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#4

by stanley lieber

Cameron fried an egg. Cook encouraged her. She used too much oil, and she left the egg in the frying pan for a bit too long. Breakfast didn't taste very good, but at least she had the toast. Cook beamed at her, gratified.

Shinji had actually showed up at their apartment. No warning. When the sensors went off she even let him in. Of course, he'd brought the t-shirts. (Andrew obliged.) But what he had really wanted was to talk to her. *Her?* she had asked. *Her*, he had said, winking conspiratorially.

Shinji offered a proposal that seemed preposterous on its face. He wanted to sell his shirts in America. And who did he happen to know who frequently visited America? Cameron wasn't so sure about the idea. Andrew, obviously, was all in. Of course he was. Where would they begin?

Cameron felt she needed to exercise some control over her life. She'd start with breakfast, and hopefully expand into more meaningful territory. This proposal would mean curtailing her book hunting; they'd need the separate storage for Shinji's shirts. She decided to go along with it, if only because at least this was something different than her usual pattern, stumbling around all tired and grumpy from arguing. And anyway, America was America. Right? Andrew could keep the money.

Five or six shipments later, even she was sick of America. She wondered if it was really necessary to accompany the shirts on every single trip. Shinji insisted. Well, let's just have a look at these shirts, she had said. Shinji froze, and she knew right then and there that something was wrong. She had had to choose her next words carefully. "I'll be the one to chaperone the shirts—this time, next time, and every time after that, for as long as this goes on," she said. Perhaps sensing that their enterprise dangled on the end of a slender thread, no one objected to her demands. And so it went.

She didn't want to know what Andrew did with his money. In spite of their joint success, he remained broke.

It wasn't her problem.