

# Another Generation

Von Jitsch

## Kapitel 9: Another Love

They were surrounded. Jūdai counted six figures looming around them, all looking exactly the same. Lanky, clad in black leather, eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses. None of them was saying anything.

"This is not a deception again, is it?" Fubuki asked warily.

"If it is, we are all deceived," Asuka noted. "And they don't look like they want to help us."

The six men took a step forward - all of them moved at exactly the same moment and with the same foot. The sound of six feet touching the ground simultaneously instilled a feeling of dread in the three students.

Jūdai raised his left arm with the Duel Disk and reached for his deck in a well-practised motion. But Asuka stepped half in front of him and touched the wrist of his right hand to stop him from inserting the deck into the Disk.

"Jūdai, Nii-san, please let me handle this," she said.

There was a short pause.

Then Jūdai exclaimed "no way" so loud that his voice drowned the protest that Fubuki raised at the same time. Jūdai moved his hand away from Asuka's to finally put his deck in place.

Asuka turned around to him and caught his gaze. The determined look on her face made him freeze with his right hand on the way to the Duel Disk's activation switch.

"Jūdai, we heard that you are the one who can beat Darkness and that Nii-san is also important. So you both need to go on," Asuka said sternly.

Jūdai stared back at her. "We can fight them together," he said with conviction.

"But if you lose, everything is lost!" she protested.

"And if we win we are one step closer to beating Darkness!" he replied eagerly.

Asuka looked sad. "I know you have done amazing things that nobody thought possible... but the monsters have told you to team up with Johann, right? We split up so he can get the *Rainbow Dragon* and we can get Nii-san. So you should not risk everything here but reunite with the others."

"I agree with her," *Yubel* added.

It made Jūdai turn and look at the monster. "You are telling me to ditch Asuka!?" he asked angrily.

"I am telling you to look at the options realistically. It was you who decided to trust *Crystal Keeper* and *Crystal Master*, so you should go with their plan."

Jūdai stared at the ground, then back to Asuka who had stayed silent, guessing that he was talking to the companion she could not see.

A low chuckle came from the Trueman who was standing closest to Jūdai. "It is nice to

see you argue, but the discussion is pointless. We are not going to let any of you get away."

He raised his left arm, which burst into fragments that looked like cards and set itself together as a Duel Disk. His doppelgangers on his left and right did the same.

Jūdai took a ready stance. Fubuki reached for his deck.

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Somewhere in the forest off the Academy's main building, the duel between Amon and the false Shō Marufuji was coming to an end.

"I activate *Big Summon Cloud*. Due to its effect I can pay half of my Life Points to Special Summon one 'Cloudian' monster from my hand. I pay half of my Life Points to Special Summon *Cloudian - Eye of the Typhoon* that I just drew with the effect of *Pot of Avarice*."

As Amon's Life Points dropped from 3800 to 1900, the one-eyed Cloudian appeared in front of him with a low growl. The monster had 3000 Attack Points.

"I attack your *Cyberdark Edge* with *Eye of the Typhoon*," Amon calmly ordered.

A beam shot from the eye of the monster like a lightning bolt, but it did not hit *Edge* itself - the monster pushed *Drillroid*, which was caught in its fangs, forward to intercept the attack. The Roid was destroyed, but *Edge* stayed afloat. Amon's opponent did not bother to explain this part of *Edge's* effect. They both understood how it worked.

The opponent's Life Point counter fell from 1000 to 400 by the battle damage from the attack. Amon straightened his back and adjusted his glasses. "The effect of *Natural Disaster* occurs. You take 400 damage for *Drillroid* which was destroyed and sent to the graveyard."

A whirlwind shot from the card image and engulfed the opponent as well as the remaining monster. *Edge* screeched. The Life Point count showed zero.

"Damn you, Amon Garam."

The voice did not sound like the small boy anymore, it was much lower, but that could also be because the wind distorted the sound.

"Darkness is not defeated. It can never lose, because there is always darkness. And some time you will give in to it, too," the voice said.

Then the whirlwind disappeared. Amon's opponent was gone like he had never existed in this world. And with him, the memories of a boy called Shō Marufuji.

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Trueman grunted.

Before the eyes of Jūdai, Asuka and Fubuki, the shapes of the sinister men in front of them quivered, then burst into shapes of pitch black cards that scattered on the ground like falling leaves.

Just a moment later, the cards gathered again, but they only formed a single person this time. That one looked dismayed.

"What happened?" Jūdai asked.

"I don't know but this is your chance!" Asuka said loudly and pushed Jūdai's back. He stumbled forward, past Trueman. Asuka pushed Fubuki as well.

"As if I am going to let you go!" Trueman wheeled around.

But Asuka dashed into his way. "I am your opponent," she said fiercely.

She raised her left arm with the Duel Disk.

Trueman's lips twitched, but after a short pause he nodded. "Fine. I will beat you in no time."

The Duel Disk appeared on his arm again. He took a tall posture and glared down at her. Asuka did not flinch.

"Asuka, no!" Jūdai protested.

This time it was Fubuki who yanked him back by grabbing his arm. Jūdai turned to him with an irritated look.

Fubuki's expression was serious. "She wants to fight. We must not stop her," he urged.

Jūdai looked conflicted. "But if she loses..." he glanced back at Asuka, "I will forget about her... I have already forgotten so many, I just don't want to..."

Asuka had heard him talk and turned around. "Jūdai, please trust me. I won't lose so easily," she said with confidence.

Jūdai stared at her for a moment and then his expression became determined.

"Asuka," he said. His gaze flickered before he found the resolve to look right at her. A hint of a blush appeared on his cheeks.

"That night I couldn't give you an answer. I'm still not sure if... if I like you the same way you said that you like me."

Jūdai was speaking fast, and with an uncharacteristically low voice. But she could tell that he meant the words he was saying.

"There is one thing I can say, though: You are an important person and I don't wanna lose you!"

That part came out stronger, resembling his usual demeanor more closely.

Asuka smiled gently. "Thank you, Jūdai."

Jūdai raised his right hand into the air. "I trust your skills as a duelist. You beat that guy, and I will beat Darkness, and then we can figure the rest out."

Asuka nodded and took his cue for a high-five. Their hands touched ever so briefly.

"I will," Asuka said.

"Good luck," Fubuki wished her.

Then he and Jūdai turned around and started to hurry back towards the main building.

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"Wait," Jim urged, and Johann followed his advice immediately.

They had been moving through the jungle-like vegetation somewhere behind the Academy's main building, but now both stood still. Even Caren fell quiet. The only sound was rustling leaves, but that could have been from a breeze.

Except someone stepped out from between the trees no two meters away from them just moments after.

Johann's tension vanished as he recognized the tan skin and the dark red hair that was pointing up like a flame.

"There you are," Amon Garam said.

He was slightly sweaty, but so were Jim and Johann. Otherwise he looked absolutely fine. And in his left hand he carried something.

Seeing it, Johann suddenly *felt* something, too. A presence. Similar to the spirits.

"Is that...?" He approached Amon and extended his arm without even really thinking. It was like the object was drawing him in. Which was probably the case.

"Indeed," Amon said and raised his lower arm to present what he had found. It looked like a rectangular brick of glass, but the material was shimmering in soft rainbow

colors and inside it, they could make out a Duel Monsters card.

Johann took another step towards Amon. He was slowed down by the awe he was suddenly feeling. He turned his head to his two ghostly companions, who both nodded without saying a word.

Johann slowly extended both hands. When the tips of his fingers grazed the material, it started to dissolve, as if it was melting. A soft light shone from the card inside. And then the glass-like material was gone and the card was right in Johann's hands, and none of the onlookers could have said how that had happened.

"Good to see you again." It was *Crystal Keeper* who had spoken. *Crystal Master* stayed silent, but although his face was hidden behind the mask, his posture seemed relax just a little bit, showing relief.

Johann did not even register the words of his guardians. His attention was fully on the card that he now had in his hand. He held it closer, mesmerized by the drawing of a long, slender dragon covered in white armor-like scales that were decorated with seven differently colored gems.

This was the card he had been wanting to obtain ever since the Crystal Beasts had chosen him as their master. But it felt like he had actually been waiting for this moment all his life.

The Ultimate Crystal God, *Rainbow Dragon*.

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"I normal Summon *E-Hero Sparkman* in attack mode," Trueman declared.

Asuka had already successfully set up her field by Ritual Summoning *Cyber Angel Benten* and setting two cards during her first turn. Now it was for him to really start the duel.

The appearance of the Elemental Hero made Asuka hold her breath for a second.

"That's..." she gasped.

Trueman smirked. "Is something the matter?" he asked.

Asuka quickly regained her composure. "No. Go on," she said.

Sure, *Sparkman* was a staple card in Jūdai's deck, but that did not mean that it was forbidden for anyone else to use it. Still... it did not feel right.

Trueman did nothing to quell this feeling: "I attack *Benten* with *Sparkman*," he ordered calmly.

Asuka's hand flicked to the activation switch of her trap card. *Sparkman* had only 1600 attack points and would be destroyed by the stronger *Benten*, so it was obvious that that was what Trueman wanted, for whatever reason. But what reason could that be? *Sparkman* had no effect. Was there a card effect he could activate when his monster got destroyed? Or was this about losing life points?

Even if it was the latter, there was a way to turn this in her favor, and she would use it.

"Not so fast. I activate *Double Passé!* I can turn an attack against one of my face-up monsters into a direct attack."

*Benten* evaded the incoming monster elegantly and the solid vision hologram shot its lightning at Asuka instead. Her life dropped to 2400, but she smiled.

"And now my monster that you targeted can make a direct attack against you, too. *Benten*, go!"

Following her pointing finger, the Cyber Angel in the skin tight suit dashed forward and swung her nunchuk at Trueman. His life fell to 2200 when it hit.

She had used this move before with *Sparkman* on the field. It was years ago, but she still remembered that duel clearly. The first time she had played against Jūdai. Back then she had just been curious to figure out what that guy was all about. He had piqued her interest as an Osiris Red who didn't act like he had just landed in the least prestigious dorm of the Duel Academy. Who openly challenged some of the best new Obelisk Blue students (Who exactly? She could vaguely remember interrupting a duel between Jūdai and someone else, but that person was already gone from her memory).

That first duel had shown her that Jūdai was passionate about dueling, and that he easily respected anyone who was the same. Later she had learned that he could be reckless, but that an inner voice of reason kept him from doing outright stupid things. Even later than that she had come to understand that that voice of reason was his spirit partner Yubel, whom she could not see. But after the strange events surrounding the Seven Stars in their first year and the Society of Light in the second, believing in Duel Monster spirits came easy to her.

"Not quite bad," Trueman said, but his smirk did not look like he was feeling threatened by her move. "You are the Queen of Obelisk Blue, after all."

Asuka did not reply, but the remark made her frown. She *had* been called that before, although she could not remember by whom. But she was sure that was almost as long ago as her first duel against Jūdai. At least she was sure that he had never called her that. To him, they had always been equals. There were too many at the Academy that saw her as a woman before they saw her as a duelist. But Jūdai had never been like that, right from the start. And maybe that was why she had fallen for him.

Thinking of him made her gather her resolve again. She would not lose. He had not discarded the possibility that he could love her back, after all.

"I set three Spell or Trap cards and end my turn," Trueman announced, breaking her line of thought. She had to concentrate on the duel now!

Asuka drew and smiled. If he could not stop her next move, she had already won.

"I activate the Ritual spell *Machine Angel Ritual*. I offer my *Cyber Angel Benten*, which is Level 6, and *Petit Angel* from my hand, which is Level 2, to Ritual Summon the Level 8 Ritual Monster *Cyber Angel Dakini*."

An altar appeared on the field right in front of her and her two monsters turned into whirls of energy that gathered just above the altar's center. The new monster emerged from that exact place in a flash of light and took a striking pose.

"When *Dakini* is Ritual Summoned, you have to select and destroy one of your monsters. Say good-bye to *Sparkman*!"

Trueman shrugged as if this was not a bad thing. The hologram of the four-armed Cyber Angel lurched forward and slashed at *Sparkman* with the sword she was holding. The opponent monster disappeared easily.

Asuka almost gave a sigh. With the three face-down cards the possibility that this would not work had been high. But it did not look like that. On the other hand he had aimed at getting *Sparkman* destroyed from the start. Was she just playing into his hands?

But no, she must not let this chance go: "You have no monsters left to protect you. I attack directly with *Dakini*."

The Cyber Angel jumped forward again, but this time Trueman did react.

"I activate my Trap Card *Draining Shield*. It negates your attack and increases my life by *Dakini's* attack points."

As the card flipped up, the hologram of a large shield of light appeared in the air and intercepted the blow from *Dakini's* spear. Then the light fell down on Trueman like a curtain and Asuka watched his life rise to 4900.

Well, this was bad. If he had tried to destroy *Dakini* she could have stopped it with her set card *Angel Blast*, but now he had more than full life again. On the other hand, she did have her ace monster *Dakini* and *Angel Blast* left so there was a lot she could still do.

"I end this turn," she announced.

Trueman announced his draw.

"I Summon *Dark Psycho Eye*."

The appearing monster was a weird mess of limbs made from flesh and some grey substance. It did not look like it had a face, or anything comparable. There was just a grey blob where, on an animal, the head would be. It displayed only 400 attack points. Asuka frowned. This was a monster where it was likely that it would be a pain because of its effect, not its strength.

A mean smirk appeared on Trueman's lips. "Let me show you what this monster is about," he said in a low, menacing voice.

The blob that was the monster's head shook, then opened up like a flower, except the petals were muddy grey flesh and the middle of it was a big eyeball. So that was what the monster's name referred to.

It made Asuka feel dizzy to look at the eye so she quickly cast down her look to the feet of the creature.

"Now I activate my Trap Card *Birthright*. It allows me to Special Summon a Normal Monster from the Graveyard. I choose *Sparkman*."

The card flipped up and the *E-Hero* appeared on the field again with a low grunt.

Asuka suddenly felt uneasy. This move...

"Next I activate *Polymerization*. I fuse *Sparkman* from my field and *E-Hero Clayman* from my hand to form *E-Hero Thunder Giant*!"

Clayman appeared and got pulled into the vortex of the fusion before the big, sturdy *E-Hero* appeared and flexed both arms.

"Cool, eh?", her opponent said.

Asuka blinked. That voice... She blinked again. But there was no doubt. Standing across from her was Yūki Jūdai. But something was weird, because he was wearing the uniform of Osiris Red.

"If you are trying to fool me, don't make it so obvious," she scolded.

"Hey, Asuka! What are you angry about. Let's just have a fun duel!" Jūdai replied.

He sounded just like back then. Young, ambitious, and cheerful. He had not been like that recently, not since...

She could not remember what had happened, but she knew that Jūdai had been rather gloomy recently. And she had kept her distance ever since her confession.

Had she been afraid of hearing his answer?

Or of the reaction people around them might show if they actually got together?

"Hey, snap out of it! We're in the middle of a duel," Jūdai called out.

Asuka shook her head to get rid of those fruitless thoughts and quickly assessed the duel situation.

"You are right. But I think you miscalculated. You cannot use *Thunder Giant's* effect to destroy a monster because it only works on ones that have fewer attack points than itself."

"Oh gosh, you're right!" Jūdai sounded outright shocked.

But then he grinned. "Just kidding. I have something in mind."

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Jūdai and Fubuki did not stop to run until they were on the straight path that led up to the main entrance of the Academy building. There, Fubuki slowed down first and turned around to check if they were being followed. There was no trace of Trueman. Nor of any other person.

"Will Asuka be okay?" Jūdai asked, halting as well.

He was talking mostly to himself, but *Yubel* still felt obliged to answer. "She will be fine. You know she is strong," the monster said gently.

Jūdai nodded slowly as they walked on. Fubuki did not say anything, even turned back to where they were coming from with a worried expression.

They did not get much farther when someone called Jūdai's name. He turned in the direction the voice had come from and spotted blue hair and a cowboy hat behind one of the statues. Seconds later, Johann Andersen emerged, closely followed by Jim Cook. A few steps behind them came Amon Garam.

"Guys! You're okay!" Jūdai exclaimed and hurried over.

Johann showed him a confident smile. "Sure are."

"Did you find it?" Jūdai asked excitedly.

Instead of saying anything, Johann proudly held up a card in his hand. By the color of the card it was an Effect Monster. And by the presence that Jūdai could feel it was a considerably powerful one.

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"Are you ready, Asuka? Because here I go," the false Jūdai announced.

Asuka nodded slowly. "Try to beat me," she said.

Jūdai, especially the one from the past, always acted like it was already decided that he would win, even if it was not. The record was on his side - in important matches he had almost never lost. She could remember that as a fact, although she had trouble to remember all the duels she had watched him play in detail because mist had already settled over the memory of his opponents.

"First I attack *Dakini* with *Dark Psycho Eye*. Go!" Jūdai commanded.

The weird monster moved forward. *Dakini*, which had the absolute upper hand in terms of attack strength, slashed back at it with the second knife. *Dark Psycho Eye* disappeared just like that and Jūdai's life fell to 2600.

If her opponent had not boosted himself with *Draining Shield* last turn, this damage would have wiped him out. So he had been preparing for it?

"Now comes the cool part! When *Dark Psycho Eye* is destroyed, I can select one of your monsters and take control of it until the end phase," Jūdai announced.

Asuka felt like a knife was stabbed in her gut.

She had felt well protected with *Angel Blast* there to protect *Dakini* from destruction and the monster itself being on the strong side. But against this move she was helpless.

"That's not... not like you, Jūdai," she managed.

Well, she *knew* her opponent was not really Jūdai. Now more so than before. Because the real Jūdai would not do something like stealing her monster and using it against her. Even Yubel's effect of turning the opponent's strength against them was something he outright hated (and mostly successfully refused) to use.

"Well, yeah, but I thought it would be nice to have both our monsters together!" Jūdai said with a grin and spread his arms.

"After all, I don't want to fight *against* but *with* you."

Asuka swallowed.

This was not the real Jūdai. But his words... they were so alluring.

"We... we can fight together but first we have to beat Darkness..." she weakly said.

Jūdai shook his head.

"Come on, Asuka. You know that that's not true. I'm aiming to be a pro duelist and you decided to leave Japan and study in the United States. Once this is over we're going to be separated."

That was another stab.

How Trueman knew she had no idea.

She had not told him. Not the real Jūdai. But it was true.

That was another reason why she had kept away from him all the time.

She had struggled with her decision, an offer to study at an abroad branch of the Duel Academy. But after he had not given her a positive response to her confession, she had made up her mind and accepted.

His promise to figure things out was directed at the void she was inevitably going to leave.

"We... can keep in touch... Pro duelists travel all the time, just look at... uh... I think I knew some pro duelist but I can't remember that person..."

Jūdai shook his head.

"You're lying to me and you're lying to yourself. After graduation it's goodbye. So why not give in to the Darkness - where nothing ever changes?"

She was out of moves anyway.

She had no monsters and only a useless Trap card left on her field and both *Thunder Giant* as well as *Dakini* had enough attack points to wipe out her remaining life on their own.

"*Thunder Giant* and *Dakini*, attack together," Jūdai said.

Asuka nodded. That made sense with what he just had said.

"I'm sorry, Jūdai," she whispered, words directed to the real one. "I couldn't tell you that I'm leaving. It's probably best that I disappear without a trace. Goodbye."

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"Weren't we waiting for someone to catch up?" Fubuki asked.

Johann and Jūdai, who had been looking at the *Rainbow Dragon* card together, turned to him in surprise.

"No, I don't think so," Jūdai said.