

Autumn Leaves

Von SeiyaKou*

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Red, orange and yellow leaves danced around her in dizzying circles. An October breeze typical of Tokyo toyed with her wavy hair. She shivered faintly in the cold, crisp air.

Michiru was sitting in the park's only swing set, dangling her legs, thinking idly, and taking in the colour and the beauty that surrounded her. She gazed into the park's shallow duckpond, and watched as a crimson leaf spiraled down to meet the water's surface.

It touched. The water rippled. She smiled fleetingly.

Beautiful.

Natural beauty was so difficult to find these days. It made one appreciate it more. She sighed into the breeze. Tiny leaves were falling on her, on her nose, in her hair, tickling against her skin. The world smelled fresh, and crisp. She could hear the wind, and the soft chirping of birds. The sky was grey, but that didn't matter to her.

She enjoyed seeing this aspect of the world. The real one. The beautiful one. The trees, the animals the wind. To her, it felt like a luxury. Maybe that was what Tokyo did to everyone.

She took in a slow breath.

The air tasted sweet to her.

A gold brown sparrow hopped in front of her, and cocked its brown head to the side.

Michiru regretted the fact that she didn't keep a stock of birdseed.

"Sorry buddy." She smiled sheepishly. "I don't have anything for you."

The bird looked up, and flew away, chattering.

Michiru thought that was beautiful too. She wondered, if she closed her eyes, could she pretend to be a part of it for a while?

She was glad she was alone.

If any of the other's saw her this way, they would only laugh.

Why? Because she wasn't supposed to act this way. Because this was out of character for the quiet, art and music lovin' Michiru. Because they had all already chosen their masks. And it was too late to revert back to their old selves now. Now when they functioned as a team. Now when they knew each other inside and out.

Hah.

She shook the thought from her head. She was here, now. Alone, in the real world. This was her time to forget.

Her gaze shifted from the pool of water, to the trees, to the skyline. Beyond the park, a white hospital loomed, provoking a sense of foreboding in her heart.

"Damn, but do I hate that place." She announced to the empty lot of land. She pulled out a green scarf from her jacket's inner pocket, and wrapped it around her neck. She was thankful for the extra warmth.

She meant not that one hospital, in particular, but all hospitals in general. Hospitals meant someone was sick. Or hurt. Which usually meant one of her team mates. That, in itself, disturbed her more than anything else. Seeing any of the Sailors down and out. Even if she only knew their masks, they were still important to her.

Her attention slowly drifted away from the hospital, and fell again to the pool of water. The crimson leaf sailed over the duckpond ocean, its bright colour standing out even from the rest of the colourful leaf-boats.

Somehow, that shade of crimson always stood out.

The corner of Michiru's mouth twitched in a slight smile.

Yes indeed, there was a particular shade of emerald which always stood out to her too. But that was something that she would mull over in the spring, when the grass and the flowers came into bloom.

Haruka with her pale complexion that reminded her of lilies. Haruka with her soft baritone, which reminded her of the wind on the water. Haruka, who's will was stronger than stone.

Thinking about Haruka was always dangerous. It would lead her to have thoughts she didn't want to have, and feelings which twisted and turned inside her.

She had told Haruka about those feelings once. By accident.

Another reason why she liked to be alone now. Being around Haruka was too unbearable. Because somehow, in the course of the two years that they had known each other, worked together, fought together, Michiru had.....

Michiru had fallen in love.

She couldn't put her finger on when, or how. It was just something that had happened, without her really realizing it until much later. Slowly her normal life had faded, and took backseat to a feeling stronger than she had ever felt before. She was in love with Haruka.

And for some strange reason, it didn't surprise her. The woman was beautiful, yes, and that could attest for something. But not love. What was it that made Michiru love her? Her quiet demeanor. Her strength of character. Her intelligence.

Sometimes, when they were alone, they used to talk. About small things, and big things, and everything in between. Michiru could even recall them having a long discussion on philosophy once. They would do things together, sometimes. Go for coffee, or for a walk. Nothing really special.

Well, nothing special to Haruka, at any rate. It had made Michiru feel wonderful, however. And once, for a while, she had thought that maybe....just maybe there was a chance that Haruka cared about her too...

But last week, she had managed to destroy everything between them, with just that simple admission.

It had slipped from her lips, really. She hadn't meant to say it. Haruka had been very distraught after seeing her "nice" Mother that evening. She had returned with tears in those beautiful green eyes.

Michiru, of course, had followed her up to her room. She wasn't about to let Haruka shut herself up when something was wrong. She was worried. It scared her to see Haruka shake. It hurt her too.

Haruka had ran up to the safety of her room, where no other could touch her. Michiru knocked on the door, anyway. Amazingly enough, Haruka had let her in. They talked

for hours. She had buried her face in her hands. "No one could love me."

Michiru could remember the pounding of her heart. She remembered those seconds vividly. There was a time warp. A sense of vertigo. She wondered if Haruka saw her sway back and forth on her feet. She remembered debating with herself whether, she should or shouldn't say it. Whether or not to confess. She remembered making the conscious decision

"I do, Ruka." She had said after a moment of hesitation. "I love you."

She had regretted those words from the minute they spilled forth. She had seen Haruka's eyes widen with some emotion -anger, shock - she didn't know what. She just ran. Ran before the woman which she loved so dearly could say anything more. Because she knew what Haruka would say. And if she ran, she wouldn't have to listen. And here she was, running again. Avoiding her.

Haruka, of course, had ignored her all week. Typical Haruka style. Or at least, the typical style of Haruka's 'mask personality'. Not a word had she spoken to Michiru.

In a way, she was grateful. That would only make it hurt more. But some of the looks Haruka gave her when they were working together...

Michiru shivered. It was like Haruka could assess her with just one stare. She was sure that that was what she was doing too.

The sky was darker now. The water in the pool looked like ink.

She watched as the crimson leaf was overrun with liquid. She watched it as it sunk beneath the glossy surface of the cold water.

"You're not alone. I feel like I'm going under too." She stated for the sake of the sunken leaf. She felt sympathetic.

Leaves crunched behind her. She didn't look up.

She laughed softly. She was talking to a leaf. "You're an idiot, Michiru." She said and smiled. Talking with herself was okay. At least that way someone would listen.

"You're not stupid, Michiru." The wind on the water, forming syllables and words. A shiver ran down her spine. What were these, hospitable words?

"Hello Haruka." She said simply. "What are you doing here?" She turned around to look at the woman.

"I was visiting my dear Mother and tell her what I'm thinking of her "nice" acting... I was on my way back."

"What are you doing here, Michiru?"

She could play the game. She could wear her mask. She clasped her hands over her heart, and turned to face Haruka again. "Becoming one with nature."

The woman's pale face quirked with one of those rare, beautiful smiles.

Damn, that hadn't worked the way it was supposed to. Damn Ruka, with her damned perception. And that beautiful smile....why did she smile?

"Didn't think you were the type." Haruka noted with mild interest.

"You wouldn't." Michiru agreed.

"What inspired you to come out today." Haruka drew closer to her. Michiru didn't know what she wanted, but she was persistent.

"The colours." Michiru said honestly. She sighed wistfully. "The colours are beautiful today. Especially the reds."

"You're right."

Michiru nearly gasped when she felt Haruka's hand on her shoulder. She could feel its warmth, even through her coat.

"Michiru....."

"Haruka?"

Arms wrapped around her torso. Haruka, still standing, stooped over her from behind. "Ruka?"

Her voice caught in her throat when soft lips descended upon her own, sweet to taste, and gently molding to her, skin against skin.

Haruka tasted like mint.

It was she who broke the kiss. She pulled back, and looked up at Haruka, eyes wild with bewilderment.

"Ruka?"

"I love you too, Michi."

Her mouth fell open in shock. She closed it, dumbly, and stared up at again. Long moments passed, and the only noise was the soft hush of wind in the trees. She was petrified. What if Haruka was teasing her? Her heart pounded in her chest.

"Ruka why didn't you tell me sooner....?"

Gentle green eyes, regarded her carefully. "I was afraid."

"Of me?"

"Of love." Ruka said. She stepped back. "I'll understand if you're angry with me. I just wanted to tell you."

Haruka was not wearing her mask. This was the truth.

"Ruka." Michiru smiled up at her, hesitantly. "I'm not angry."

Her sandy-haired crush looked dumbfounded. "You're not?"

"No. I love you, Ruka."

Long fingertips brushed against her cheeks. Hands cupped her face, and turned it up to look at the sky. Haruka filled her vision. Lips were on hers again, and she sighed into the kiss.

There was a time warp. A sense of vertigo. She wondered if she was swaying back and forth in her swing.

Ruka broke off.

"Do you want a push?" She asked. Emerald sparkled with playfulness and poured into a soul.

Skyblue looked up. Michiru smiled. "Yes, please."

The cold autumn air was filled with warm laughter. The wind tore into green hair as one woman soared higher and higher. When she returned to earth, she looked up into beautiful emerald. A body twisted around in the swing. Long arms reached up to loop around a pale neck.

Two creatures of nature joined hearts.

Red leaves danced all around them.

Owari