

Split soul

Von Gepo

Kapitel 14: Visiting a castle

He had brought Ayako and Natsue home after dinner. The little girl had slept most of the way, so he had carried the backpack and her. While Ayako had sometimes asked him before if the things he carried were too heavy, she had stopped with such questions completely after seeing him play today. When they reached her home, she asked him to come in and help her settle Natsue into bed.

It really was only one room. Ayako removed the table in the middle and laid out the futon instead. He put their princess down before unpacking the bag with his back to both women, so Ayako could get her daughter into sleeping cloths. As it wasn't much, he finished before her and decided to make some tea for both of them in a kitchen that didn't even measure a meter. She took the cup with a thankful smile and nodded to the door. They changed into their shoes again and went to drink their tea outside the apartment.

"I am sorry my place is so small." She leaned against the open reeling in front of her place.

"I am sure you are providing Natsue with the best you can."

"Yeah." She sighed. "It was a wonderful day. Your friends are really great. I would ask you to stay, but, well, I don't even have enough place for you as well."

"Thank you for the sentiment." He smiled at her. "May I ask you over to my place? With a sleep-over if you would like." He hoped he had not misunderstood her. "Next weekend for example."

"I'd like that." She looked up at him with a blinding smile. So yes, she really wanted to spend a night with him. "Say ...". She sobered up again. "Could you lend me a good book about this personality thing? I'd like to know a bit more, so I don't step on your toes unintentionally."

"I'll bring you one tomorrow," he promised. After a moment he leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Feel free to ask me some questions next weekend. I don't want you to stumble into a relationship you regret afterwards. I never planned on keeping this from you."

"I never thought so." She stood and stepped onto her toes to kiss him on the mouth. She tasted like duck and green tea. "Sometimes it makes me afraid how easy it is to trust you."

"I'll try my best not to betray your trust." He took her hand and kissed her knuckles. "I hope you'll sleep well."

"You too." She smiled at him and took the empty cup from his hands.

He took his bag and nodded at her before leaving. His driver – who had sent a text to while cooking tea – waited downstairs. He couldn't help but smile on the way back,

even his driver finally asked him about his day. He told him with a wink that a gentleman keeps his silence.

Most of his books had been in English, so choosing one hadn't been difficult. He only owned three in Japanese, one from a professional perspective, two from the eyes of people having DID. He chose one he liked more than the other and the professional one and briefly visited the kindergarten to give them to Ayako. The kids tried to get him to stay but he had a meeting. Their pouts were adorable but work took first priority. His alter ego was adamant about that, though they did argue for a moment. He couldn't wait for the weekend. He really hoped Ayako would decide to stay. Gods, had he ever felt this nervous? He found himself spacing out thinking about her, much to his alter ego's dismay. He was finally offered to just go to sleep until Saturday and let the other handle everything until then. He thought about it and took the offer. Having DID was kind of nice sometimes. He woke on Saturday, excited like a kid on his birthday and immediately checked his phone. His alter ego had exchanged some texts with Ayako. She planned to take the train at nine, arriving at the station near his place a quarter to eleven. As his body was working like a clockwork, he had woken at six, just like every day. Hm, what to do ... a morning jog would do nicely. He should also check on Yukimaru on the way, he definitely wanted them to meet his horse. How about a brunch?

>Already ordered one.< His alter ego informed him.

>You're the best.< With a smile Akashi changed into his work-out clothes and left the house after greeting his butler. After jogging, showering, dressing, a snack and playing a bit of piano, it was still only eight o'clock. Well. How did you prepare for a date? He didn't want to ask Kuroko, he was still a bit cross with him and Shintaro was out for obvious reasons. Should he ask Momoi? She was female after all. From all other available people she would also be the only one awake on a Saturday morning. He decided to text her, he had nothing to lose after all.

It only took a few seconds for his phone to ring.

"Mochi-mochi?" Momoi asked excitedly. "I am so glad you wrote me! Good morning."

"Good morning, Momoi," he greeted her a bit more moderate.

"So Ayako is visiting for the first time?" Always the gossipmonger. "Does she know what to expect? You have quite a mansion, you know."

"Does that change anything?" His voice was doubtful.

"Well, yes, she won't be speechless and intimidated. Tell her when you get her from the station." That was good advice. "Is she bringing her daughter?"

"Yes, Natsue will come too."

"Have you prepared something for her? Kids get easily bored. Do you have some paper and pencils ready? Some games? Maybe a video if you'd like some time with Ayako?"

"I think we get about every channel available to earth here. When Kuroko zapped through my programs, I saw him watching Kazakh TV." He lay down on his bed. "I am not too sure about games but I have stables, a pool and an outside court. More than one actually. I also have a music room and a game room with pool and cards. I have a butler, a cook, a gardener and two maids available if she is still bored."

"So you can do everything from baking cake to riding on a beach, okay, I get it. Do you have some idea what you would like to do?" Had she just made fun of him?

"I? Err ... no, I have no idea. I'd like to show them around and introduce them to my horse. Oh, I also planned some brunch."

"Very good, that will take a few hours with the size of your place. Until then they'll most likely have an idea what they'd like to do. If not, baking a cake is often a good idea. It's fun, easy to do and the result is tasty."

"Do you think I should look up a recipe beforehand?" He had never baked, had he?

"No, looking for one is fun too. And you most likely have everything at your place anyway, so don't sweat it. Are you wearing decent clothes?"

"I think so. I am wearing what I normally have on in my spare time."

"Yes, you always dress well, no worries there. You are also someone that doesn't need to be reminded to shower, brush their teeth and comb their hair." She made a humming sound for a moment. "I think with you the best advice is not to overdo it. So much things are normal for you that are special for other people, it's easy to overwhelm others. Don't take her flying or hunting or whatever you think may be special. Just show her what is normal for you."

"I've never been hunting." Except for Kuroko. "I don't hurt animals."

"But you know what I mean, right?" She sometimes added strange endings to words to make them sound cuter and while he normally didn't mind he found it annoying after some time.

"I guess so." But what was normal? He was mostly never home. If he was, he was jogging in the garden, taking a swim or playing piano. Riding was his only passion. But going for a ride would be overdoing it if he had understood correctly. This conversation was giving him more questions than answers.

They exchanged some pleasantries but ended the conversation a bit later. Eight thirty. Whatever should he do?

At ten he had given up and called his driver to get Ayako and Natsue from the station. It had him standing on a desolate platform fifteen minutes early but it was easier than sitting around at home. He watched the train's progress on his app until it finally pulled into the station. He pocketed his phone and watched the passing doors for Ayako. This was quite a bit out of the way, so the train was nearly empty. He had no problem to spot them as they were the only ones getting off here. He approached them with a smile.

"Akashi!" Natsue ran up to him to get a hug.

He lifted her from the ground, spun her around and settled her on his hip before asking: "Did you have a good ride?"

"We counted rivers!" She checked her hands. "There were ... mama, how many were there?"

"Eighteen rivers." Ayako kissed his cheek. "This really is out of the way."

"It gives me time to check my e-mails every morning and sign my documents every evening." He took her hand and led them from the station. "My house is even farther off, so we'll take the car."

"Cool!" Natsue fidgeted to get down. "I've never driven a car!"

"Really?" He looked at her in astonishment.

"We don't own one and we don't have friends that own one." Ayako smiled at him.

"Don't be surprised if that will be her highlight of the day."

"Well, maybe the day will have many highlights." He held open the door for them, only then noticing that he had not planned a security seat for children. He was therefore surprised to see one in the back of his car.

>Some of us thankfully aren't love-struck fools.< His alter ego told him arrogantly.

Ayako knew how to secure her daughter in one, so she did not seem to be a stranger

to cars. She sat beside her while he took a seat opposite them. His car had two rows divided by a small table on which he normally spread his documents. The windows were tinted, so it was hard to see the outside. Maybe he should have taken a car from which one could see a bit more.

"I hope you won't get sick. Driving for the first time can be confusing," he told Natsue. "It's best to look outside, so that your eyes know you are moving."

They started driving and Natsue let out an excited squeal. It seemed no problem for her to stare outside, she was watching the houses fly by and shouted: "We are so fast! Like a train."

"We can hear you, honey." Ayako held her hand and smiled at her indulgently. "You don't need to shout."

"Look, there was a dog!" She pointed outside.

"We are out of the city. There are a lot more and bigger dogs out here." Ayako took her pointing finger. "And even if people can't see us, we still don't point at them."

"There are a lot less houses here. They are also smaller." She noticed.

"Out here families can afford a house all for themselves. Even I could afford a bigger flat. But it's a long way from the city and it's expensive to drive those long ways every day."

"Actually, about that," he interrupted them. "I was told to warn you that my house is rather big."

"I had guessed that." Ayako smiled at him broadly.

"I was told that people underestimate my definition of big." He intently watched her face. "It's big as in having a park, a pool and some outside courts as well as stables, tea houses and greenhouses."

Her eyes widened. She blinked before asking: "You mean big as in big as a castle?"

"Are we going to a castle?" Natsue asked completely focused on their conversation for once.

"Well, no, I mean, yes ... to be honest, it's even bigger than your average castle. It's bigger than our emperor's castle."

"Are you joking?" Ayako mustered him for a second. "You aren't, are you? Just for the record, are you related to our emperor?"

"I am his nephew, yes." Was that important? "I am not in the throne's inheritance line if that is your question. My mother was the emperor's sister."

>Our father was an idiot to kill her.<

>He thought she sullied his reputation. To him, she was better off dead after bearing him one acceptable heir.< He replied with spite in his voice.

"Oh gods, I am dating the emperor's nephew." She hid her face in her hands. "Are you a minister as well?"

"No, not yet. I haven't reached the minimum age for that." He leaned forward to take her hands. "Is it so bad to live a life others have thought up for you? I have always just accepted this as the role I was born into."

"I was born to be a spurned wife, not a fairy-tale princess." She grabbed his hands. "This feels a lot like entering a fairy-tale."

"The books you read are still true," he reminded her. "The fairy-tale is just what people painted on the outside."

Ayako watched him for a moment before taking a deep breath and nodding. He let her hands go, so she could sit comfortably again. To be honest he would have felt better to continue to hold them. Momoi had been right, his life was rather overwhelming for other people.

"So ..." Natsue watched them just as intently. "Are we going to a castle or not?"