**Hot Spring Christmas Part 4**

by Emi Tsuruta

My cousin Namie and I were finally coming to our last stop, Gero hot spring in Gifu prefecture far to the west of Tokyo. It was past supper time when we finally got there. I knew that Gero is famous for its hot springs, but it wasn't at all like I expected. It's not that big a city I guess, but it has a sort of big city feel with lots of tallish grey concrete buildings around the train station, sort of like Manhattan in New York. We walked down across this bridge over a river, and found our hotel. It was a cheaper place, sort of like a cross between a business hotel and a youth hostel. We'd spent a small fortune on Dogashima, so it was probably just as well that we were staying some place cheaper. We found a ramen shop, and had some supper. By the time we got back to the hotel, it was after dark.

An older man at the front counter gave Namie and me our keys. We took this really small elevator upstairs, and in the hall on the way to our room, there were quite a few boys sitting in their doorways chatting. They looked young, maybe 18 or 19. They quietened down when we walked by, but once we were inside our room, they let out this great whooping yell. Namie looked at me a bit surprised. Clearly, we were a hit. I guess not many girls stay in this kind of hotel.

We looked around our room, but there didn't seem to be any yukatas for us to wear. I wanted to take a bath, but it was too late to go looking for the outdoor bath. We decided to try the indoor women's bath in the hotel. I pulled on a pair of pink bloomers (stretchy booty shorts) and a buttery soft white croptop hoodie. Namie changed into her purple velour track suit she uses like p.j.'s. When we stepped out into the hall, one of the boys called over to us.

"Where are you two lovelies from?" His voice had a thick Kansai accent. He reminded me of the comedian Macchan - sort of confident, cocky, a bit sarcastic maybe.

"California," I joked.

"Tokyo," Namie said.

"You're American? You don't look American," he joked back. He got up, and came this way. Namie tugged on my sleeve, not wanting to get involved. "Aren't Americans supposed to be blonde with blue eyes?"

"There are people like me too," I teased back. Namie finally took my arm, and pulled me away, but we almost tripped over a boy in glasses lying on the floor behind us. I covered my tits worried he could see up the front of my top.

"Oops," he said.

"I'm Kazu, and that's Tomohiro," the comedian said pointing at his friend. For some reason, Namie was kind of spooked by all this, so she quickly dragged me off toward the stairwell. "Hey, at least tell us your names," Kazu called after us.

"Maybe later," I called back as Namie pulled me through the door.

"What do you think you're doing? Don't talk to them," Namie scolded me.

"What? I thought they were kind of cute."

"You already have a boyfriend."

"Relax. I was just curious. You have to admit they're some of the friendliest people we've met so far this trip."

She didn't say anything, but anyway, we went off to look for the bath. We couldn't find any signs saying which floor the women's bath was on, so we went back down to the front desk. Unfortunately, the old man told us that it was late, so he'd already turned off the hot water in the women's bath.

"Is the men's bath still on?" I asked.

"Yeah, but there are a bunch of students here tonight, so that wouldn't do. I'll tell you what. I'll refund you 500 yen, and you can go use the sentou (public bath) down the street."

Namie and I looked at each other. Neither of us wanted to go back outside, but the guy insisted that was the only way. We reluctantly took the money, and headed back upstairs.

"Hey, what happened?" Kazu asked when he saw us.

"The girl's baths are closed, so he wants us to go out to the sentou."

"Use the boy's one. We don't mind."

I looked at Namie, but she just scowled.

"Thanks, but no thanks."

"No, no, I'm serious," Kazu insisted. "Most of us go to the same school, so I can just ask the other guys to clear out till you're done."

I looked at Namie again. It would be a pain changing, and going all the way outside in the middle of the night. Namie didn't seem too keen, but I finally convinced her to try. We waited outside the bath while Kazu and Tomohiro gathered up their classmates, and got them to clear out. At first, they grumbled a bit, but when they saw us they brightened up. One boy bowed, and motioned for us to go in.

"It's all yours, ladies."

Namie and I went in. She kept watching the door to make sure they didn't try to peek in.

"They are still there just outside the door!" she balked.

"Relax. They're just guarding the door. It'll be OK I think. They seem like alright guys." Kazu reminded me a bit of my own boyfriend Ryosuke. Ryosuke has the same kind of helpful take-charge personality.

Anyway, Namie and I finally got undressed. We went in, and we sat down on the stools to shower off. The bath wasn't nearly as nice as the last place we'd been, but the water was warm, and it was clean enough. We quickly showered, and got in the tub. Namie lay back, and let out a deep sigh.

"It's been a long day," she said.

"Are you thirsty?" I asked.

"No, I'm OK."

"I'm kind of thirsty. I'll just dash out, and grab something. I'll be right back."

Namie looked worried about what I was going to do, but she didn't get up.

"Be careful," she called after me. I was too wet for my clothes, so I picked up my towel, and wrapped it around me. It wasn't quite long enough to tie in a knot. Hmm. Maybe I can pin the two ends with my arm. The towel seemed long enough to cover my pussy, but just barely.

I picked up my wallet, and tiptoed over to the door, my heart beating away pitter pat. Kazu and Tomohiro were relaxing on a bench just across the hall, next to the drink machine.

"Umm," I called out. "Do you mind if I grab a drink?"

They both straightened up when they saw me, staring down at the gap in the towel at my hip. I think they could tell I was naked underneath.

"N-n-no, not at all. G-g-go ahead," Kazu stammered. I took a deep breath, walked over to the machine, and struggled to get some change out without dropping my towel. Kazu quickly rushed to my aid. I slid a 100 yen coin into the machine, but I didn't have any tens, so Kazu fished out his wallet, and put two in for me. Grateful, I gave him a shy smile. I pushed the button for honey and lemon, but when the can came down the chute, I realized that I couldn't bend over without flashing them my bare bottom.

"Could you...?" I asked Kazu, nodding at the opening. He leaned over, fished the can out, and handed it to me. I went to go back to the change room, but Kazu called out.

"Why don't you drink it here?"

Tomohiro stood up offering me a space on the bench. I knew I shouldn't, but they were both being so gallant. I sat down jumping a little at the feeling of the cold plastic on my bare behind. My towel had come apart, exposing my hip all the way up my side. I kept adjusting the towel trying to keep from flashing them my bush. It was Kazu who broke the awkward silence.

"Those are interesting slippers. Where did you get them?"

I leaned forward to look at them. They were pink and furry with a hello kitty design.

"Do you like them? I think I must have bought these ones online. They weren't expensive at all. 1000 yen or something like that," I babbled on. Then another man, closer to my age, came out from the stairwell.

"Ooo, Ebihara!" Kazu called to him. "Come over here. There's someone I want you to meet."

He came walking over peering down curiously at my naked hip.

"This Is Ebihara, our tutor. This is... umm..." Kazu was trying to introduce me, but he didn't know my name. Without really thinking, I stood up, and bowed to him.

"Emi... Emi Tsuruta," I volunteered, butterflies in my tummy. I looked back at Kazu, but he'd gone silent, gaping in wonder at my bare bottom. "Ooops!" I exclaimed, letting out an embarrassed giggle. I didn't mean to flash him, but this darn towel was so small. Intending to leave, I bent over to pick up my drink. Kazu blinked, wondering I guess if I was teasing them on purpose. I finally waved bye, and scampered back to the change room.

Once I was safely back in the change room, I finally let the towel fall. I was so excited I was shaking. I couldn't believe I'd just flashed them. How could I be so foolish? On the other hand, it was kind of thrilling. All three of them were kind of good-looking in their way.

After I'd calm down, I went back into the bath.

"What happened?" Namie asked. I debated telling her, but decided I'd better not.

"Oh nothing. I just bought a drink," I said showing it to her. I didn't want to get her all upset. It was no big deal really. I guess I should have been more careful, but at least they didn't follow me into the change room. Maybe they are gentlemen after all.

Anyway, soon we got out of the bath, got dressed, and went back out. The three of them kind of stared at me wide-eyed.

"Sorry," I apologized to them.

"No problem," Kazu said cheerfully. The three of them walked back up with us, but Kazu told us Ebihara lived on another floor, so eventually, they chased him away. I bowed good night. He still had this silly grin on his face. I rubbed my forehead, regretting a bit having flashed him.

Namie tucked in early, but I sat out in the hall chatting with Kazu and Tomohiro till quite late. They were seniors here to write university entrance exams. Ebihara went to the same high school, but he was in university now. I told them all about Oceanview University and my entrance exams, and they seemed fascinated. They both said they wanted to study abroad some day. I'm not sure if they meant it, but anyway, they both seemed quite taken with me. Eventually, though, it was getting late, so I bid them good night.

The next morning, Kazu and Tomohiro were in the hall when we came out. They invited us to breakfast, and took us down to a local eatery they'd found. Namie still seemed wary, but when she found out we'd been talking about entrance exams, she started sharing her stories too. She had all these little strategies for getting herself up for the exams, and avoiding distractions. I was surprised because I never realized she took school that seriously. Eventually, the conversation turned to Gero.

"Do you know anything about the hot springs here?" I asked.

"There's one down by the river," Kazu told us.

"We were thinking of going down, and taking a look," I mused. Namie looked at me, not so keen on going down together.

"OK, we'll take you down," Kazu burbled happily. Tomohiro nodded.

"Don't you have to study?" Namie asked.

"Nah, we've been studying all week."

Namie still didn't look keen on having them join us, but anyway, she went down with us. Of course, I felt nervous about bathing with these two guys we barely knew, but on the other hand, I was wondering what they look like naked. Tomohiro was slender, more the studious type, but Kazu looked pretty athletic. They probably had quite handsome bodies, I decided.

After breakfast, the four of us went back to our rooms. Namie was still trying to talk me out of going with these guys, but I told her to relax. She didn't have to come in if she didn't want to.

Outside, it was nice and sunny, but still pretty brisk. We saw a few people and cars on the main street, but once we got down to the river, there didn't seem to be too many people around. Standing on the bridge, I finally caught sight of a pool down on the flood plain below.

"Is that it?" I asked pointing.

"Yep," Kazu nodded. We climbed down the bank to take a closer look. The bath looked nice enough, smooth stones and steam rising off the top, but it was right out in the open with no walls at all, not even a change room.

"Do people actually use this bath?" Namie asked in disbelief. I kneeled down, and checked the water.

"It's warm," I noted. I started looking all around. Across the river was a ten-storey office building. I couldn't see any of the lights on, but in some of the other buildings further down, there were some signs of life. Namie wandered away, not so interested in the bath. Kazu and Tomohiro looked at it, nervous.

"Well?" I said.

"What? You want to bathe here? Did you bring a bathing suit or something?"

I shook my head no.

"Are there any other hot springs nearby?" Namie asked hopefully.

"There are some in the hotels, but I think you might have to be a guest to use them," Kazu said. Namie fished out a guidebook, and started leafing through. I didn't know anything about other places, but I was positive that this was the place Ryosuke had intended to bring me. This was just like him - an outdoor bath way out in the open in the middle of town. I undid my scarf, and took it off. They all looked surprised that I was stripping here with all these buildings around. I turned my back on the boys, took off my backpack and coat, and set them down on the snow.

For all my bravado though, I have to admit I was kind of scared. Some of the buildings near us seemed to be hotels, and it was hard to tell if anyone was watching or not. I decided not to think about it, and unzipped my boots, and slid them off. The snow was so cold on my stocking feet. I glanced back at the boys, and they were just standing there staring at me.

"Let's just go back to the indoor one," Namie implored.

"That wasn't a spring. That was just tap water," I retorted.

"Then let's go find a spring."

"We're here now. Let's try," I suggested. "The water is nice and warm."

Kazu looked at Tomohiro. There was a long silence, and then finally, Kazu stood up, and took off his jacket.

"What the hell? Why not? You only live once."

I smiled at him, and started taking off my sweater. Namie was still dragging her feet, but she knew I wanted to do this. As I got my sweater off, I started to wish that they did have a changing hut. The town was surprisingly quiet, but every once in a while, a car drove across the bridge not so far from the bath. I guess it really didn't matter though. With a bath like this, people are bound to see you no matter what you do.

"Emi!" Namie shouted, trying to get me to stop.

"Hundreds of people bathe here, don't they Kazu?" I asked. Namie came closer, and whispered in my ear.

"I don't think this is such a good idea. I mean we barely know these guys."

I pulled her off to the side, away from the boys.

"Oh, come on. Just try. I talked with them for a long time last night. They seem like nice guys. We can trust them."

Namie didn't look convinced at all. She sat down on one of the rocks with her back to us.

"You guys go in. I'll stand guard."

Kazu and Tomohiro were down to their shorts, but I wasn't so keen on going in without Namie.

"Namie, come on. I can't do this without you."

"Then get back dressed."

"No. Please? For me? Pretty please."

She glanced over at me, her eyes still suspicious.

"Why is this so important to you?"

"You've got to admit you've had fun this week." I glanced back at the boys. They were still in their shorts, squatting down to keep warm. "Look at them. Do they look dangerous to you?"

She finally looked over, and laughed.

"I guess not, but Emi! For heaven's sake, look at this place. Those buildings could be filled with people."

"Who have probably seen it all before. Relax. Come on. It'll be fun."

Namie looked over at the boys and back at me.

"You're crazy. Do you know that?" She stood up, and took off her scarf. I wasn't sure, but I took that to be a yes. The guys were holding their towels in front of them, and slipping off their shorts. As I suspected, Kazu had a great body, a six pack of a stomach. They both slid into the bath, and set their towels down on the edge.

"The water's beautiful," Kazu said. They were both watching us now. Namie was kind of hiding behind me. I was glad that the boys had stripped, but actually, I did share Namie's misgivings. This was awfully out in the open. "Aren't you girls coming in?" Kazu asked.

I sniffed, and took a deep breath. I've been to nude beaches before. I've been skinny-dipping. I can do this, I told myself. I unbuckled my belt, and undid the top button on my jeans. Namie was staring at me so wired. I nodded for her to get undressed too, and then pulled down my jeans. The boys wolf-whistled at the sight of my bare legs. I turned my back to them, and then pulled down my panties. I pulled off my blouse, my t-shirt and my halter bra. The morning air was so cold, but I honestly didn't care. I was just so excited being naked out here in the middle of town. I could feel people watching, people in the buildings not so far off, but I just walked right over to the edge of the bath, and stood there a moment. Kazu and Tomo looked up, impressed with my body too.

I looked back at Namie, but she was just standing there, afraid I guess. I hurried back to her, and helped her take off her coat.

"Hurry up. I'm freezing," I said.

Back up on the bridge, there were people walking by, and they'd obviously spotted us. One guy pointed me out to the girls he was with. Knowing they'd seen me just got me more excited. Namie was panicking though, covering her mouth as she looked up at them. The boys were looking over at us, perhaps wondering what Namie looked like naked. I felt really strange, but I kept on pulling off her clothes. I was shivering but more from excitement than the cold.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I'm fine. Let's just get in the bath."

I finally got her underwear off. Namie raised her eyebrows high, perhaps feeling the same exhilaration that was nipping at me. I scurried over to the bath, and waded in. Namie was right behind me holding her towel in front of her.

"Wow!" the two boys exclaimed. I dipped my body into the water, but then stood back up, on some kind of natural high. I don't know why, but I was just so horny. It was like the whole week had been building toward this. Then, we heard a loud voice calling down from the bridge.

"What are you kids doing down there?" It was an older man with a trench coat and an officer's hat. At first, I thought he was a policeman, so I sunk down into the bath to hide. As he came closer, we could see the uniform looked more like a security guard's. Kazu finally spoke up.

"Sorry sir. We just came down for a bath."

The man stared at me. He looked kind of annoyed, perhaps upset that I'd been standing here naked.

"I don't know where you kids are from, but I want you to know we run a respectable town here. We don't like any funny business around here." He had a very rustic accent, hard to understand. I bowed my head in apology, and then the others bowed too.

"Sorry," we mumbled.

"Who are you anyway?" he said still looking right at me. Kazu crawled over, and grabbed his towel, tying it around his waist.

"Oh her. She's uh... she's from the States. She doesn't really know the rules around here."

"The States, huh? She ain't one of them traveling performers, is she? Like a stripper or something?"

Namie gasped in shock. I wasn't so surprised though. I guess I had it coming.

"No, no. She's a university student, and a good one too. She was helping us study for our exams." Kazu was quite the talker. I was really impressed with how he was handling this man.

"A university student? Such a beautiful young lady?"

Gradually he was changing his tune.

"You sure you ain't an actress?" he asked me. I was about to answer, when Kazu said,

"Oh, she doesn't speak Japanese. Like I told you, she's an American."

I blushed, nervous at this lie, but I realized that Kazu was just trying to protect me. The guy apparently took him seriously.

"Nice body," he said in English. "You like Japanese?"

I let out a giggle, but then went quiet. I'd better be careful here. Kazu got up out of the bath, and put his hand on the man's shoulder, herding him away from us.

"Anyway, sir, we'd better get going. Sorry to have bothered you."

"Oh, no. It ain't no bother. I just wanted to protect you lovely ladies here. You never know what kind of strange men you'll meet in these parts."

I laughed again. Even Namie cracked a smile. Kazu managed to escort the old man back towards the bridge. I quickly stood up, and made a dash for my towel. The man peered back trying to get a look at me. I dried off as quickly as I could. I still felt excited, but Namie was right. It was kind of crazy to bathe out here in broad daylight. Namie came out, and we both got dressed.

I'm not really sure how many people saw us that day, but it must have been quite a few. One good thing about that guy showing up is that it kind of took the edge off what could have been an awkward situation. Namie didn't even seem that upset with me for talking her into it.

Once we were all back dressed, we went to the train station, and bought some lunch. I exchanged email addresses with Kazu and Tomohiro, and wished them well with their exams. I could tell they really wanted to see us again, but Namie is married, and I had to go back to the States. On the train back, Namie seemed pretty cheery.

"What are you grinning about?" I asked.

"I don't know. I guess it was kind of fun. Thanks for inviting me."

I smiled back. Maybe the two if us are more alike than I thought.