

by stanley lieber

Shinji was gone and Cameron didn't care. The snow had come again, blanketing the evidence of filth on the street. Andrew was bereft. What now?

He'd saddled them with significant debt. Three shipments were en route, but the shippers might refuse to release the cargo if outstanding invoices were not paid. Classic cash flow roulette. Cameron just wanted to walk away from it all. Maybe she would.

There had been no word from the son of a bitch. He'd simply disappeared.

No such luck with Andrew. Her brother could drive her crazy. He was already arranging some kind of insurance scam based on the losses that would be incurred from the three stuck shipments. If the shippers eventually relented, well, then, more money for the both of them.

Cameron wanted out.

Shinji was tapped out. He'd spent the last of his savings on the ticket home (his uncle was generous, but perverse). If they'd already let his apartment, what could he do?

He unlocked the door on the roof and headed downstairs to his apartment. Well, *the* apartment, whoever it belonged to now. That would take some getting used to.

Carmine answered the door. He spoke, acted without thinking.

"Oh," he said, and closed the door again.

Andrew was beside himself. The whole thing had come apart in his lap. All his carefully laid plans spilling onto the floor. How was he going to pay off the—No, something would work out. It always did. He flashed on the real estate Shinji had left vacant in Japan. Shouldn't be much trouble taking possession. He had the papers of incorporation. It would just be a matter of convincing the property manager, and that guy was already on the payroll.

Carmine had to think quickly. Much depended on what he said next. His cousin was patient, but even family ties could be stretched to their breaking point. He ran first one, then another elaborate explanation through his mind, rocking the tape back and forth, searching with the knob of his tape machine for the sweet spot—he'd know it when he heard it.

Nothing sounded good.

Finally, Carmine opened the door again, but just stood there and said nothing. Shinji remained planted on the same spot in the hallway, just outside the door to his own apartment. Carmine looked left, then right, craning his neck for a better view down the hallway, then leaned forward and kissed his cousin on the cheek.

Smiling, he stepped back and watched to see how Shinji would react.