

Ignorance is bliss

Absence makes the heart grow fonder...RyuuxShuu-
goodness

Von Merilsell

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 imagining 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 give 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 me ...in 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...
