

Ignorance is bliss

Von Merilsell

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Kapitel 1: A gamble can be risky...or the thing which is needed

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Chapter 1: A gamble can be risky...or the thing which is needed

"Absence sharpens love, presence strengthens it."

--Thomas Fuller

Shuurei could hardly stifle a yawn as she finished yet another page of her report. She glared at the looming pile of paperwork before her, as if willing it to shrink in size. She had once again sacrificed sleep to stay over night in the archive for getting the massive amount of paperwork done.

There was no other way of doing so, because it was an important case she worked on and Kouki her chief of the section of Government inspection needed the finished files as soon as possible. Where the hell was Seiga anyway?

"Good-for-nothing idiot, can't be counted on to do his share," Shuurei muttered to herself before shaking her head and putting down the pen, taking a deep breath as she did so.

"Well, okay, maybe it's time for a little break - just a little - to ease my mind; it is a wonderful clear night after all." the young woman said and decided to take a short walk in the beautiful royal garden before finishing the rest...or as much as possible. She sighed.

"Damn you, Seiga. How should I alone get this much work done before morning?"

Shuurei rubbed her tired eyes with both of her hands. Well, she had to make it or Seiga and Kouki would never acknowledge her as official of their section and whining about it wasn't helpful at all.

"I practically begged chief to be allowed to work over these files, so it's my turn to repay his trust. Well, after finishing the walk," she decided, while leaving the archive in the direction of the door.

As soon as she stepped outside, Shuurei inhaled the cold fresh air and immediately felt her mind freed a bit from the hours of repetitive desk work. It was a perfect night to take a walk, not too chilly anymore and the half rounded moon shone brightly over the palace garden.

Shuurei found it quite amazing how quiet and peaceful this normally overly busy place could be late at night. She didn't even see a single guard around, *which either meant they went patrolling or to sleep*, she silently mused. *It's wonderful here - now I understand why Ryuuki liked to stroll through the garden, when he couldn't sleep*, Shuurei thought with a faint smile on her lips.

Wait... her eyes widened,what if I meet him now while wandering around here? He is the last distraction I could need now. ...and Ryuuki doesn't even know I'm here at this time of the night, so meeting him would be kind of... awkward. She panicked lightly.

Actually, a small part of her wished for meeting him this way (though she would never admit it to anyone). Neither had seen the other for the past few weeks due to being overloaded with their work. Shuurei could imagine that ruling a country wasn't a job which left much free time and it was quite noticeable to her that Ryuuki took his duty as emperor much more seriously now compared to the times before. Yes, he was handling things more maturely and had indeed grown as a king - since that incident in the Kyusai cove - this was a certainty she could not deny.

Yet somehow she couldn't shake off the nagging feeling of him....avoiding her. Albeit this fact seemed quite ironic to Shuurei - Wasn't he always the demanding one in their relationship? In their always returning routine of Ryuuki confessing his undying love to her, while Shuurei was the one who constantly shrugged him off, saying he should give his love to someone else? Even after she had told him dozens of times that he had to give up, the young kind had always refused to follow her advice, three years long.

All the more was she taken aback as Ryuuki made this kind of suggestion not so long ago: A gamble, an agreement. Shuurei could easily recall every single one of their words in her mind, as if it were said yesterday:

"An emperor must marry. If that is a duty as a king we'll get married. This means we can't wait forever for you, Shuurei. In addition, if we marry someone other than you it will be Jyuusan-hime."

Wait wha...huh? Why all the sudden? Instantly, her mind and heart started racing again, just like that time she had heard those words from him. She couldn't believe what he was saying there; Shuurei felt her face fall out in disbelief.

Ryuuki observed her reaction carefully and was pleased with what he saw. *That's good, it looks like we still have a chance, he inwardly smiled.* "So let's play a game: we'll set a time limit," the young emperor added. "If you continue to escape us until then you win. We'll never say that I want to marry you again; We won't trouble you."

Shuurei couldn't do anything except stare at him, dumbfounded.

"However, if I manage to make you accept my proposal, I win. How about that?" Ryuuki finished and looked expectantly at her, hoping she would react the way he thought she would.

What. He's suggesting a gamble? This was all she was able to think in this moment. *However, what a foolish desperate idea of Ryuuki. Why is he doing that? He knows I would never give up my dream being an official to marry him.* "It sounds like you are at great disadvantage," she proudly declared to him. "Well, fair enough. I'll play your game. What is your time limit?"

Ryuuki smiled inwardly - she had reacted like he thought. He was pleased to know that he knew her well enough. And with that thought he bowed down to her to whisper the time limit in her ear.

What Shuurei heard then didn't surprise her - it was just so typical for them.

Kapitel 2: Irritations of heart

Chapter 2: Irritations of heart

The affections are like lightning: you cannot tell where they will strike till they have fallen. -Jean Baptiste Lacordaire

Two months had passed since that day they made that arrangement. She walked on until she stood right in front of the alley where the sakura trees were located. She didn't know why she was wandering this way and before she fully realized it, she was already there. In front of the tree where Ryuuki and she first met so long ago. The branches of the trees rustled in the fresh breeze and the cold wind caused her to shiver momentarily. In spite of the chilly gust at times, it was indeed one of those many mild nights lately, indicating that the winter was almost gone. As Shuurei looked up to the clear night sky and to the branches of "their" sakura tree, she recognize a few little buds, which would surely bear flowers soon.

"Until the cherry blossoms bloom..."

These words said by Ryuuki echoed clearly in her mind. This was their time limit ...and in barely one month it would become spring - this she knew for sure....

"Looks like I'll win, huh?" she silently breathed to herself. "Ryuuki will give up on me and marry Jyuusan-hime ...it would be better for all of us, I never intended to give up my job for him anyway."

But why was she willing to make this agreement with him months ago? She failed to find a proper explanation for her actions back then. Maybe she wanted to proof something to him, just what was it? In her eyes Jyuusan-hime was the most fitting wife for him. She was beautiful and well mannered; more than Shuurei ever could be.

Jyuusan-hime was literally predestined to be on the side of the emperor, because she would be by far the more elegant empress. Shuurei sighed - why was this bothering her anyway?

No, she was just imaging that because if Ryuuki would take her as his wife all of their problems would be solved. Shuurei wouldn't have to give up being court official and Ryuuki could solve the heir problem and also represent an elegant empress on his side. Yet there was a slightly dejected feeling spreading inside of her as she thought of Jyuusan-hime as Ryuuki's wife. She shrugged to get rid of it and didn't really understand where it came from, because there was no reason for feeling down, *was*

there? She indeed was happy with her fulfilling job. It had been her life's dream to work as imperial official and since a few years, she was living her dream. And it was all thanks to Ryuuki, who made it possible with the relatively new law he installed, which allowed women to take part in the world of politics, something had been strictly forbidden before.

Therefore, Shuurei felt a strong obligation to support him as a subordinate with all her heart. ...Although, that was not the only reason. She also thought that Ryuuki was a fine king ...and man. She reminisced on the mental picture of him - he always seemed to be happy when seeing her. So it was utterly beyond her comprehension why Ryuuki avoided her since he had made this agreement with her. She hadn't seen him for a couple of weeks now, so there was in fact very less time left for him to "win". *No I must just imagine that he doesn't want to cross my way, she shrugged, I bet he's just busy with governing his country.*

Shuurei was confused by those nonsensical thoughts which suddenly flooded her mind.

Why do I care so much about this fact anyway? I mean, I should be more happy about the fact that Ryuuki stopped chasing after me, shouldn't I? It's better for us both.

Despite these thoughts, Shuurei recently caught herself thinking of him and what he was doing from more often than she wanted and it really bugged her. She took a deep breath and leaned on the tree, while sinking into her thoughts again. Why did her mind fill up with questions regarding Ryuuki when she had some quiet moments to herself? She had sworn to herself never to fall in love- it was the last thing she could ever need. In the world of politics one always had to be tough and hence love wasn't something Shuurei would attach any great importance to. Because to love meant to show feelings - a luxury Shuurei couldn't allow herself in a world ruled by men.

No it isn't love, I'm just worried about him, she reassured herself. She hadn't seen him for several weeks now and didn't know if he was okay at all. And before she fully realized it, her mind was annoyingly circling around Ryuuki again. *Why doesn't he come to see me anymore?*, she was asking herself, before she wondered about how he was doing. *Is he still afraid of sleeping alone in the dark? He shouldn't be lonely anymore since he now has Jyuusan-hime on his side, right?*

She recalled seeing him in a few official meetings at last, but it didn't gave her the clarity of mind she searched for. Because she knew that in those meetings Ryuuki always had to hold up the charade of being "the emperor". So seeing him then wasn't really conducive to her knowing if the person Ryuuki was okay.

The young woman tried to focus her mind on the more important things like her actual work, but no matter how hard she tried to desist, her mind kept circling back on finding the reason why Ryuuki avoided her like the plague. He never acted that way before and this was something Shuurei confused her more than she liked to. She felt a nagging feeling creeping up in her stomach and remain there, much to her discomfiture.

No, it couldn't be that I actually miss him, or could it? She bit her lower lip on this thought and tried to get rid of it, but failed. So Shuurei indeed became annoyed with herself: "Oh great, just great. Instead of finding a solution for the problem I have on my files I'm worrying about that stupid emperor!" she blurted out into the night. Then a thought hit her mind.

What if I shortly check up his place to see if Ryuuki is okay? No, she shouldn't do that, because she knew the idea was much too weird to implement and she had to get back to business; there was still so much work to do!

So despite knowing that giving in to this slightly unusual idea wasn't the wisest thing to do; Shuurei's feet already seemed to find their destination of their own. Her room had been next to his back in the days; therefore, it wasn't surprising at all that she didn't have any trouble finding the correct way again. The king's private chamber, where she had once stayed the night with him... at the time as he had protected her from the poison by drinking it himself.

"Yeah great plan, Shuurei what now? Knocking on his door? I couldn't peek in, I'm sure the guards would arrest me on the spot...or at least ask what I'm doing here," she quietly muttered to herself. Meeting a guard now would end in a most humiliating situation, so she'd definitely like to avoid that particular confrontation like the devil avoided the holy water. *How am I supposed to answer anyway? Excuse me, Mr. imperial guard for sneaking around here, but I haven't had a small talk with his highness for over two months! That's the reason why I'm now checking him up late at night?! Yeah right! Not exactly my duty as his subordinate. What the heck was I thinking by coming here?* Shuurei was highly annoyed with her irrational act now.

I just should be glad that no guard is around...again. Slowly she wondered if there were any guards on duty at all tonight. She pondered if she should inform Seiran about their bad discipline tomorrow. *I mean what if something happens to Ryuuki? ...ahh, not again,* she shrugged, feeling perturbed and embarrassed for giving in to her stupid idea. She knew she should go back to her desk and finish her paperwork... after all, that was so much more important than sneaking around here late at night and worrying about Ryuuki. *I shouldn't be here at all.*

She was sure he'd be okay and felt truly idiotic about the fact that she stood here - outside his room. Irked with herself and despite her intention to leave, her eyes still remained fixed on Ryuuki's door. She shortly shrugged and slowly turned around to leave. Let's go back no--

"AAAAAAAHH!"

A single scream parted the silence in the night.

"Ryuuki!!!" Shuurei yelled out in horror. All her former intentions were forgotten in a split second. It was Ryuuki who had screamed there - she would recognize his voice among thousands. Her mind raced and she was highly alarmed. *What happened? Was he hurt?*

She feared the worst, so she turned around as fast as she could and without thinking, practically barging into his room. As soon as she entered, she froze on the spot. Shuurei saw how Ryuuki sat up in his bed, panting heavily, his face deeply buried in both hands...and seemingly ...crying? She blinked and couldn't believe her eyes, yet she felt how her heart faintly ached at the sight. Shuurei knew it was the wrong thing to do, but a bigger part of herself was curious about why Ryuuki was so devastated. So she shoved her doubts aside and slowly came closer until she stood in front of his bed. He still hadn't noticed her ...*"Ryu..uki...?"* the young woman softly whispered his name, as if she were afraid to scare him even more with her words.

Finally, he recognized the source of the voice and thus turned around to her, while still shuddering massively. *"Shuurei?"* his tone revealed utter surprise and yet alleviation to see her. Looking straight at his face, Shuurei panicked inwardly, Oh god what was I thinking? What the hell am I doing here?

She felt his inquiring gaze resting on her and briefly struggled for words, before blurting out at once, *"Ehh, you know I had so much work, so I stayed in the archive over night but needed a break, so I took a walk in the garden and as I was nearby -heaven forbids to tell him why-* she added mentally, *"then I heard you scream. Where are all the guards by the way? It's so weird no one is around."*

Shuurei felt awkward to the bone, even more as she recognized that her face was burning, yet she didn't dare to move from her spot. *"What happened Ryuuki? Are you alright?"* she added very quietly.

Ryuuki looked up at her, his eyes still blurred from the tears *"I...I had a nightmare, a truly horrible one,"* he confessed in a nearly inaudible voice, still struggling to compose himself.

So he's drenched in tears because of a nightmare?, she narrowed her eyebrows in confusion *"What was so horrible about it, Ryuuki?"*

Instead of answering her question he suddenly reached out for her, grabbed her by the sleeves of her robe and without warning, pulled her close to him. It all happened in a blink of an eye, too fast for Shuurei's mind to comprehend. The only thing she was able to notice was how her heart set out for a second at this sudden movement ...and how it started to palpitate faster as she found herself in his arms, in his crushing embrace.

A moment of silence passed, where neither of them said a word. After the initial shock had abated, she came back to her sense and the warmth of his body was more than ever obvious to her. At another time, she would have shoved him away instantly, like she used to but right now she was so captured in his arms that that was not an option. She reluctantly surrendered in his arms, a small part of her even *wanting* to.

Shuurei didn't know why, but his embrace had a somehow calming and comforting effect on her. So despite her mind telling her it would be reasonable to get away from him, she closed her eyes to enjoy the warmth, which fully enveloped her. She decided that her emotional behavior was only due to the relief nothing happened to the

emperor ...no, to Ryuuki.

"You died," his whisper suddenly broke the silence between the two and contemporaneously put Shuurei out of her daze.

Her eyes widened in bewilderment at his words. "Err what?"

The young emperor released her from the embrace but only so far that he was able to look into her brown eyes. "Shuurei, it..was..so real. I saw you...dying... right in front of my eyes. I couldn't do anything to save you," he began to sob again, clinging onto the fabric of her arms.

She blinked, and stared dumbfounded at him, while her mind tried to grasp the meaning of his words. *The reason why he was so devastated earlier was due to what happened to mein a dream of his?* She was taken aback and although she thought his behavior was a bit too extreme for just dreaming, Shuurei felt slightly flattered and wondered why such a strange warm feeling crept down to her stomach. "Hey, Ryuuki. It was just a dream you had, okay? I'm still here, alive and the same old Shuurei", she smiled at him genuinely, trying to dispel his heavy thoughts.

"Yes, you are right," he responded with a loving expression on his face, gazing straight into her eyes. "Shuurei is Shuurei." With these words he reached out for her face, softly cupped her face with his fingers and turned her head lightly to caress her cheek with his fingertips. "We ar....I'm glad that it was just a dream after all," he smiled adoringly at her.

Shuurei's breath hitched, as she perceived how his light touch sent a furious shiver down her spine. Her mind was still occupied with comprehending the reason for it, and she felt her skin like burning on the place where Ryuuki's fingers had barely brushed her. Why was it like that, why was she all feeling this? Then suddenly recognition hit her. *Oh no...it can't be, please not!*, she began to panic at her realization, her breath trembled. This was the last thing she could need at all. *I'm just imaging that, right? This could not happen.*

"Shuurei? Are you okay?" Ryuuki looked puzzled at the image of his beloved before his eyes - she seemed to be really flustered and ...confused all a sudden and he failed to find a reason for it.

Shuurei's mind raced back and forth, pondering how to get out of this situation without letting him notice something. His inquiring stare still lasted on her and made her feel cornered.

"I REALLY should go now. So much work and stuff", she hastily declared. Feeling all awkward by now, her face blushed deeply and she just hoped he wasn't observant enough to notice it in such faint light. "I...I'm g-glad you a-are okay, though," she stammered and tried to get up from his bed. He, however, didn't release her.

"Ryuuki?" she uttered with a mixture of surprise and irritation in her voice.

"Shuurei, stay please," he looked pleadingly at her, clinging onto her as if his life depended on it. He hadn't seen her for months and was delighted to have her near him, so there was no way he was letting her go now.

"N-n-no, ...I can't," she murmured nervously and half-heartedly tried to get away from him again.

Even though Ryuuki failed to grasp exactly why, he knew her well enough to distinguish that Shuurei wasn't her usual self tonight. At another time she would have snapped at him long before for acting like that, though she didn't tonight. Seeing her acting so flustered instead in a situation, where she usually was always so violent and self-confident before, made her even more lovely in his eyes.

"Just a while, until I'm asleep again, we...I am still afraid of the dark," he confessed. *What an unconvincing reason*, he thought, yet he hoped it was persuasive enough.

Shuurei shortly got lost in his gaze and felt slightly lightheaded, before she managed to avert her eyes from him. As a person who always chose her words wisely she had never expected her tongue to be faster than her brain one day.

"Okay, but really only until then."

Damn it, why did I just say that?! Shuurei, remember you wanted to go, so whatever happened to that, she scolded herself mentally. Shuurei sighed. Since when did she give in to him so easily? It was never like this before, and now, how come she couldn't even deny him this one tiny thing? Was it because he looked at her in such a charming way that she couldn't say no to him? She bit her lower lip in quiet contemplation, and let out another sigh. *Wait, Did I just think he was...charming?* Since when was his childish behavior charming to her? It was just beyond her understanding how it could come so far. Annoyed with herself, she let out an inaudible sigh and only hoped that he would be asleep soon.

Ryuuki was wondered why she didn't object when he took her hand in his as he laid down again, though he enjoyed it very much. Shuurei, however, sat still on his bed right next to him, shocked by the feeling caused by her tiny hand gently entwined in his. Her heart throbbed frantically. Several endless minutes passed, where she barely dared to move or breathe and just remained in that rigid position. She gulped as she tried to figure the shower of emotions she was feeling due his presence and soft caresses of his hand, fearing Ryuuki could hear her heart, which was surely beating out of her chest now.

After another while, she noticed that everything finally went quiet again. Shuurei assumed that he had fallen asleep at last and turned around to check, only to find his face right next to hers. She nearly let out a shriek but froze at the unexpected sight in front of her. Despite her intention to scold him for scaring her like that, she didn't say anything, because at that moment Shuurei was too captivated by his face. No matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't avert her eyes from him. Although she already had seen Ryuuki's face a dozen times before in the past three years, now it was as if she was truly looking at it for the first time. She knew he possessed an annoyingly

beautiful face, yet she never noticed its fine details before. Like his well formed cheeks. Or his deep auburn eyes which were gazing back at her with surprise right now. Shuurei's stare unintentionally landed on his full lips, before she shrugged mentally. Yet she caught herself thinking that every detail of his face seemed indeed so... so... lovely to her.

What the...

Kapitel 3: Stay with me

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Kapitel 4: An unexpected revelation

One meets his destiny often in the road he takes to avoid it. -French Proverbs Sayings of French Origin

Chapter 4: An unexpected revelation

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It was early in the morning, even before the morning sun had fully gotten up, as Kou Shouka entered the the royal archive. However he wasn't here yet to begin with his work, no he was worried. Shuurei didn't came home yesterday like she promised, so he assumed she stayed at the archive to put another all-nighter for her paperwork. He first checked the desk, she usually used and expected to find her there, sleeping. Though the only thing he'd found was a massive pile of files scattered all over the table. Those papers undoubtedly belonged to her, he could clearly recognized her handwriting on those files.

Still no Shuurei to find at all.

His sorrows grew, it was so unlike her that she left such important documents lying around in the open. No, he knew his daughter, she never would do such a thing, except... for the case something happened to her. He shrugged, *no it was too early to panic, she can watch out for herself quite well. Still it would ease me to know if she's alright.*

"And is she here?" Seiran's worried voice put Shouka out of his thoughts.

"No I thought so, but I had no luck. Though she was here" he said and pointed to the desk.

"I see, well then I'll go around searching the palace for her and asking Shuuei and Ensei for assistance", Seiran decided and was thankful for the fact he was allowed to move everywhere around in the palace as the new general of the imperial army. "Master, would you mind staying here for the case she comes back here?"

Shouka pondered this option, before answering: "No. You're probably right, you can move around more freely than me here anyway ...oh and I better take care of the documents too, heaven forbids what would happen if those would land in the wrong hands. Make sure to inform me though, if you got any news."

"Of course", Seiran responded, before hastily leaving the archives to seek assistance from the others. Six pairs of eyes would see more than just two anyway.

"What Hime-sama is lost?" Ensei shouted out surprised, as he heard the news. "Not

exactly lost -rather missed, she has a good sense for direction unlike Kouyuu, you know?!" Ran Shuuei replied casually.

Seiran rolled his eyes "This makes the situation even worse, don't you think? Yes hate me for being worried, but she would never abandon her work so carefree, with all the papers lying still around"

"Hehe, Seiran, don't worry she'll okay, Hime-sama is smart, probably more than the three of us together" Ensei said.

"Yeah smarter than YOU definitely, thats for sure", Seiran hissed and glared at Ensei. "Enough of our tea-party already, could we please go now and search for Shuurei?" with this words Seiran aimed for the next place where he Shuurei presumed to be.

"Yes my general, at your duty" Shuuei sarcastically muttered, before following him right away.

They went for different places, amongst others the bureau of government inspection, its small file archive and the royal garden, yet no luck. Seiran was frustrated and was not alone with it.

"Any ideas left where she could be? It's not that I would mind hunting after a woman, but it seems kind of pointless here in such a ridiculous huge place" Shuuei sighed. Ensei however went back to the archive once again to see if she has arrived there meanwhile.

Hmm, he has a point here, Seiran thought and was while going through the options left, suddenly struck by an idea. Hold on a second, where the hell is my brother anyway? I haven't seen Ryuuki around yet, what if Ojou-sama...he mentally shrugged, *naah impossible, they haven't seen each other for about two months*. This he knew for sure, because Ryuuki told ...or better said whined about that fact to him constantly. Despite of eliminating this possibility of it already, he wordlessly took the direction to the kings chamber. He could at least ask his brother, if he has seen her, he decided.

Shuuei followed him rather puzzled, knowing the end of the path quite well and was asking himself quietly, why of all places, Shuurei should be there. ...*Oh..* he inwardly grinned, as this kind of idea flashed to his mind. *Maybe I only overestimate his highness by thinking whatever I'm thinking, but for sure is ...its going to be interestingeither way.*

Soon enough- not soon enough though for the eager Shuuei - they arrived at their destination. The guards objected first but went immediately silent as they saw Seiran. *Authority much, huh?* Shuuei mused mentally.

Hmm, all quiet here, is my lazy brother still sleeping? Seiran thought, not caring to knock he leisurely opened the door a bit, enough to look through it...and froze at the view.

"I....I...think I've....found h--her," he blinked, obviously not believing his eyes.

He saw his younger brother lying asleep in his bed- so far so fine- but what the rather eloquent and hard to shock man caused to go rigor ...was the small figure lying close entangled in his arms, snoozing peacefully.

Shuurei.

And their clothes scattered around the floor was the evidence of what kind of meeting they actually had....

"Huh? answered Shuuei puzzled, before squishing his head also into the door. "Ohoooh. Looks like I didn't overestimate his majesty at all", he said quietly, grinned all over his face. "About time huh?", he looked at Seiran, whose was still trying to figure out what the heck happened. *No WHAT happened was pretty much clear...but still...*

"Come on, give the two love birds some private space, would you?" Shuuei sighed over dramatically and shoved him out of the door, closing it quietly behind him. The guards looked confused at the two men. "Everything is fine, guys, we only had decided to come back later, the emperor is rather...busy now", he declared cheerfully. Seiran only throw him a glare. "Oh Seiran, don't tell me you are jealous after all."

"No way. Its just unexpected. ...I'm...surprised", he confessed, while they slowly departed from this place.

Seiran knew about Ryuuki's feelings for Shuurei too well, he has always been bold with it -maybe too bold- though this was how his brother was ...kind, righteous and when he loved someone he did it with all his heart, he smiled, remembering on Ryuuki's face as a six years old. Aside his surprise about the sudden change of mind from Shuurei he thought, if Ryuuki is the man she'd choose for her life, she would make a good one ...and he definitely could live with it. Ryuuki loved Shuurei more than anything, therefore she would always get treated with the highest respect and receive his unconditional love. Oujo-sama also knew how to handle him perfectly, he grinned on the picture coming to his mind, where she were scolding the mighty emperor of Saiunkoku like a nagging mother. Yeah they complemented one another quite well, but was Shuurei was really willing to become the empress? Knowing her so well, he wasn't too sure about it ...and only hoped his kind brother won't get heart-broken again.

"Hime-sama hasn't come back to the archive, so have you still any ideas where she could be?" A breathless Ensei informed the two man. Seiran and Shuuei didn't said anything just looked shortly at each other.

"My my catch your breath, old man, don't run if you can't handle it," Seiran sarcastically mentioned.

"How could you stay so calm, Seiran? I mean what if we really can't find her? What if something happened to her? "

"No, she is fine, believe me", Shuuei responded amused.

"So the both of you have found her, actually?" Or have you asked the emperor if she has seen her?" Ensei asked pointing to Ryuuki's private rooms

"Yeees, we have", Shuuei continued.

"What, you have found her or asked him?"

"Both, actually", Shuuei replied dryly.

Seiran threw Shuuei another "shut up or die" stare, however he was elegantly ignored by him. This was too just much fun for the young man to let it pass. Ensei on the other hand looked rather puzzled at his both friends. *What the hell did Shuuei meant with that?*

"My, my a bit slow today, aren't you Ensei? Well lets say she stayed at his highness place ...for err...an important meeting," Shuuei chuckled. He knew he would probably get killed by the furious wraith of Seiran for saying this, but he thought it was definite worth it.

"What a meeting?...ooh..., Ensei grinned as he finally realized the meaning. Seiran remained silent, though. He decided to punish Shuuei later for his disproportionate announcement, but first he had to figure out what exactly he should tell Shouka about it...

"Uuarghhh", yawned Shuurei loudly and stretched her still tired limbs. The young women needed a moment to realize where she was, as she opened her eyes. Then realization hit her. *Oh right, I came here because Ryuuki had a nightmare and then we...oh god...* she blushed, while thinking on what occurred last night. She could still feel his hands and touch everywhere on her body and recognized that her face burned by now, probably in a deep crimson red. How could she went so overboard like this all the sudden? She never even kissed him back before and now suddenly all *this* happened at once.

Oh my god, she mentally panicked. Though she had to admit all these strange things Ryuuki had done to and with her felt so- so unexpectedly good. Was that the reason she didn't told him to stop? Notwithstanding the sane part of her reluctantly pleaded to her to do so before she tuned that inner voice out, as she got swept away with passion; more quickly than she ever had imagined? Or was this because she felt so strangely at ease in his arms, enjoying his near? She had never acted so emotionally before, never let a person fully seen her more vulnerable side, where she just acted like what she actually was.

A woman.

Shuurei sat up in his bed, bit her lower lip and tried to find a reason how Ryuuki could

crumble her walls she constantly had build up around her emotions so instantly down with just one kiss of his. She knew it was wrong what she had done with him, he was the emperor after all. *Why didn't I told him to stop then?* Her mind was searching for a reason to justify her behavior last night - yet failed to find one. She only knew that her actions might have been complicating things between the two. The last night blurred the lines between being his subordinate and the woman he obviously loved even more. Shuurei felt embarrassed and couldn't decide if it was a good thing or not that Ryuuki wasn't here anymore. Maybe it was really for the better in this moment. She didn't know how to face him at the moment.

"Oh, you are awake now, fine", a cheerful female voice startled her out of her thoughts. She looked up to the sound just to find the face of Ran Jyuusan-hime smiling at her. Good morning... or whats left of it, slept well? Shuurei's eyes widened, *oh noo she has seen me, here...naked...in his bed...oh my god..., was the only thought she was able to form in her panic state.*

Jyuusan-hime coolly overlooked the embarrassed Shuurei while saying: "I should tell you that his majesty....or Ryuuki for you, she winked to her with one eye, is terrible sorry he can't be with you now, but his presence were indispensable for an important matter of the court. Therefore he asked me to take care of you," she finished.

Shuurei found finally her voice again "Ryuuki...did WHAT?"

"Don't worry Shuurei, I'm the lady in waiting remember? Its my job to do the tasks the king gives to me discreetly and I'm good in it. So here use these clothes and I also have boiled you some water, you might wanna clean yourself up before leaving".

"Yes...thanks", Shuurei said puzzled, while still sitting in bed.

"Oh, sorry I almost have forgotten about that", Jyuusan-hime nestled shortly in her robe to put out a letter and handed it to Shuurei. "He thought it would be more personal this way" Shuurei stared dumbfounded at the letter for a second before taking and reading it;

My love,

I'm sorry for not being with you when you get awake, my job really can be annoying at times. However as much I would like to now I can't forsake my duty, but I really hope to see you again later. Be nice to Jyuusan-hime, I have asked her for those things.

I love you.

-Anonymous

Shuurei looked absent-minded on the writing of the letter for a moment. *That idiot, how could he do something so careless? What if this falls into the wrong hands?Okay he hasn't written any name on it, but it clearly showed the handwriting of the emperor.* Every minister and official would be able to recognize it. She shortly huffed angry before giving in to the temptation to read it one more time. *On a second thought this*

is typically Ryuuki, so cute. She smiled to herself for a split second before gripping the meaning of her thoughts. *Wait... did I thought cute???* She suppressed the urge to hit herself and just let out a silent sigh.

Jyuusan-hime grinned inwardly, she didn't miss the change in Shuurei's face expression from irritation to delightedness as she watched her reading the letter. *It was there for just a mere second but there was actually something like bliss on that girls face for sure.*

„I'm glad for you both, really.”, she stated firmly.

“Huh why? I mean..its not like that, really”, Shuurei awkwardly blurted out.

Jyuusan-hime quirked an eyebrow. *Oh well there she sit, naked in his bed and told me “its not like that”? Yeah right. Is that girl really so hopeless?* For a moment she admired the kings persistence and willingness to suffer so long for the one he loved, although the one seemed still to deny her love for him after all.

Hmm, time to test her a bit, she decided and sat down to her on the edge of the bed. “You know, Jyuusan-hime started, I never actually intended to marry his majesty, even not after the agreement you both made”

Shuurei looked at her surprised “What?”

The Ran princess sighed, “As you might know its a promise I made to my older brother triplet, if they save someone's live I would do anything they asked. So I'm repaying this debt by entering the imperial residence- and now as lady in waiting. Also you probably remember that I love someone else anyway.”

Shuurei nodded “You mean the one-eyed skinny man at the Kyuusai cove?”

“Yes, it may be foolish after all what happened there, but thats how love is; unreasonable. I still can't forget about him”, Jyuusan-hime looked down, “ I even thought about to forsake my family's wish or my family themselves to search for him”.

It was not a lie she was telling Shuurei, in the lonely nights here in the palace she often thought about him, about the last time when she saw Shiba Jun. It still hurt her to left him behind like that and wished she could search for him, to see him one more time. Though Jyuusan-hime didn't tell her that this was a forlorn, hopeless wish she had. Like Shuurei she was bound to her family name and duty, maybe even more as Shuurei. She was able to do how she please at last, living her dream of being an official and even held the heart of the emperor of Saiunkoku. Her brothers however would never give her so much freedom or even the possibility to search for the man who had fallen so low in the eyes of the Ran-clan. No, she was bound to her promise, bound to the palace and maybe even bound to marry a man she didn't love. A so called political marriage, which would strengthen up her family's position as the mightiest clan of Saiunkoku. Jyuusan-hime however, even she did love her family, her brothers, would gladly pass on the opportunity of this marriage. She actually liked the emperor, he was a kind and righteous man, though both of them would never be able

to get happy with each other. Under other circumstances maybe yes, but not when their hearts were already given away to others.

Shuurei was taken aback by her confession, though she had told her a bit about the man she loved before, she never expected that she would go to that extent for him. Love is.... unreasonable? Jyuusan-hime's words echoed in her mind and Ryuuki's mental picture appeared before her eyes, before she inwardly shrugged.

"Do you love him?" The Ran Princess asked.

"Huh?" said Shuurei, startled out of her thoughts.

"I mean the emperor, do you love him?" Jyuusan-hime looked straight to the young woman's face.

Shuurei blinked and tried to avoid her eyes, the question hit her unprepared. "Err... what? ...N-n-n...no, I-I can't", she managed to bring out and felt her heart fluttering rashly. Why is she asking something like that out of the blue? ...loving him? Sure she felt at ease in his arms, that was a fact she couldn't deny anymore. *But was that really.... love?* She noticed that her face began to burn again at that thoughts and failed to calm the wild palpitation of her heart down.

"Aside that I can't marry him anyway." Shuurei added hastily.

"Why?" she narrowed her eyebrows in confusion.

"I have other goals in life, then only being a wife. I love my job. I worked so hard for my dream to become an official and I don't want to give it up now. There is still so much I want to achieve", Shuurei declared.

Jyuusan-hime expected her to say something like that, yet this sounded more convincing at other times. *Good, same Shuurei-chan, always sturdy and unaware of certain things*, she smiled to herself as she thought on her next sentence she would say to her. A sentence which hopefully draw an evidently reaction out of her.

"So then you are fine with me marrying the emperor?" Jyuusan hime asked her with the most innocent sweet undertone in her voice she was able to.

"Whaaat? But you have sai...", Shuurei blurted out, before quickly covering her mouth with one hand, her eyes widened.

Damn.

She was appalled by her immediate reaction and inwardly cursed her mouth, which was faster than her brain....again.

Oh what an interesting and unexpected revelation we got here, Jyuusan-hime inwardly grinned. *Well, congratulation your highness, it seems that she isn't so hopeless after all...*, she thought. Jyuusan-hime stood up from the bed, "Err Shuurei-chan, I'm sorry I

have to go now, you may get ready if you don't wanna late for your job...or better say even more late. It was nice to have you seen again, though.", she waved to her and leaved nonchalantly.

"Oh my god its that late already?" Shuurei's eyes widened, as she saw the sun was already standing high up in the sky. She rushed out of bed and got ready with the water and clothes Jyuusan-hime prepared for her as fast as she could. She bound the mess of her hair loosely to a ponytail before running down the hall to the department of imperial investigation.

"Arhh, Ryuuki, someday this man will be my death", she angrily muttered, while she was hoping that she now didn't get fired on the spot.

"Oooh if that's not Kou-"sama", nice you that you still honor me with your presence after all..." Ki Kouki sarcastically hissed, as Shuurei breathlessly entered his office.

"I'm...sor...sorry, sir I over...over slept", she stammered, still trying to catch her breath from running here.

"Hmm is that so? Well I don't have use for officials who doesn't take their duty serious", he narrowed his eyes, looking sharply at her.

"No- its not like that...I-I..."

"Silence I don't care why you late, I don't want to hear it" Before Shuurei could explain herself, Kouki hushed her rapidly. "More importantly, official Kou you were working on a case, right? So what are your results? Where are the documents? You do have the files I've given to you, right?"

The documen....OH NO!!! I let them in the archive, Shuurei's eyes widened in panic, her mind raced.

This is it.... I'm done, now I'm getting fired for sure. She braced herself for the worst.
