**Hot Spring Christmas 1**

by Emi Tsuruta

I've got a whole bunch of other stuff I want to tell you from last year, but this time I want to skip ahead to last Christmas. I think I might have mentioned this, but I got to go back to Japan again for a couple of weeks. I was feeling a bit homesick, and I wanted to see my family, and maybe visit some hot springs while I was there. Originally, my boyfriend Ryosuke was supposed to come back with me. He made a whole bunch of reservations for inns he was going to take me to, but then his boss told him they needed him over the Christmas rush, so he couldn't come.

I decided it would be a waste not to go, so I started emailing my friends and family, and asking if they wanted to come with me in Ryosuke's place. Michiyo and Miori couldn't come, but my cousin, Namie was free. She's a couple of years older than me, and just got married. I asked about her husband, but he had to work over Christmas, so I emailed her all the info. She said it sounded great. In any case, I wanted to hear about how things were going with her hubby, so we had a lot of catching up to do.

One small problem was I was a little worried that my mom might want to come along. I mean I like my mom and everything, but she has this picture of me as her innocent little girl, so I can't really be myself around her. Anyway, as soon as classes finished, I flew home to Japan the next day. My dad and sister Norika were still working, so it was just my mom at home. She had all sorts of things she wanted to tell me. I eventually managed to sneak away, and give Namie a call.

It sounded like Namie was really looking forward to the trip. I guess I told you, but the last time I saw her I sort of gave her some advice on how to spice up her love life with her new hubby, so I wondered if she was going to tell me about that. I was looking forward to seeing her too.

I guess when Namie and I were younger, we were always more like rivals than friends. Namie is really good-looking, and I guess I felt a bit jealous. At the wedding, she looked absolutely gorgeous- so pure and innocent - in her wedding dress, but somehow Ryosuke had talked me into wearing this revealing dress. I was so embarrassed. Still, after the wedding though, Namie kind of came to me looking for advice. I think before she got married, she mustn't have dated too many guys, so she wanted to learn about men. I'm no expert, but anyway, I tried to help as best I could.

Anyway, the day of our trip, I got all dressed up in my ski duds -a slick red and white coat, ski pants, a beige toque, futuristic goggles. I look pretty fashionable I thought. I left early with my dad, and thankfully, my mom decided to stay home, and write new years' cards. Dad took a different bus, and when I arrived at the station, Namie wasn't there yet. I waited a while, but when she came, I almost didn't recognize her. She was wearing sunglasses, a ski jacket and tight fitting jeans. She looked great - young, alive, ready to have fun, I thought. Anyway, we got on the train bound for the Izu peninsula, and headed out.

Once we'd settled in, I couldn't hold back my curiosity. I asked her about her husband, but she just giggled, and blushed, and wouldn't tell me anything. Apparently though, things were going well, and she thanked me for my advice. I was still dying to know what had happened, but she wouldn't talk. Anyway, I was glad to see her looking so happy.

She had plenty of other things to tell me about her new life. She was helping at the community centre, booking groups to perform. We rode along chatting and laughing. Every once in a while, we'd pass a castle or a nice view of the ocean or Mt. Fuji. It was fairly clear weather, but Mt. Fuji was still sort of hidden behind some white fluffy clouds. It didn't matter though. We just sat there munching on snacks and gabbing away having the greatest time.

When we got to Mishima in Shizuoka prefecture, we got out, and changed trains, heading south to Shuuzenji, the last stop. I'm sure I told you about Shuuzenji before. It was one of the places where Ryosuke and I stopped in my last trip there. Ryosuke was up to his usual games that trip too. Somehow he'd fooled me into riding around in his car in just this short hoodie with nothing on underneath. He must have planned to come back here, just to remind me. I hate to think what he might have planned for this trip.

Anyway, our train eventually arrived at the last stop. I guess it was 'cause it was winter and all, but there were hardly any other people getting off the train. It was so quiet. We left the station, and outside all the souvenir stores were all boarded up. We were hungry though, so we looked around till we finally found a little soba shop that was open. The shop was empty except for the one woman working there. She took our order, and then went around behind the counter to cook it. Namie looked around commenting on the rustic atmosphere of the shop.

Soon, the woman brought us our soba. She told us that we were kind of lucky because when she'd got up, she'd considered not coming into work at all. Apparently, not many people come through Shuuzenji on weekdays in the winter. I found that a bit surprising. Like I said, it had been a mild winter in Kamakura, but now we were up in the mountains, so it was a bit colder than down on the coast. Namie asked if people headed home once it got cold, and the woman said yes. She asked us why we were there, and I told her all about living in the States, and wanting to visit some hot springs while I was back. She started telling us about Tokkonoyu, the most famous spring in Shuuzenji. It turned out it was right near the soba shop. It was one of the sights that Ryosuke had recommended we visit on his list. She told us it'd been discovered by Kobo Daishi (a famous Japanese priest) a long time ago, and princes and nobles used to come there to bathe. She told us how to get there, and after lunch, we headed out to find it.

Namie and I were both feeling pretty good now that we'd had some lunch. We walked along next to the river, and soon we saw a gazebo built on a small rocky island in the middle. We walked down, and there was a plaque by the entrance labeled 'Tokkonoyu' explaining some of its history. Namie read the plaque, but I headed straight down the short wooden bridge. Inside the gazebo, there was a hot spring bath built out of these wonderfully smooth stones. I tested the water with my hand, and it was really warm, even though the wintry wind was blowing in through the wooden fence that ran around the outside. Namie finally came down the bridge, and joined me. She laughed when she saw the bath.

"How can anyone bathe here?" Namie said, gaping out at the street. There were no walls really. The fence running around the outside was just these widely spaced slats of wood. You could see temple grounds across the river, and back the way we came, there were houses and shops. I suddenly realized what Ryosuke had been planning - that he and I strip down, and take a bath right in the middle of town. Can you believe it?

"Yeah, I wonder," I mused. I took off my glove, and swirled my fingers in the water. "It's nice and warm. Do you think anyone would notice if we just went in for a quick dip?"

Namie widened her eyes obviously shocked at my suggestion.

"You're not serious, are you? I mean it's freezing out... and besides there's nowhere to change."

I wasn't sure what to think. Surely the locals must slip in here for a dip now and then. It was a bath after all. I looked at my watch.

"It looks like we've already missed the 1 o'clock bus. We'll have to wait quite a while for the next one. What do you say? Do you want to try?"

It was pretty obvious from her expression that at first, she thought I was absolutely crazy to even suggest such a thing. She looked down at the water. I didn't say anything, but I could tell she was weighing the idea in her mind. Perhaps, she was thinking back to that day at her parent's house when I'd been trying to convince her to show off her body to spice up her marriage.

"Are we even allowed to bathe here?" she asked incredulous.

"Sure. There's no sign or anything."

She just looked at me obviously still worried, but I was starting to get all excited at the idea. I just wanted to try. That's obviously what Ryosuke had intended. It was really too bad he couldn't come.

I took off my scarf and coat. We could hear the wind blowing, the rustle of the leaves in the trees and even some cars far off in the distance, but I swear there didn't seem to be anyone around. Probably all the locals were indoors. I pulled my sweater off over my head. I licked my lips, excitedly undoing my blouse.

"Emi!" Namie shouted, still not convinced.

"C'mon, Namie. We came to try some hot springs, didn't we?"

I felt a bit weird having to convince her. When we were younger, I used to kind of look up to her. She is a few years older than me, and she used to act more grown up. Then I went across to study in the States, and now when I come back, it's almost like our roles have reversed. I'm the one who's suggesting things, pushing her to be more adventurous. Her mom, Aunt Sachi, is much more open-minded than my mom. Probably, Namie has the same wild streak in her. Maybe she just needs a bit of coaxing.

I took off my blouse, and set it down on top of my jacket. Namie was still scanning for people, but eventually she began taking off her scarf. For some reason, this made me nervous. I began to wonder if this was such a good idea, but I was already too excited to just stop now.

The wind felt so cold on my naked shoulders and tummy. I stood up, and started fiddling with the button on my jeans, but I was shivering with excitement. Namie took off her jacket, and was still looking around anxiously, trying to decide if it would be safe. She kneeled down, and started taking off her boots, so I did the same. We hadn't seen anyone, but it'd be better if we hurried, and got right into the bath before someone came.

"I can't believe I let you talk me into this! Of all the crazy ideas..." she giggled nervously. As I slid down my jeans and tights, I felt the cold air on my legs, but my whole body was starting to heat up from the excitement. I glanced outside not so much to check for people as to savor the moment. We really were right in the middle of town. I could still hear the rustling of the leaves, but not much else. I found it so weird that such a built up place could be so quiet.

I pulled down my panties too, and covered my mouth, amazed that I'd actually done it. Who ever thought I'd be naked in the middle of Shuuzenji? I undid my bra, and threw it on the pile of my clothes, naked at last. Namie looked over at me in awe at my bravery, and I flashed her a big grin. I was so excited to be free of my clothes I'd almost forgotten about the bath. I padded over to the entrance, and peered out at the street we'd come in on.

"Where are you going?" Namie cried out, as she finally got her jeans off. I swear I was honestly thinking of walking back up the bridge to the street to see if anyone was around. Looking back at Namie shivering there in her underwear made me realize how crazy that would be. I hurried back, and got in the bath. The water was so warm, and felt so good on my skin. I'd really missed Japanese baths. The tubs are deep, the water piping hot, and they are usually in a place of great natural beauty.

Namie finally finished getting undressed. She has a great body - large perfectly shaped breasts, a flat tummy and curvaceous hips. I don't know why she insists on covering up. I stared over at her pubic hair, wondering if it was thicker than mine. It stood out so much against her porcelain white skin.

"What?" she said, blushing like crazy, her cheeks all pink. Was she excited too?

"Oh, nothing. I just thought you have an awful lot of pubic hair."

She brushed it down flat, even more embarrassed.

"It's not that much. What about yours?" she said, sliding her long legs into the bath. I took another look outside, and then stood up to let her see. I felt so deliciously naughty, flashing her my pussy out here in the open like this. I spread my legs, but I was getting too excited too fast. I slid back into the back fighting back an orgasm. I don't know why I'm getting so excited. I'd better calm down.

We sat there savoring the warmth of the bath. Namie kept jumping every time we heard a sound. I was trying to act this all was no big deal, but the truth was I was a bit nervous too. I glared out at the street, and only when I was satisfied that there was no one around, did I lie back, and relax. We sat there for a long while enjoying the view and the experience. Finally, I asked,

"Don't you and Aunt Sachi ever go to hot springs?"

"Not so much. Not like this, anyway." She finally showed me a weak smile.

"It's nice though, isn't it? I really understand why those princes came here. It's heaven really."

Just when I'd almost convinced her to relax, I suddenly realized that out on the street, there was a short older man walking this way. Namie and I both sunk down deep into the water. I was worried that he'd spotted us. He came right up to the entrance to the bridge, looking over this way, but he eventually went past. Both Namie and I breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"That was close," she said. "Here. We'd better get back dressed before more people come."

"Calm down. We've got plenty of time."

"What time's the next bus?"

I wasn't sure, so I got up out of the bath. My body was nice and toasty from soaking in the spring, but the breeze reminded me again of how naked I was. I looked at my watch, but then we heard the sound of a bus. At first I thought it might be our bus, but it pulled around the corner, coming right this way! It was clearly a tour bus.

"Oh, shoot! Quick! Get dressed!" I yelled. I grabbed my panties, and quickly pulled them on. As the bus drew nearer, it slowed down, and stopped not so far from the entrance to the bath. Oh no! Now what? We had no time to get properly dressed, so I pulled on my coat, and motioned for Namie to do the same. My coat went down to my knees, so that was alright, but when I looked over at Namie, I realized her jacket stopped at her waist. She was frantically trying to pull her jeans on, as the tour guide and group filed off the bus. I blocked their view as best I could, hastily buttoning up my coat, and stuffing the rest of my clothes in my backpack.

The tourists were middle-aged Japanese and quite curious about us. They peered down curiously at my bare calves, and tried to get a look at Namie too. It was taking her forever to get her jeans on. I think some of the tourist might have caught a glimpse of her pussy, but what could we do?

Once Namie was more or less decent, we walked back up the bridge as the tour group looked on. I clasped my coat tightly together to hide my cleavage. I felt horribly exposed. I could feel the fur lining against my naked skin. The tourists all kind of stared at us, as we scurried off back towards the soba shop. As soon as we were inside, I called out to the woman who'd cooked for us earlier,

"Can we use your washroom?"

She yelled back,

"Sure."

I let Namie go in first. The woman came out, and asked what had happened. I rubbed my nose, not sure what to tell her, but soon she guessed.

"You didn't go in the bath, did you?"

I nodded sheepishly. She broke out laughing.

"You're not supposed to go in there during the day."

"It seemed like there was no one around, so I thought we could get away with it. Then a tour bus showed up."

The woman couldn't stop laughing. I felt pretty embarrassed. I definitely hadn't planned to get caught like that. Namie came out, all dressed now. I quickly went in, and got back dressed too. The woman was still laughing when I came out. We thanked her again, and headed off to wait for the bus. We sat there on the bench, drying our hair with towels, and soon the bus came. o Namie didn't say anything for a long time, just kind of gazing off out the window.

"You've changed a lot since high school, haven't you?" she finally said. I laughed.

"I suppose. I've grown up a bit."

Her eyes flickered for a second. This was apparently not what she meant. I countered,

"You've changed too since last time I saw you. You seem more confident."

She grinned.

"Tell me about this boyfriend of yours," she asked. I was a bit surprised she was asking, but I guess I had mentioned he'd been the one who planned this trip.

"I met him in school in California. We get along OK... most of the time anyway."

"What's he like?"

"Mmm. I don't know. It's hard to describe. He's smart and self-assured. He was kind of the leader of our group, always organizing things."

"Like this trip?"

"Yeah."

Namie never quite came out, and said what was on her mind, but I wondered if she'd somehow guessed the kind of games that Ryosuke and I get up to. We chatted away for the rest of the bus ride, and soon she seemed herself again. I wondered if maybe I'd pushed too far too fast, but she didn't seem too worried. It was no big deal really. It was kind of funny, I thought, seeing the look on the tourists' faces.

Anyway, I've got a lot more to tell about this trip, but I guess I'd better save it for next time.

Take care, Emi Tsuruta