stabbed; his warm lifeblood leaching out into the slow.

He had been terrified that he would lose him and because of his dislocated shoulder all he’d been able to do was cradle Jun on his lap and speak words of comfort to him as Sakuria had covered Jun with his own jacket and placed pressure on the wound until Toma and Aiba arrived.

It had been the worst moment of his life and he now knew that he loved Jun with all his heart. But what did the future hold for them now? There was no longer any reason for Jun to stay; he was free to return to his family or go anywhere else that he desired.

What would such a young and beautiful person want with a man fifteen years his senior who lived in the middle of nowhere? Jun deserved better.

If Jun wanted to leave then he decided that he would say or do nothing to stop him. All he could do was wait and hope that perhaps Jun liked him enough to want to stay. The memory of Jun’s soft lips gave him at least a glimmer of hope for the future.
True feelings shared

“I know most people bring fruit when they visit people in hospital, but I figured that you might like these better,” Nino said as he placed down a container full of cupcakes on the table over the end of Jun’s hospital bed. “Or at least you will be very popular with the staff.”

Jun smiled as he opened the lid and saw the smiley faces piped on top of each one. “Aiba-san?” he asked as he poked the shaky looking decorations with the tip of his finger.

“He wanted to help,” Nino replied with a laugh as he took a seat on the edge of the bed.

“Thank you and please thank him for me too,” Jun said, wincing slightly as he pulled himself more upright.

“Ohno-san said that he won't be able to visit you today. He has something important to do.”

Jun blinked and looked away, unable to hide the hurt that Nino’s words caused.

Nino immediately realized his mistake. “I didn't mean that he thinks you're not important,” he said softly. “Surely you know just how much you mean to him?”

“That's just it Nino; I’m not sure. What if he wants me to go? Now that Father is dead there's no reason for me to stay here any longer.”

“There is a whole village full of people who will strongly disagree with that statement,” Nino said gruffly as he handed one of the cakes to Jun and took one for himself. “Promise me that you'll talk to Ohno-san before you do anything.”

Jun nodded and picked absently at the icing on his cake, wondering why Satoshi seemed to be distancing himself from him already.

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“The nurses told me that you haven't eaten anything at all today,” Toma chided Jun as he checked his stitches. “Satoshi will be cross with me for not looking after you properly.”

“Satoshi…” Jun began crossly.

“Is right here,” Satoshi said, popping his head around the door. “And I brought some visitors with me,” he added, gesturing behind him.

A middle-aged woman with sad eyes and a pretty girl who had the same huge eyes as Jun, stepped hesitantly through the door, their eyes lighting up when they saw him lying in the bed.

“Mother! Erika!” Jun could hardly believe his eyes as the pair rushed over to embrace him, laughing and crying at the same time. He looked at Ohno, unable to believe that he had fetched them to come and see him.

Ohno nodded in a satisfied way and quietly backed out of the room, taking Toma with him.

++++

Satoshi knew that by bringing Jun’s family to see him he might hasten Jun’s departure, but it was worth it to see the look of sheer joy on his face as his mother hugged him and his sister took his
hand.

For the last three days he’d stayed away from the hospital, allowing Jun to spend as much time with his family as he could. He had been more lonely than he’d ever imagined possible, but if Jun was happy then he was happy too.

He placed another log on the fire and went to make himself a coffee, enjoying the peaceful atmosphere of the coffee shop after opening hours.

“May I have one too?”

Satoshi almost dropped the mug he was holding as Jun slowly walked into the room, supported by Toma who helped him over to his favourite chair near to the fire.

After settling Jun in comfortably Toma headed back to where Satoshi was struggling one-handedly trying to make the coffee.

“Let me do this while you go and keep Jun-kun company,” Toma said, as he took the mug from Satoshi’s hand and nudged him towards Jun.

Jun was looking pale, but his eyes were clear and sparkling as he looked up at Satoshi who took his hand and squeezed it before taking up his favourite position in the chair beside him.

“I’m home,” Jun said softly, gazing into the flames that reflected in his eyes. “If you don’t mind, that is,” he added hesitantly.

“Welcome home,” Satoshi said, rubbing his fingers along the soft skin of Jun’s wrist. “Of course I don’t mind. You will always be welcome here.”

There were so many more things that wanted to say, but Jun was obviously tired and still in some pain. He needed to know one thing however. “Your sister and mother?”

“They’ve gone. They’re planning a long holiday together and maybe they won’t even come back. I think that’s what they need,” Jun said with a touch of sadness. “They asked me to come too…”

Toma cleared his throat loudly to warn them of his presence and placed a mug in front of each of them. “I’ve made myself one to take with me. Jun-kun don’t forget to take your pain medication and Satoshi keep that arm in the sling. I’ll be back in the morning to check on Jun and in the meantime I think you two should go to bed.” He blushed as he realized how his words sounded, but didn’t say anything else; in his opinion these two belonged together and the sooner they both acknowledged it the better.

After Toma’s hasty departure Satoshi took a nervous sip of his coffee before asking, “When will you be leaving?”

Jun looked confused and hurt. “Leaving?”

“With your family?” Satoshi could hardly get the words out.

Jun looked at him with huge eyes, “I’m not. I wished them luck, but I told them that I was perfectly happy right here, with you.” Jun blinked nervously, rising from his seat and hastily added, “And with the other friends that I’ve made here too.”

Satoshi wanted to grab Jun and kiss him senseless, but could sense just how fragile he was so instead he walked over and carefully wrapped his good arm lightly around Jun’s waist. Jun turned
and pressed himself against Satoshi’s solid body as if seeking comfort. He buried his face in Satoshi’s shoulder and wrapped his arms around his waist in return.

Jun nuzzled Satoshi’s neck and pressed a feather light kiss on the underside of his jaw, breathing in his comforting scent. When their lips met, their kisses were slow and gentle, light touches of their lips as their bodies slotted comfortably together.

Satoshi felt Jun’s tired sway against him and held him tighter. “You should sleep now. I’ll help you up to bed.”

Jun nodded meekly and allowed himself to be guided up the stairs. Nothing had been said between them but they both felt a new sense of connection that had been absent before.

++++

The snow receded and Jun’s strength gradually returned as spring arrived in the mountains. The air was filled with a fresh scent and the trees sprouted tender bright green shoots.

Jun still saw a therapist infrequently; his suppressed memories now all fully returned. His information and led to the arrest of several more suspects and he had bravely testified in court. Each time he would hurry home to the safety and comfort of Satoshi’s arms. Their relationship continued at the same pace; gentle kisses and peaceful times spent together. The subject of sex had never been discussed and as much as Satoshi longed to make love to Jun he waited patiently for the younger man to indicate that he was ready. The knowledge that it would be Jun’s first time made Satoshi even more cautious; he wanted it to be perfectly sure that it was love and not gratitude that drew Jun to offer him his body.

++++

Jun knew that Satoshi was working hard in his studio, coming upstairs each night with tired eyes and covered with paint smudges. He couldn’t help being curious as to what he was painting and when Satoshi had to go into town to pick up more paint he seized the opportunity to sneak a look.

As he opened the door a crack and peeked inside he couldn’t believe his eyes. There were at least a dozen paintings stacked around the walls, covered with dust covers. He tiptoed over to the first one, not even sure why he was sneaking when he was alone, and pulled the cover back only to be confronted by his own face.

At least it looked like him, but only better. He knew he couldn’t possibly look as good as Satoshi had portrayed him. He removed the covers from the rest of paintings one by one and realised that they were all portraits of him, sometimes alone and other times with Satoshi. He knew that he should feel embarrassed or creeped out by the idea of Satoshi obsessively painting him over and over again, but he didn’t. He could feel Satoshi’s unspoken emotions that were conveyed with every brush stroke. When you looked at the paintings in order they told the story of their first meeting in the snow, and marked things that Satoshi felt were important in their lives together since then. Each painting was a love letter with no words.

The last painting in the series was still on the easel, unfinished as if the artist couldn’t decide what the final outcome would be. Jun was shown walking down long road and instead of portraying the artist alongside him as the other paintings had done; it showed him standing some way behind with his arms outstretched as if he was being left behind. It conveyed a sense of insecurity and hesitation about their future and a fear of abandonment, and looking at it made Jun realise that the other man’s feelings were clear and it was time for him to let the older man know what he felt in return.
Over the past few months neither of them had spoken of their feelings, instead living and working happily alongside each other; never discussing the possibility that now Jun was safe he might wish to resume his studies or return to his old home that now stood empty, cleared of all of the evil that had inhabited it while his father lived. Rather they chose to live in a bubble where real life couldn’t intrude. He was still sleeping in Satoshi’s bed as he had when he was so ill, but now Satoshi was sharing it with him. They had never spoken of this, it had just happened naturally without needing to be discussed. Like so many other things between them no words were needed.

They both slept chastely on either side with a pillow in the middle of the bed separating them until the night after Jun looked at the paintings. Satoshi was already in bed when Jun walked in wearing only a large bath towel which he let slowly slip to the floor. In the last few months his body had filled out. His waist was still slim but he had gained muscle across his chest and shoulders, a byproduct of all the wood chopping he had been doing to keep the fireplaces in the coffee shop going.

"May I join you?" Jun asked softly. "I want to be close to you tonight."

"Are you sure about this?" Satoshi asked in return, gazing at Jun’s beautiful body, unable to believe that he was freely offering himself to him.

"Yes, there’s nothing I want more than this," Jun replied sliding into Satoshi’s side of the bed.

"Before things go any further I have a confession to make. Well two actually," he continued, making Satoshi’s heart feel as if it was going to beat its way out of his chest, "I looked in your studio and saw the paintings."

Satoshi could feel embarrassment burning his cheeks. What would Jun think of him now?

"And I want to tell that you that I love you too and I want you to make love to me tonight." Jun finished, also blushing deeply.

"What do you want with an old man like me?" Satoshi replied, stunned by the way that Jun had been able to interpret the meaning of his paintings so easily and understand the depth of his feelings so clearly.

"You aren’t old," Jun said with a playful cuff to his head. “I’ve never met anyone as kind or as special as you. When I thought my life was over you gave me hope. I was scared that you would reject me because I’m too young, but when I saw those paintings I knew that you loved me just as much as I love you.”

Satoshi sat up and pulled Jun into a sitting position beside him so that he could look searchingly into his eyes, hardly believing what he was hearing. The truth that he saw there made his heart swell with happiness.

With a heart that felt as if it was about to beat its way out of his chest, Satoshi leaned towards Jun and took his hand, kissing each of the long delicate fingers in turn. He was determined to make this a night that Jun would never forget.

Note: And so in the next chapter we finally get to the smutty part. Sorry it took so long, but I think you will agree that they had quite a few challenges to face before they could comfortably reach this point together. Thanks for sticking with me this far.
Jun’s breathing quickened as Satoshi gently explored his body for the first time, his eyes closing as he surrendered himself to the sensations that Satoshi was creating within him.

Jun shivered as Satoshi slid out of bed, leaving him behind as he made his way to the bathroom, pulling his shirt off over his head as he went.

All of Jun's earlier confidence had evaporated the moment that Satoshi excused himself to go and fetch the supplies necessary if they were to go any further. He pulled the covers up tightly under his chin as he felt his erection deflating as nerves gnawed at his stomach.

Jun wanted this to happen, it was all he’d been thinking of for weeks, but now that it actually was happening he was paralysed with fear.

Satoshi looked equally as nervous as he returned, clutching a bottle of lube in his hand. “Jun, I'm sorry but I just realized that I don't have any condoms and there's nowhere I can get them from at this time of night.”

Even though Jun was scared, now that he'd made his decision he didn't want to wait any longer. “Um, do we have to use one?”

Satoshi frowned, “You realize what that means? It means that I will come inside you.”

Jun shivered once again, but this time because he found the idea oddly exciting. “I understand. I love you and trust you.”

Satoshi walked over and sat on the edge of the bed and stroked Jun’s cheek, “After I discovered that my ex was cheating on me I made sure to get tested and I haven't made love to anyone since then. So you don’t have to worry.”

“Then let's stop talking and just get on with it,” Jun blurted out louder than he’d meant to. This night wasn’t going the way that he’d always imagined it would at all.

Satoshi frowned, “Jun, I love you and I promise that I would never hurt you, but if you don't feel completely ready we can just cuddle and do this another time.”

Jun blinked and said, “Perhaps if you just hold me, I’ll relax a bit.”

Satoshi nodded and slid the lube under his pillow before rejoining Jun in bed.

He pulled Jun close and Jun happily snuggled against his side, resting his head on his shoulder and draping his left arm and leg over Satoshi’s body.

After some time Satoshi kissed the top of Jun’s head and stroked his fingers down Jun’s chest and side, tracing the scar that remained from his father’s attack. Jun flinched and tried to pull away.
“Jun? What’s wrong? Does it still hurt?”

“N-no. I just don’t want you to touch it …my side is scarred… and ugly,” Jun mumbled.

“Ugly? You’re beautiful, each and every part of you.”

Jun tugged the blanket down, fully exposing the red streak than ran in a curve across his ribs and around his left side. “When you look at this do you really think that it’s beautiful?”

Satoshi leant over Jun and once again caressed the scar with the tips of his fingers.

“This scar makes me appreciate every moment of every day that I get to spend with you. It reminds me that I almost lost you and that I am lucky to still have you in my life. I would rather have you in my arms with imperfect skin than to have lost you forever.”

Jun blinked back tears at Satoshi’s loving words. “S-Satoshi…I love you.”

“I love you too my beloved. Please let me show you how much?”

Jun nodded and reached out a trembling hand to touch the warm skin on Satoshi’s chest before allowing the older man to lay him back down on the mattress and press a series of soft kisses onto his neck.

Satoshi worked his way down Jun’s chest, nibbling and kissing the tender skin and when he reached the scar he traced the length of it with his tongue, showing Jun just how much he didn’t care that his skin was disfigured.

Jun’s breathing quickened as Satoshi gently explored his body for the first time, his eyes closing as he surrendered himself to the sensations that Satoshi was creating within him.

Satoshi moved at a slow pace enjoying every sigh and the slight hitching of Jun’s breath that indicated that he had found a sensitive part of Jun’s body. He made a mental note of the tiny mole on the side of Jun’s neck that made Jun shiver at the slightest nibble and the spot just below his ear that made Jun gasp out loud when licked.

Jun tentatively reached out and slid his hands over Satoshi’s body in return, stroking the hard planes of his muscles and clutching him tightly around the neck as if hanging on for dear life when the older man took his nipple into his mouth, sucking lightly on it and teasing it with the tip of his tongue.

“Jun, do you want me to continue?” Satoshi eventually asked, summoning all of the willpower he possessed to pull away from Jun who was panting and writhing under his touch, his cock once again fully hard and begging to be touched.

“Y-yes, please, please, I want you,” Jun gasped, his hips jerking reflexively up from the mattress as if to underline his need.

Satoshi slid down and positioned himself between Jun’s legs, soothing away Jun’s squeak of embarrassment with a series of kisses across his hip and belly.

As he felt a slick finger stroke across his entrance Jun’s whole body tensed and he flinched away. Satoshi hummed soothingly and kissed the ticklish skin of his inner thigh, making him giggle and squirm and somehow before he knew it, “Oh!”

“Is it okay?” Satoshi allowed Jun time to adjust to the feeling of his finger invading his body.
It wasn't painful, merely odd and Jun willed himself to relax, earning himself an encouraging murmur from Satoshi as he moved his finger very slowly and carefully in tiny thrusting movements.

++++

Jun was looking up at Satoshi with eyes so filled with love and trust that it made his own heart swell near to bursting with love in response.

Jun’s hips were raised up off the bed on two pillows making it easier for Satoshi to line his throbbing cock up with his well-prepared entrance. Satoshi carefully inched his way into Jun’s body, freezing when Jun gasped, clenching his fists and squeezing his eyes shut.

“Jun, if you try and bear down on me it will make it slightly easier,” Satoshi said, kissing Jun’s mouth and biting lightly on his chin. “Breathe and relax. I won't move until you tell me to.”

Jun was feeling a strange burning and stretching that made it hard to breathe but he tried to focus on Satoshi’s calm voice and the insistent nibbling on his lips that urged him to allow his tongue entrance.

Parting his lips in response, Jun moaned as Satoshi darted his tongue inside, thoroughly and possessively exploring every millimetre of his sweet tasting mouth.

Jun reached up and wrapped his hands around the back of Satoshi’s neck tugging at his hair and spreading his legs wider, allowing Satoshi to slide in deeper before pausing once more.

Jun gazed into Satoshi’s warm brown eyes, almost breathless with desire. The discomfort was slowly receding, being replaced by need. He experimentally moved his hips slightly, amazed at the expression on Satoshi’s face that the tiny movement created.

“Please move. I think I'm ready,” Jun said before nipping at Satoshi’s bottom lip, enjoying his lover’s reaction as he lifted his leg and wrapped it around Satoshi’s waist.

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Satoshi had always thought that he’d been happily in love during his previous twelve year relationship. They got on well enough together, with very few arguments (not counting the spectacular screaming match on the night they broke up) and their lovemaking was quite satisfying in a comfortable fashion. But perhaps they had stayed together for convenience sake, his boyfriend entertaining strangers as a diversion (as he’d discovered later), while Satoshi locked himself away in his studio for hours at a time.

But as Satoshi felt Jun’s warm pliant body moving beneath him, he was almost overwhelmed by sensation. He now knew what true love actually felt like; it was as if he was awakening from a long sleep and all of his senses were going into overdrive.

Every movement, every tiny sound uttered by Jun, every gasp, even the scent of his heated skin made Satoshi almost lose his senses. Jun’s hard cock, the ridges of his rib cage, the soft flesh of his buttocks, his pouting lips dotted with beauty marks parted in ecstasy, the small puffs of air that blew into Satoshi’s face as he bent to kiss him over and over again combined to bring tears to his eyes.

Satoshi’s hips moved in a languorous rhythm, Jun echoing the movement with tiny answering thrusts of his own hips as if asking him to go deeper and deeper into the very core of his being.
“Jun, Jun, Jun,” Satoshi didn’t even know that he was chanting his name as he became lost in a swirling maelstrom of pleasure.

Jun raked his fingers down Satoshi’s back in an attempt to anchor himself; he felt as if he would fly away.

It was so very good, everything that he’d ever dreamt of and yet so much more. It was as if he was losing himself completely, his spirit merging with that of his lover, sending him into an almost trancelike state.

Satoshi seemed to know exactly where and how to touch him, experience gained in just a few minutes’ worth of exploration of his body before he entered him. The discomfort and strangeness of the first few minutes had soon been replaced by waves of sheer pleasure that reverberated through his entire body.

And when the head of Satoshi’s thick cock rubbed against a certain spot deep within Jun he found himself crying out with unrestrained passion before biting his bottom lip in an attempt to stifle the embarrassing noises coming from his mouth.

Satoshi pushed his finger into Jun's mouth, prying his clenched jaw open. "Be as loud as you like Jun. It makes me happy to know that you are feeling so much pleasure."

"It feels so good," Jun panted. "So very good."

Satoshi reached down between their bodies and took Jun's cock into his hand, firmly stroking the heated flesh in time with his thrusts. Jun flung his head back exposing his smooth neck, which proved to be an irresistible attraction to Satoshi who couldn't resist leaning down to lick the beads of sweat pooling in the dip of his collarbone, entranced by the sweet and salty taste.

"S-Satoshi...I feel like...I need to..."

Instantly understanding what Jun was trying to say, Satoshi said, "I know, my love, I know. You've been so very good and you can come any time you want."

The deep tone of Satoshi's voice and the constant rhythm of his hand on Jun's cock combined with the relentless snap of his hips was all too much for Jun and quite shortly after he was coming. His orgasm ripped through him, turning his vision to a white haze filled with dancing pinpricks of light.

Satoshi continued to thrust deeply into Jun's twitching body, kissing him deeply as he found his own release. He groaned almost painfully as he came, filling Jun with repeated jerks of his hips as he rode out his orgasm.

They collapsed together into an exhausted heap, the room suddenly silent apart from their quickened breathing and the rapid beating of their hearts.

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The next morning Satoshi stroked Jun's messy hair back from his face and pressed a series of light kisses over his eyelids and cheeks, gradually working his way down to Jun's slightly parted lips.

"Nrggh..." Jun mumbled and pulled the covers up over his head with a groan.

Satoshi laughed and nuzzled his face down against Jun's, pushing the covers back and ghosting kisses over the side of his neck. "Time for breakfast, or actually it's almost lunch time and you
definitely should eat something."

Jun grumbled and reluctantly pried his eyes open, blinking at Satoshi who looked almost annoyingly chirpy and awake. He moved to sit up but froze and winced at the pain in his lower half.

Satoshi immediately put the tray of food down and moved to help Jun to sit, propping him up against a pile of pillows after rubbing the base of his spine soothingly.

"I have some painkillers here," Satoshi offered, handing them to Jun with a glass of juice. "You’ll feel better soon, I promise."

"It's a good sort of hurting," Jun said, stretching his limbs with a satisfied purr and looking up at his lover through lowered lashes.

"Don't even think about it," Satoshi said with a chuckle. He lifted the tray and carefully placed it on Jun’s lap. “You’re already sore.”

“Spoilsport,” Jun pouted jokingly.

“There is one way to guarantee that you get this kind of treatment on a regular basis though,” Saroshi said, suddenly looking quite serious.

“Oh really?” Jun asked with a wry smile as he washed down the painkillers with a gulp of juice.

“Marry me.”

Jun coughed, almost choking on the tablets that seemed to be caught sideways in the back of his throat. “W-what?”

“Marry me and I promise to make you breakfast every morning and bring it to you in bed,” Satoshi said, snatching a slice of toast off Jun’s plate and taking a huge bite.

“Stop teasing me,” Jun said, angrily pushing the tray to the side of the bed. “It’s not funny.”

Satoshi realized his mistake and tried again.

“I’ve never been more serious about anything in my life,” he said calmly, taking Jun’s hand and tangling their fingers together. “I love you and can't picture my life without you as a part of it. You're my inspiration, my muse and the love of my life. Please let me love you and cherish you for the rest of my days.”

Jun could hardly breathe or think over the loud pounding of his heart which was racing uncontrollably as if about to burst out of his chest. He couldn’t recall Satoshi ever speaking so many words to him at the same time before, and especially not such strong words of love and assurance.

He reached out with his hand, surprised by how steady it was, cupping Satoshi’s cheek, rubbing his fingers over the light stubble, smiling at the sandpaper feeling under his fingertips.

It seemed as if every terrible and every wonderful moment of his life over the past year had led him to this place, this time, this kind and gentle man that he loved with every fibre of his being.

He smiled, tears spilling from his eyes and trickling down his cheeks as he nodded his assent. Once again words were unnecessary between them as Satoshi pulled him into his embrace, holding him
as if he would never let go and Jun wouldn't have it any other way.
Chapter Summary

As they prepared to walk down the stairs and stand together, to pledge themselves to each other in front of the whole village, Satoshi nervously grabbed Jun's hand "Are you sure you want to spend the rest of your life here with me?"

6 months later

"Satoshi, hurry up. I don’t want to be late," Jun said, straightening his lover's tie.

"I thought that the bride was allowed to be late to her own wedding?"

"Ow!" Satoshi complained as Jun jabbed him hard in the ribs in response.

"If you call me that again there won't be any wedding at all."

As they prepared to walk down the stairs and stand together, to pledge themselves to each other in front of the whole village, Satoshi nervously grabbed Jun's hand "Are you sure you want to spend the rest of your life here with me?"

Jun was going to give a joking answer until he saw the flicker of fear in Satoshi's eyes. There was something in his expression that made Jun feel his own jolt of nerves.

"I have never been surer of anything in my life." Jun said as he took Satoshi's calloused hand in his and pressed it to his chest "Can you feel my heart racing? It's racing because it's in a hurry to be joined to yours and I know yours is just as eager." Jun pressed a soft kiss to Satoshi’s lips.

As Satoshi returned Jun’s kiss, holding him close and feeling their hearts beating loudly with nerves the door to their living quarters was flung back in its hinges and Aiba burst into the room.

“What are you two doing not only together, but groping each other? Don't you know it's bad luck?"

Aiba grabbed Satoshi’s elbow and shoved him out the door, almost knocking over Nino who was coming up the stairs carrying a bottle of champagne and three glasses on a wooden tray.

“Watch it!” Nino grumbled as the tray wobbled dangerously around in his hands.

A moment later Satoshi found himself on the wrong side of the door which was shut very firmly in his face. Feeling somewhat reassured, he made his way downstairs to meet Toma who was acting as his best man.

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Satoshi’s most recent exhibition in the city had been a huge success. Since he had met Jun he had once again been inspired to paint with more depth of feeling and expression than he had ever previously displayed. The first paintings he had done before they officially started their relationship were not for the public, but kept only for themselves. None of his subsequent paintings were specifically of Jun but each painting still clearly conveyed Satoshi's feelings of love and passion to the viewer. It was this feeling that made people want to buy his work, because just
looking at his paintings filled them with an echo of the serene happiness that he was living with every day. Jun had enriched his life in so many different ways since their chance meeting in the forest so many months ago.

“Satoshi,” Toma said for the third time, nudging his friend with his elbow.

‘Un?” Satoshi grunted, started by the contact.

“Jun will be down soon and you will ruin his big moment if you are spacing out and miss watching him walk down the stairs,” Toma chided.

“Sorry,” Satoshi mumbled, pulling himself together. He was worried about his wedding gift to Jun and how it might be received but he knew that now was certainly not the time to think about it; not when his life was about to change forever and in the best way possible.

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Jun, why do you look so worried?” Aiba asked as he passed him a glass of champagne.

“Surely you’re not having second thoughts?” Nino asked, surprised by Jun’s disturbed expression. He had never seen a couple more in love than these two and he was at a loss to understand what the problem might be.

“Satoshi seems preoccupied by something,” Jun said as Nino forced him to cease his nervous pacing, stand still and allow him to fuss with his tie. He had been perfectly calm and happy until now but Satoshi’s nervous question before leaving had him worried.

“Well, it certainly can’t be anything to do with the wedding,” Aiba said.

“But what if he’s changed his mind?” Jun asked in a trembling voice.

“Why would you possibly think that?” Nino asked.

“He’s just seemed kind of off all morning,” Jun said, his face turning pale. “What if he thinks this is all a huge mistake?”

Before the other two had a chance to reassure him, Jun dashed away from them and locked himself in the bathroom with a loud slam of the door.

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Satoshi could see the flower strewn path that led to the nearby clearing in the forest where the ceremony was to take place; it was lined with chattering villagers happily anticipating the biggest event to have taken place there in months, if not years.

Jun’s mother and sister had arrived a week earlier looking tanned, relaxed, and still not tired of travelling yet. They were sitting in the chairs arrayed in the open space along with other relatives and friends waiting patiently for Satoshi and Jun to walk there together.

When footsteps could be heard on the stairs Satoshi and Toma both looked up but to their dismay it was only Nino and Aiba, stomping down at some speed and neither of them looked particularly happy.

“What did you say or do to Jun?” Nino asked accusingly.

“What did I…what?” Satoshi stuttered.
“He’s really upset,” Aiba said, pushing Satoshi in the direction of the stairs. “You need to go up there and fix whatever you broke.”

“I didn’t do anything!” Satoshi said, confused until he had a sudden thought. “What if he’s just had second thoughts and decided that he doesn’t want to marry me? What if he thinks I’m too old and boring?”

“You didn’t ask him that did you?” Nino glared and poked Satoshi in the chest with an accusing finger.

“Not in so many words…but I might have hinted it…”

“You are a complete idiot!” Sakurai said as he returned from making Jun’s family comfortable and unable to keep out of this conversation any longer. “You need to get up those stairs and talk to Jun right now.”

With four sets of eyes staring at him accusingly and a less than gentle shove from the Inspector, Satoshi found himself heading up the stairs.

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“Jun?” Satoshi asked softly. “Sweetheart, what’s wrong?”

Jun was standing facing the window, his shoulders trembling slightly as he clutched the windowsill hard enough to make his knuckles white.

“If you don’t want to marry me you should just say so now,” Jun rasped, turning towards him with teary eyes.

“I never meant to make it seem that way,” Satoshi said as he crossed the room and attempted to take Jun into his arms only to have Jun shy away.

“Then you must doubt my love for you,” Jun replied.

“Jun my love it was just me being stupid and insecure, not about marrying you, but about what happens afterwards.”

“I don’t understand what you mean by ‘afterwards’” Jun said softly.

“It’s connected to my wedding present for you,” Satoshi confessed.

He took Jun’s hand and led him to the tiny office that he never used, unlocking the door and revealing what he was talking about.

++++

“This is all for me?” Jun asked faintly as he looked at the shiny new set of photographic equipment arrayed on the desk alongside a completed set of university enrolment papers.

“You had to give up your studies when your father threw you out,” Satoshi said gently. “I want you to have the opportunity to finish what you started, to experience things that a person of your age should.”

“But this school is over three hours away,” Jun said as he stroked a fingertip over the embossed lettering of the shiny brochure. “How can I manage that?” he added sadly.
“That’s the second part of the present, but it comes from your mother,” Satoshi said, offering Jun a large envelope.

Jun’s hand trembled when he opened it, his eyes widening when he saw that it contained the deeds to an apartment that was located close to the campus.

“Apparently it’s quite comfortable,” Satoshi said. He fidgeted nervously near the doorway as he waited for Jun’s verdict.

He only had a moment to wait before Jun launched himself across the room and straight into his arms, peppering his face with a barrage of kisses.

“Thank you thank you thank you,” Jun chanted breathlessly.

When he finally let Satoshi go a sudden realization dawned, “This was why you were acting so oddly?”

“I guess I am worried that you will forget about me when you go,” Satoshi said sadly. “Or what if you find someone younger?”

“I don’t want anyone who isn’t you, you dummy,” Jun said as he kissed Satoshi until they were both breathless. “It doesn’t matter who they are or where they are or how old they are, if they aren’t you then I’m not interested.”

“We can still see each other on holidays and weekends,” Satoshi said with more than a hint of longing.

“Are you trying to get rid of me or something?” Jun asked teasingly.

“No, of course not!” Satoshi knew that he himself would suffer from being so far away from the other half of his heart, but it wasn’t healthy for Jun to shut himself away in this small village in the forest and miss out on these kind of experiences while he was still young.

“Then what’s to stop you coming with me? You could stay whenever you want and for however long you want to. Let’s face it, since you started painting again Nino mostly runs this place anyway.” Jun took another look at the floorplan of the apartment before waving it under Satoshi’s nose. “There’s even a tiny second bedroom where you could paint.”

Satoshi didn’t even hesitate for a moment to accept Jun’s offer. The idea had already occurred to him but he had hoped that Jun would make the suggestion himself. He didn’t want to hold Jun back in any way and loved him enough to want him to fly with his own wings.

“Does that mean that I’ll be your landlord?” Jun asked with a cheeky smile as he wound his arms around Satoshi’s neck. “Because I can think of some very interesting ways for you to pay the rent.”

It was only after they heard a grumble from the doorway and pulled apart from embracing each other that they noticed the other four glaring at them and looking pointedly at their watches. Somehow they had forgotten about their own wedding, but to each of them it felt as if they had already made their vows and offered their commitment to each other.

+++++

The ceremony (which began thirty minutes late, but nobody complained) was simple and short and left nearly everyone who witnessed it slightly tearful. At its conclusion Nino hastily bolted back indoors, ostensibly to check on the caterers, but not before his friends noticed him subtly wipe his
eyes as he rushed past them.

Jun spent a long time being hugged and kissed by his mother and sister while Satoshi accepted congratulations from the rest of their guests. Fortunately Nino announced that drinks and canapés were being served on the deck of the coffee shop, causing a general stampede which left Satoshi and Jun blissfully alone in the flower strewn clearing.

Satoshi made to follow, but Jun grabbed his wrist and dragged him further into the trees away from view.

“Hello there Husband,” Jun said softly.

“And hello to you too, Husband,” Satoshi replied with a smile as he pulled Jun into his arms.

Jun spun around, pressing Satoshi against the smooth trunk of the nearest tree. He loosened Satoshi’s tie and nibbled on the exposed base of his tanned neck. At the same time he stroked his hand teasingly over Satoshi’s crotch.

“Jun, what are you doing?” Satoshi asked, his voice rising in pitch as Jun gave a squeeze. “Our guests will be waiting for us.”

“Don't worry, Aiba promised to keep them amused, while I thank you properly for the wedding gift,” Jun said huskily as he pressed himself against his husband. “Aiba has a real talent for singing and playing the guitar and apparently Sho-san once worked undercover at a cocktail bar. They won't notice if we're missing for a while.”

It wasn't just Jun’s hand which was now busily working inside his trousers that made Satoshi breathless. Over the past few months Jun had blossomed, his level of confidence seeming to grow with every passing day. He had changed from a thin, fragile youngster into a well-muscled man who glowed with good health and a beauty that illuminated him from within. Satoshi put the changes down to the fact that Jun’s father was gone from his life, never realizing that it was the love and support that he’d offered Jun that had worked its magic on the younger man, offering him a calm oasis in which to recover and truly find his own way.

Jun however, knew differently; Satoshi was his rock, his safe harbour and his comfort. This was why he hadn't hesitated for even a second to accept Satoshi’s wedding present, even though it might physically separate them for a time. He knew that they would be together always, their love supporting them and carrying them through their lives together.

Jun reached into his pocket and pulled out two condoms and some lube, his eyes glinting with mischief, “Toma gave me these. He didn't want us to mess our suits up.”

“You used to be such an innocent little thing.” Satoshi said with a mock pout as he undid his belt, enjoying the pink blush that spread across Jun’s cheeks at his words.

Jun fluttered his long lashes and kissed the tip of Satoshi’s nose, “Hurry up and see how quickly you can make me come. We have guests waiting for us you know.”

Satoshi could only shake his head at Jun’s unique way of thinking. Only his bewitching husband could find a way to make this all his fault when he was one one who had been ambushed.

++++

“S-Sato...shi,” Jun panted.
Satoshi had reversed their positions and now Jun had his back pressed against the tree trunk as his new husband rutted up into him. Jun’s left leg was lifted high and wrapped around Satoshi’s waist allowing him deeper access with each successive thrust of his cock.

Satoshi held Jun’s raised leg tightly, helping him to retain his balance as Jun stroked his own condom-clad cock in time with his thrusts. The tree shook with every snap of Satoshi’s hips, making the pair of them giggle breathlessly, wondering if the guests would be able to see the unusual movement from their place on the balcony.

“Satoshi...hurry up before the tree falls over,” Jun snickered.

“Like this?” Satoshi asked, changing angle slightly and commencing to pound on Jun’s prostate.

Jun wailed and threw his head back against the smooth cool bark, his supporting leg almost giving out on him as he filled the condom covering his cock.

Spurred on by Jun’s screams Satoshi thrust even faster and harder, his movements losing coordination as his hips jerked a few more times before he shuddered through his own orgasm.

They clung tightly to each other, gasping for breath and still giggling. Even though Satoshi sometimes worried about being fourteen years older than Jun, at times like this he knew that Jun would always find a way to make him feel as if there was no gap between them at all.

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The happy couple were pleased that nobody noticed (or at least decided not to comment on) their slightly disheveled appearance as they joined the party.

Cake was eaten, dancing was done and speeches were made, including one particularly weepy one by Nino that he would forever deny making.

Much later that night after the party was over and the guests had finally all departed, the happy couple stood on the outside deck of their coffee shop admiring the full moon that was rising over the nearby mountains.

“That day in the forest when you tripped over me. You saved me in more ways than one,” Jun said softly, holding Satoshi’s hand tightly. He still sometimes had nightmares featuring his father, waking bathed in sweat and trembling, but Satoshi was always there, a steadying presence in bed beside him, gathering him into his arms and holding him until the shadows lifted.

“As you saved me,” Satoshi replied, kissing Jun’s temple. He now knew that when he’d bought the business he’d been running away from life, content to drift through the rest of his years, painting in a mediocre way and not seeking out any further relationships. Jun’s unexpected arrival had rekindled not just his love of painting but of life itself.

The rest of their thoughts remained unspoken as they gravitated into each other's arms swaying together to music only they could hear.

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