

# Someone Like Me

## By Kelly Matsuura

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### Introduction

*Someone Like Me* is a short concept story, which I intend to expand into Book 2 of a YA novella series. Book 1 is Hongyen's story, and features both Trinh and Joel as secondary characters. In this story, I wanted to explore Trinh's character in more detail and introduce a boyfriend for her, someone who understands her unique ability and has a cool power of his own.

No doubt, I will change some details when I write the novella, but I'm looking forward to creating an adventure story for Trinh and Yuki soon. I hope you enjoy the story so far...

## Someone Like Me

*~Trinh and Yuki's Story~*

Trinh Pham walked through the local mall with two hundred bucks in her purse and a smile on her face. Birthday shopping was one of her favourite things to do; after playing sports, and camping.

“Hey, check out those jeans!” She pointed to Jay Jays’ window then looked back to get her cousin’s approval.

“Hongyen.”

Hongyen had stopped too, but tilted her head in close to Joel’s. Then the giggling started. Had it actually even paused in the last half-hour?

“Hmff!” Trinh had had enough of watching the lovebirds for one day. “Hey, I’m going in there.” She tugged Hongyen’s arm and made sure she was heard.

“Oh, okay. We’ll wait out here for you.” Hongyen and Joel sat on a vacant seat and recommenced cuddling.

“What. Ever.” Trinh bounced into the store, determined to have fun.

Finding the rack with the jeans she had admired, she pulled out her size and walked towards the change-rooms.

“Just those?” The cute attendant handed her a plastic card for a single item and smiled. He seemed about Trinh’s age, and had a smooth Asian face with lovely dark eyes and long lashes. She checked his name badge.

*“doumo arigatou, Yuki-san.”* She couldn’t believe she had just flirted! But she was taking Japanese as her second language course and couldn’t resist the chance to use it.

“Wow! A pretty girl who speaks Japanese,” he teased back. *“dou itashimashite.”*

She bowed her head, hoping to cover her blush. *Pretty?* She had no idea what to say next.

“Do you go to Edenvale Secondary College?” Yuki asked, and resumed folding the clothes on the counter.

“Yes, I’m in Year Ten. Oh, and my name’s Trinh.” She tucked her hair unnecessarily behind her hair. Damn it, Hongyen did that all that time and it drove her mad.

“Hi, Trinh. I’m in Year Ten too, at Alexandra Secondary. I think I’ve seen you at some inter-school sports days. With your sister, is it?” He looked out front where Hongyen was visible on the bench seat with Joel.

Trinh frowned. Of course he noticed Hongyen. She had the delicate bone structure and pale skin of a cosmetics model. Trinh however was often told she had a nice ‘girl-next-door’ face, meaning she was too sun-tanned and freckled. The two cousins, although best friends, couldn’t look less alike.

“Ah, she’s my cousin. Her family moved here a few months ago.”

“It didn’t take her long to find a boyfriend,” Yuki joked. “Joel’s a great guy though.”

“Yeah, he is.” She meant it too; although she’d been feeling a bit left out since the two friends became a couple. Joel had technically been Trinh’s friend longer, and she missed just hanging out with him alone.

“Um, sorry, I should try these on. Don’t want to keep them waiting for me,” Trinh said, reluctant to end the conversation.

“I think they’ll be fine without you.” Yuki gave a little wink. “Hey, I just noticed. You picked out guy’s jeans there. I can show you some cool girl’s ones though.”

*Ah, awkward topic number two.* Only her family, Hongyen, and Joel knew about her weird power.

She took a soft breath. “Yeah, I know, but guy’s jeans fit me better. Plus, I’m a bit of a Tom Boy. I like lots of pockets.” She shrugged and hoped he didn’t think she was gay. It happened. A lot.

To her surprise, he leaned forward with a mischievous grin. “And what do you put in all those pockets?”

Trinh couldn’t think why that might be a dirty question, but it certainly sounded dirty the way he said it. He was flirting back!

“Okay. Well, my chewing-gum, keys, mobile phone...” she started.

“Of course.” Yuki nodded seriously.

“And a few ninja stars...” She raised an eye to make sure he was going along with her.

He kept the same expression. “Very practical. What else?”

“Invisibility spray.”

“How does that work?” he asked, this time holding back a grin.

“I spray myself with it and become invisible. I’ll show you...Oh, damn, the spray’s in my other pair of cargos.” She made a play of slapping her pockets in vain.

They both cracked up.

“You have brothers, don’t you?” Yuki asked.

“Two younger ones. Good guess!” Trinh said, enjoying their chat.

“I have an older sister. She used to make-up funny stories for me like that. I miss her,” he said.

“Oh, has she left home?”

“Yeah, she moved to Adelaide for uni earlier this year. I got her room though.”

“Haha! Good for you.” Trinh hopped from toe to toe. She really did want to talk more, but knew she had to hurry up.

“Go try on your boy jeans.” He shoed her to the change rooms. “I’ll give you a present when you come back.”

“Okay.” She smiled and turned away from him. *Flirt. But how did I miss a cute Japanese guy at the only other high school in town?*

It only took her a minute to answer that question. She froze with the new jeans half-on when she remembered him. *Oh, my god.*

*Don't panic!* Two summers ago, Trinh's parents had let her go on a boy's one-night fishing camp. It was after Trinh had discovered her ability to gender-shift, and they had thought it a good idea for her to spend some time in a boy's persona. She had been thrilled to go, and had created the identity of Thai Kim that she still used now.

Yuki had been on the camp too, but had lost some weight and grown a few inches since then, that's why she'd been slow to remember him. Plus, Trinh hadn't got to know him well. Because of the 'incident', she'd gone to bed early and missed the bonfire. She still wanted to die of embarrassment when she remembered...

*No, don't let it ruin your day!* She had one point of comfort; he knew Thai Kim – a boy – not Trinh Pham as she was most of the time. She should just pretend it had never happened.

"Hey, Trinh. Are the jeans okay? I can bring another size if you need." Yuki's friendly voice outside the door cheered her; he was a nice boy and seemed to like her. She hoped they could be friends.

"Yeah, they fit good." She buttoned the top and turned, checking that they weren't too tight across her bum. Perfect.

"Cool." She heard his footsteps move away.

Quickly changing back into her own pants, she felt better. All she had to do was forget...

"I'll take them, thanks," she said, placing the jeans on the counter.

Yuki smiled again. “Glad you’re happy with them. Ok, give me a sec to ring it up. They’re actually going on sale tomorrow so I’ll give you fifteen percent off.”

“Oh, thanks. You’re great.”

“No worries. And...” he held his hand out. “Here are a couple of *shiken* to fill the pockets with.”

“Wow!” she took the three origami ninja stars, made from colored giftwrap paper, and turned them over. “They’re neat! I love them.”

“*yokatta, Turin-san.*” He handed her the shopping bag and her change.

Their fingers touched as she took the notes and Trinh jumped from the spark.

But Yuki froze and stared at her. “You’re a shifter,” he said. He tried to touch her again but she pulled her hand away.

“Huh? I don’t know...” she mumbled. “Oh, it’s late. Thanks again. *Ja mata.*” She gave a little wave and started to go.

To her surprise, he didn’t try to stop her leaving. “*Ja mata.* Hey, Trinh? My phone number is on one of the stars.” He winked a final time and turned to help the next customer.

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This day was not happening.

“Food Court. Now!” she said as loud as she dared to Hongyen and Joel.  
Thank god she had her back to Yuki.

Joel looked up from whatever he was reading on Hongyen’s mobile phone.

“What’s up with you?”

“Let’s just go.” Trinh marched off to the food court by herself and found a table where they wouldn’t be overheard.

“Hey, I saw you chatting with Yuki. What happened?” Joel asked as he sat down.

“Yeah, you look weird,” Hongyen added, but she seemed genuinely concerned.

“Joel, you know him?” Trinh asked.

“Yeah, just from different sports events. He’s pretty cool. Unless, did he offend you some way? Should I have a word?”

Trinh stifled a laugh at the thought of Joel ‘having a word’ on her behalf. He had the power to heal people—cool, but that didn’t exactly make him a tough guy. Hongyen on the other hand had several powers, fire-throwing being one of them.

Trinh waved him off and forced a smile.

“No, nothing like that. Everything was cool, we were joking around, and then when I took my change from him there was a spark. You know, like a power spark.”

“Wow, what did you do?” Hongyen asked.

“I babbled something, but guess what he said. He stared straight at me and said ‘you’re a shifter’. How the hell did he know that?” She took a sip of water from Hongyen’s bottle.

Joel’s eyes sparkled. “He must have a power too!”

Hongyen frowned. “That’s very specific. Like, how would he sense that about you, exactly?”

“Hongyen’s right,” Joel agreed. “I have a power, but I don’t spark when I touch you, and I can’t tell what powers people have.”

“I can, but that’s a unique power,” Hongyen added. She had the mother-of-all powers and could take or copy powers from other people: she had copied Joel’s healing power, for example.

“But, don’t you only know what the power is when you receive it? Could you just touch someone for a second like Yuki did to me, and then know what kind it is?” Trinh asked.

Hongyen shook her head. “No, but I’ve never tried it that way. I’ve never secretly or accidentally read someone.” She shrugged. “Maybe I could.”

“Doesn’t matter right now. What about Yuki?” Trinh asked.

Joel tapped the table with his sunglasses. “Go back and ask him what he meant.”

“What, just ask him if he has a power?” Trinh wasn’t sure it was a good idea.

“She can’t do that. She’d have to reveal her power,” Hongyen argued. “I could go, but what if he can read me too?” She shivered, as if she didn’t want to get his germs on her.

“I shook his hand once.” Joel said.

“So?”

“After a swim meet, I shook his hand. Nothing happened.”

“Oh.” That gave them all something to think about.

“He can only sense shifters?” Hongyen proposed.

Trinh nodded. “That’s my guess. But what kind of shifters are there? My Dad’s a gender-shifter like me, but the rest of my family has different powers. It’s all random.”

“He’s Japanese, so probably an animal shifter,” Hongyen said.

“Go ask him,” Joel repeated. “Stop being a girl about it.”

“What?” Trinh’s voice squeaked in betrayal. “Joel, this is serious. It’s about super-secret stuff. We don’t just tell anybody that comes along.”

“Hey.” Joel stabbed a finger in the air at her. “You two didn’t tell me straight away and I had to watch Hongyen die and revive twice before I figured out the truth. But I still stuck by you both and kept your secrets.”

Trinh pulled back. Joel rarely brought that up, but when he did, it showed some hurt.

Tears stung her eyes. It wasn't the same for them, they had powers to fight or help people, but she lived part of her life as another person. Who could she trust to handle that?

Hongyen put an arm around Joel, more concerned by his words than noticing Trinh's pain.

Trinh pushed up from the table, wiping a stray tear.

"Forget it. I don't need to worry about it today. I'm gonna go finish my shopping. You two go home if you want." She headed towards the east wing, away from Hongyen and Joel, and away from Yuki's store.

"Trinh!" Hongyen called after her, but didn't follow.

It wasn't fair, she loved them both and was so happy they were together, but didn't they see they were just lucky? Their powers brought them together and the risk they took trusting each other paid off. How could they think it was safe to tell a boy who was a stranger? And by safe, she meant her heart. She was one hundred percent comfortable as both a boy and a girl, but as she approached adulthood she was faced with choosing one identity, like her father had done before she was born. He was the only one who could understand her fear.

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Trinh wandered around the shops a little longer and she picked up a few t-shirts without much thought. She passed the food court again and Hongyen and Joel had gone, so she decided to walk home too.

Thinking about Yuki again, she tried to focus on the positive. He'd been nice, flirted even, and he was funny. He had comforting eyes that somehow reached out to her.

He now knew there was something different about her, but well she knew the same thing about him too, didn't she? She wondered if he was still thinking about it, trying to understand what she was. What was he?

Half-way home, she decided to take a short detour and wander through the botanical gardens. Inside the large park, there was a small lake with a Japanese-style rotunda and various Japanese bonsai and flowers. Hongyen and Trinh sometimes went there after school to gossip and read comics.

She climbed the steps to the rotunda platform, pleased to see she had it to herself. In fact, looking around, there were no people in near sight. She made a snap decision to switch to her boy-form; she didn't like being a sulky girl right now. She shifted, keeping the same clothes on – it was a small blessing that her size didn't change too much. As long as she wore loose t-shirts, she didn't have a problem. Except, now Thai was wearing a bra.

Quickly, he undid it and pulled the straps through the armholes of the t-shirt. "There!" He stuffed the lace bra in the Jay Jays' shopping bag

and sighed in relief that no one saw. Seeing Yuki's *shiken* in the bottom of the bag made him smile. He took them out to look at them again, remembering Yuki had said he'd written his phone number on one.

"Hmm, which one?" The matte paper was smooth and natural, easy to write on, but Thai didn't find any numbers. That meant he had to undo the stars to find them. No, but he wanted to keep the stars!

He toyed with them, twirling them through his fingers while he pictured Yuki's big smile. Thai hands were slightly bigger than Trinh's, and he was able to roll the smallest star over his knuckles, like he usually did with fifty cent pieces or large tokens.

A rustling sound behind him made Thai jerk around and look over his shoulder. A large tabby cat squeezed through a gap in the rotunda's planks and sauntered straight over to his lap.

"Oh god, you're a whopper!" The cat was bigger than any he'd seen before and was heavy too. Thai winced as the cat accidentally stepped on his groin. "Dude, watch it!" But he laughed and lay back down on the deck. The cat climbed all over him, sniffing at his clothes and finally taking a great interest in the ninja stars.

Thai rolled to his side and tugged the largest *shiken* away playfully. "You want this one? Come get it, big boy!" He was sure it was a boy after copping an eyeful. Who would own a tom cat that size and not get it neutered? Holy crap!

The cat toyed with the large star for a minute, and then turned back to the small red one. He pushed it away with his paw and pounced on it, biting into the paper layers.

“Hey, don’t eat it!” Thai reached for it and got scratched on the back of the hand. “Ow!” If it had Yuki’s number on it though, it was worth it. Thai pulled the two segments that made the star apart, searching for the phone number before he chickened out.

“Cool!” Yuki’s number was written on the inside of one piece.

The cat climbed back on Thai’s leg and smooched against his arm, purring like a car engine.

“Should I call? Huh? Just to give him my number. He’s probably still working, anyway,” Thai said. He stroked the cat’s back then got up to dig his mobile out of his backpack.

The scratch on his hand was lightly seeping blood and stung a little. “Thanks for that, mate,” he said, laughing as the cat rubbed against his legs as if to apologise. “Lucky for you I’m not a dog person.”

Thai started to dial then quickly hung up. He couldn’t call as a boy! He changed back to Trinh and she gave her ponytail a shake.

“What do you think of that, gorgeous?” She bent down to pet the cat and to re-assure it she was the same person. Trinh had had a few problems around animals in the past with the change in hormones, but generally they accepted her straight away. People, however, were usually

none-the-wiser; she looked quite different when she changed forms, making her ability to shift a handy power to have sometimes.

The ballsy cat had no qualms about her change, and lifted both front paws up onto Trinh's thighs, the way a dog might do.

"Aw, can I take you home?" She scruffed his neck and noted he didn't seem to have worn a collar recently, maybe he was wild and living in the gardens? Odd that he was so friendly though. His fur coat, though just a mix of grays and browns was lovely and shiny. He certainly looked well cared for. He had beautiful big eyes too, rimmed with white lines. "Beautiful boy," she cooed again, despite knowing she shouldn't get attached.

She sat down on the bench and redialed Yuki's number while rubbing the cat under its chin.

To her shock, a phone started ringing on the other side of the rotunda. She leaped up, expecting to see someone passing by on the narrow pathway, but there was no one.

"What the..." she kept her phone call connected, and the second phone continued ringing from the bushes below the opposite railing.

Peering over, she found the phone sitting on a small ledge, just within reaching distance. She grabbed it and confirmed it was the phone her call was connected to.

"What is going on, huh?" Turning towards the cat, her jaw dropped.

“I didn’t really think this through well,” Yuki said. He stood there looking sheepish in the same t-shirt he had been wearing in the store, but he was holding his jeans and sneakers in his hands; his black boxer shorts were just visible below the hem of his t-shirt.

“That was you? I..” Trinh blushed as she recalled the way she had been stroking the cat. Not sexual, but definitely not the way she would touch a strange boy. Still, that was the lesser problem.

“Oh, you saw everything!” She dropped her bottom to the seat and leaned forward to hide her face. Don’t cry! She willed herself.

“Trinh! Hey, don’t be upset. Hang on...”

She peeked and saw him hopping on one leg to get his jeans on. It reminded her of herself in the change room earlier, and also that she had removed her bra. Thank god she was wearing a thick-printed black t-shirt today.

“Okay.” Dressed, Yuki smoothed his hair and sat next to her on the bench. “I won’t be embarrassed if you won’t,” he said, breaking the ice.

Trinh smiled. “Deal. But, um, that cat was you, right? Not your pet cat that you trained to seduce me?”

He laughed. “Seduce you? It hadn’t crossed my mind, but you’re very good at scratching here and here.” He pointed under his chin and behind his ear, grinning. “No, I just wanted to make sure you called me.”

She punched his leg. “Tell me how you knew? In the store? People with powers don’t usually spark each other like that.”

“Really? Shifters do. Oh, but not if you’re closely related.”

Trinh nodded. “Maybe that’s it. My dad’s like me, but I don’t know any other shifters, just a few relatives with other powers.”

“Like, invisibility?” he joked.

“No! That would be a cool power though. Someone must have it.”

“Yeah, I’ve never seen anyone in Japan or here.”

“How long has your family been in Australia? Your accent is almost native.”

“I was born here, but moved to Japan when I was four, then we came back when I was twelve. I’m bilingual, anyway. How about you? You have no trace of an accent.”

“No, I was born and raised here. I do speak Vietnamese at home though.”

“And you speak Japanese.” He smiled.

“Yeah, but not so well. VCE’s going to be a killer next year.”

“I’ll help you study.” He took her hand and rubbed his thumb over the scratch. “Sorry about this, it wasn’t on purpose. Your smell made me a bit frisky.”

“What?” She couldn’t believe how often he teased, but she loved how everything made him laugh.

“Even after you shift, your female pheromones linger on your clothes. You smell good.” He shrugged.

“I thought we weren’t going to embarrass each other anymore,” she begged; her own way of joking with him. “So, you followed me all the way here?”

“Well, not in my cat-form. But yeah, I finished at work and saw you leaving the mall. I was worried I had upset you and that you wouldn’t call, so I followed you. I’m glad you came here, it’s a beautiful spot.”

Trinh bit her lip. “And then you changed? I didn’t see anyone around when...when I did.”

“I’m sorry, Trinh. I wasn’t perving on you, I swear. But, I had already guessed about Thai.”

“How?” Trinh had to know what he did. Good or bad. She blinked through damp eyelashes.

“Your t-shirt. You wore one just like it on the fishing camp, and you told me your cousin painted it for you. Do you remember that?” he asked softly, holding her hand.

She stiffened but didn’t pull away. *Time to face your past, Trinh.*

“How could I forget? I almost never wanted to be a boy again after that camp. But, I’d forgotten about the t-shirts. Hongyen makes me one for Christmas every year.” She smiled as she looked down at the colourful design. “She calls it my superhero costume, because it’s gender-neutral.”

Yuki rubbed her shoulder gently. “Hey, you’re a superhero to me, girl or boy. Well, I assume Thai can pee straight now, can’t he?” He quickly jumped away before Trinh hit him again.

“That was so embarrassing! Were you there, in the bathroom?” Trinh hoped he hadn’t witnessed the show. Not used to public urinals, Thai had turned slightly while chatting with a few boys and had sprayed straight on Daniel Webber’s arm and shirt. Not only had his urine arched to the right, but upwards!

Yuki nodded while trying to hold back a smile. “I was a little way behind Daniel, getting dressed. His face was priceless!”

Trinh giggled, remembering the event now as a bystander, not the instigator. For the first time, she didn’t feel angry or embarrassed; she felt like she was a whole person, not a girl who became a boy sometimes. Yuki liked her either way, and understood about learning to be someone or something else.

“Toby Glennes still calls me ‘Dumbo’ at footy. ‘Course most people think it’s a joke about my ears,” she admitted.

This made Yuki snort through his nose. “Can I call you Dumbo? Please? Just between us?”

“Sure. If I can call you ‘Ramballs’. My god, those things are scary!” Tears streaked both their faces and Trinh held her side, a strong stitch almost winding her. “Ah!” she leaned back against the wood railing and stretched her arms.

“Come here,” Yuki called softly.

Trinh put her arms down and looked at him, questioningly. Yuki slid over so their legs touched and he kissed her softly on the cheek.

Trinh smiled and used her forefinger to stroke under his chin, just as she had done in his cat-form.

He purred back, but in a human's imitation.

"You do like that," she said, doing it again.

"I like you." He kissed her cheek again, nearer her ear, and she shivered. How amazing, that they'd really only just met, and yet he made her feel so comfortable. Was this what Hongyen first experienced with Joel? Trinh knew a lot about boys from being one, but she was behind other girls her age with relationship experience. She'd never been kissed properly before. Yuki seemed comfortable approaching her, so perhaps had more experience, but then shifters tended to be more open with people by nature.

"What are you thinking about?" Yuki asked, leaning back against the railing but keeping an arm over her shoulders.

Trinh didn't want to ask him anything too private, so quickly thought of a suitable topic.

"Um, what kind of cat are you? You look different from domestic cats. Wilder."

"Yes, I'm from Okinawa, where there's a small island called '*iriomote-jima*'. The Iriomote mountain cat is endangered, and is only found on that island. They are a sub-species of the Asian leopard cat. Us shifters are the paranormal version."

"Wow, that's so cool. So, are Iriomote-shifters common, or not?"

“No, they’re rare too. Just my mum’s family line. My dad is a Japanese bear-shifter, which is more common, but still unique outside of Japan.”

Well, I love your animal form. You can blend in easier than wolves, bears or tigers.”

Yuki nodded. “My sister is a bear-shifter too, so I was jealous of her for a long time. I thought she had the ‘best’ animal, and mine was useless. But I learned it was just typical sibling rivalry that happens in all families, supernatural or human.”

Trinh leaned her head on his shoulder. “You’re right. People say my shift is cool, but I never believed it. I was jealous of others who had powers like fire-throwing or healing.” Trinh didn’t want to reveal Hongyen or Joel’s powers without their consent, so she didn’t mention them specifically. But she had another way to be honest about them. “And I’ve been jealous of Hongyen lately for having a boyfriend and focusing on him. Joel’s my best friend too, but the group dynamic has changed between the three of us.”

“That’s a normal reaction. But can Joel turn into a cat and sneak into Hongyen’s bedroom to hang out anytime?” he whispered. She couldn’t see his face, but sensed him holding back a laugh.

“No, he can’t. Can your sister turn into a boy and spend the whole day with her boyfriend, no questions asked?” Trinh lifted her head to give him a look.

He shook his head. “Nope. Now I feel sorry for her.”

“Yuki?” Trinh asked.

“Mmm?”

“Do you want to go fishing tomorrow?”

He giggled softly as he kissed her again, softly on the lips this time. The sensation was everything Trinh had anticipated. It ripples, she thought. *His kiss ripples through me.*

Yuki stroked her cheek with a finger, and trailed butterfly kisses along her jaw.

“I sure do, mate,” he whispered.

THE END