

Castling

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Kapitel 1:

On the day of Tsukasa's graduation ceremony his Knights *kouhais* had cried. Even though several months had passed since his graduation and he was a 'real' idol working for a production company now, Tsukasa still thought about that memorable moment a lot.

The gentle rhythm of the late night train he was sitting in on his way back from work made it easy to get lost in thoughts.

He wondered what his *kouhais* were doing right now. Of course he was still in touch with them, but were they really okay without him; without their leader?

Tsukasa shook his head. He was sure he had trained them well. They had all grown into excellent Knights, just as skilled as himself and perfectly capable of managing the unit on their own. He was proud of them and believed in them. A part of him knew that he was being a little too over-protective. He should rather worry about himself more.

His manager had already pointed out three times that his singing voice wasn't reaching its full capacity lately. His songs came across as emotionless and sounded irritated, very much unlike the way he had sung when he was still a member of Knights. Arashi suspected it was probably a mental issue. His blonde *senpai* was the only one of his fellow Knights from before Tsukasa became the unit's leader that he still talked to on a regular basis.

He missed them all a lot, but adult life had them all working busily day in day out, without much time to see each other. He didn't want to appear spoiled, but life back then had been so much easier. He had friends to sing along with and their everyday life had been fun and exciting. Now he sang alone. The lyrics were made by some guy from the company he had never met; he didn't relate to the lyrics at all but still he had to sing full of emotions and bring his voice to perfection in time for the concert. How was he supposed to sing a convincing love song in the first place? He had never experienced anything relatable. Still he had to sing the lyrics that were given to him, without much of a choice.

His whole life lately had been nothing but dull, without a spark, without inspiration.

Inspiration.

A face appeared in his mind's eye; eyebrows knit together in concentration, fluffy and messy orange hair paired with eyes green like morning grass. "Ghh!! Don't say anything! Inspiration! Why is there no inspiration?!"

A smile appeared on Tsukasa's lips. That's what he would say for sure. Leo Tsukinaga. Knights' leader when Tsukasa was still only a first year at Yumenosaki. What a weird one he was, but still the redhead had looked up at him a lot. He was wild and after his graduation he had vanished as quickly as he had vanished from school the year before. But he had taught Tsukasa what it meant to be Knights' leader and when he

appointed Tsukasa as his successor he had never felt as proud in his life before. He wondered if his *senpai* was okay?

Just as he had finished the thought, his phone vibrated in his pocket, tearing him from his thoughts. A mail from his manager:

"Changes in your schedule have been made. The date for your joint life performance has been brought forward to next Sunday, since the other idol unit has to depart overseas earlier. Sorry for the circumstances."

A small sigh escaped his mouth as he let his phone slide back into his pocket. Three days left to practice. Tsukasa mentally prepared himself for a sleepless night full of extra practice. But he wanted to bring this song to perfection and finally produce some good results he could be proud of. The redhead knew he still had many weaknesses, but a lack of ambition certainly wasn't one of them!

Kapitel 2:

A cold wind blew Tsukasa's scarf into his face on his way to the train station. He chipped it away in a rush of anger. His eyes were fixated on the ground with a gloomy expression on his face. He was angry with himself. Even though he had practiced so much, his live had been a catastrophe. He wondered why his company hadn't already fired him. Somehow they were very patient with him even though he failed times and times again, but that didn't change how Tsukasa felt about himself.

After the concert he had quickly left the venue in frustration. Certainly not without sincerely apologizing to his manager at least two times. He was frustrated but it was all his fault and he didn't want to treat the management indecently because of his own mistakes. He had started to wander the streets in thoughts. At first he didn't have any particular destination in mind; he just needed the fresh air to cool his emotions. But it was getting late and cold, so he decided to take the shortest route to the station now.

The station was already in sight. A stream of people was moving into the same direction and the air was filled with the sound of footsteps and occasional chatter. From the direction Tsukasa was heading a faint singing voice reached his ear, growing louder the closer he got. Someone stood in front of the station, singing live and surrounded by a bulk of people, so he couldn't actually see the performer. Street performers weren't unusual in Japan. There were many of them, trying to get attention and gain popularity this way, maybe even to get recognised by a company. Tsukasa was lucky that he had attended an idol school which lead to signing a contract directly after graduation, so he didn't have to take that difficult path.

".. Two glittering dreams, colliding into one another...."

The redheaded slid his ticket over the ticket machine and entered the station when more bits of lyrics reached his ear.

"Until this voice gives out, I want this sparkling song to reach you, the best performance, we shall dedicate it to you."

Tsukasa froze in his steps. He knew these lyrics. He knew this voice. But that couldn't be true. Someone bumped into him and excused himself, but the redhead couldn't react.

No, there was no way that could be him. But he just couldn't leave without making sure.

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Some moments later Tsukasa tried to push his way through the crowd surrounding the mysterious singer outside, when suddenly the music stopped. Everyone started clapping and the crowd slowly disbanded.

No! He wanted to see that person! He couldn't let him disappear from the stage before he reached him!

Tsukasa gasped in relief when he caught sight of the performer's back; dressed in a baggy pullover, the hood covering the back of his head. He was still standing in the center where the crowd had just been. He was stuffing something into a huge bag, then shouldering the bag, getting ready to leave.

"Wait!"

Tsukasa dashed towards him, grabbing his pullover to stop him from leaving. The run had made him out of breath and he was clinging to the mysterious person's pullover as if his life depended on it. When he felt the other one turn around, Tsukasa slowly lifted his head and ... stared into a pair of green eyes, green like the morning grass.

"Wahaha! Did you like my performance THAT much? I know, I'm a genius!"

The familiar voice reaching his ears... Tsukasa couldn't believe it. But Leo Tsukinaga was standing right in front of him. His former leader.

Suddenly Leo made a thinking pose, scratching his chin with his hand. "Hmmm, you look familiar! No, don't say anything! I know you! Your name was..."

"Tsukasa Suou! You should be able to remember my name by now, Leader!" Tsukasa made a sullen face, but actually he was incredibly happy to see Leo again, the Leo he knew, unchanged and still his old self, he was almost on the brink of hugging the older one.

"Ahhh!! Suou!! I knew it! The memory is flooding back like a Tsunami reaching the shore! Sweet sweet memories!" Leo whirled around dramatically and nodded in exasperation. Then his eyes found Tsukasa's face again. "But for a chicken to grow taller than his hen! I knew the saying was right! When the student surpasses the master it's..."

Tsukasa didn't listen to the gush of words coming out of Leo's mouth. Now that he saw him close up, he realized his now smaller leader didn't actually look the same way he did in his memories. His behavior was the same as always, but his eyes had dark circles, his hair was unkempt, his clothes dirty and his face looked incredibly thin. Leo never had been one of the tidiest people he knew, but now he almost resembled a homeless person.

"Did you run away from home again?", he interrupted the orange haired boy.

Leo took a moment to answer his question. He closed his eyes, his eyebrows knit together in concentration. Then he said, faking a desperate voice: "You know, Suoh! Something terrible happened! I was cursed by a witch and now I shall never return home again or despair will fall onto my family! I shall wander this magical world like Dorothy*. Do you want to be my companion?"

Leo was once again speaking in riddles but Tsukasa knew him well enough to understand what it meant. The older one must have indeed run away from home again and, judging by his outward appearance, for god knows how long already. There was so much Tsukasa wanted to ask about what Leo had been gone through these past 2 years, but he knew he wouldn't get any real answers out of his mouth that quickly and also it was growing late.

"It's late already. Let's go home. You'll sleep at my place tonight."

He knew it would take time to get Leo to talk but he wouldn't be Tsukasa Suou if he didn't accept this challenge. But most importantly, he would not allow Leo to vanish from his side again any time soon!

*Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz