

Split soul

Von Gepo

Kapitel 6: The lioness

Chiho did not look at him when he visited the kindergarten a week later. The children seemed happy to see him though, slowly getting used to having him visit. Natsue asked to be picked up which he gladly did. The little lion – he had dubbed her so himself – told him about the new musicians she had listened to with her mother, having developed a fondness of Chopin after his last little concert. Coming from her it was alright to hear she liked Fantasia impromptu best, she was a ball of sunshine after all, not fake like Chiho. She also expressed a interest in learning the piano, so he sat down with her and began to explain some basics and taught her the first notes of Flohwalzer. Her hands were not large enough to manage the keys they needed, so she played the left hand with both of hers while he played the right. They actually got what would have been the first page until lunch. She wanted him to sit with her again, so he did that. As Misses Kuroko had her week off, they sat with one of the teachers he hadn't talked to before. She sent him some not very subtle glances somewhere between interested and fearful.

So Chiho had talked. Or they had seen the marks left on her. He had expected her to stay silent, but she wasn't one to be ashamed, so he should have expected it. Well, it wasn't a surprise but it sure was a nuisance. It would be harder to court another kindergarten teachers, though if one agreed to be courted, at least they knew a bit better what they were getting into.

A boy called Shinosuke told the other how his father had brought back a Carrera track from his latest business trip, how fast the cars were but how sometimes they were so fast that they flew of the track. Especially the last part seemed to be fun for him, he had tried it out again and again to see how far he could let the cars fly. The other kids listened silently while the teacher asked question and scolded the boy when his accounts became a bit too violent.

What had he played with when he was four years old? He remembered his violin lessons, they had started at three years old, as well as his English, Spanish and French lessons. He had mastered three languages before he learned to write at five years old. Piano started at seven, as well as Mandarin. It was also the year he got Yukimaru and began to ride. After that his hobbies had been basketball, Shogi and riding. But what he done before that? He did not have other pets, he could not remember a favorite board game and while he had been playing basketball since he was five years old, it had been a scary experience when the ball still so big compared to him. So what had he done before his seventh birthday? He remembered doing puzzles and Sudoku and a lot of those toys build to make your toddler smarter. He did not remember something he actually liked. But he remembered wanting to have a cat after he had

found one in the garden once. He never saw it again. He asked the children if they had pets to which two told him about theirs.

Of course Natsue wanted to have a cheetah. It seemed her mother had told her cheetahs were big animals, so she needed to be big as well if she wanted one. Smart woman. Maybe he should get himself a real lion, he was big after all. And he had enough land for a pack of lions, hunting ground inclusive. It would be fun to train them. Natsue was just telling him how she often dreamed about curling up next to a cheetah and being warmed by it in winter.

When lunch neared its end, she was the one asking if he would play again, so he asked her for her new favorites. Instead of Chopin, she asked if he knew the music to "O mio babbino caro". He had to admit that while he knew the song, he could not play it by heart. He could however try to download the sheet music on his smartphone and have it run in time to the song. It only made her say: "Oh, then that one and the other one mama always sings. Mama?"

Ayako turned around at the other table and nodded at her.

"What is that other song you always sing? That English one?"

"It's called 'A mother's prayer', dear. Were you talking about songs?"

"I was telling Mister Akashi about my song wishes."

"You want me to sing today?" Her mother seemed a bit taken aback.

"Yes, please?" Natsue smiled up at her.

"Well ... I guess I'll warm up my voice after lunch then."

While they talked, Akashi had downloaded and scrolled through the sheet music, noting that it would sound a lot better played on violin. Good thing he brought his Stradivari today. He would need to tune it before he played it though.

"Mister Akashi, you don't happen to be able to sing as well?", Ayako asked him suddenly.

"Err, well, I took some singing lessons as a child, yes." He wasn't an Opera singer but he was alright as far as he was concerned.

"The second song Natsue asked for is actually a duet, I would be honored if you sang it with me."

"Well ... in that case, I would like to join your vocal warm-up. I haven't sang since my voice broke, I leave it to your ears to tell me if I should try myself at singing." He could possibly make a fool of himself. "I'd also like to listen to a recorded version first. You sing some pretty hard songs, so I don't know if I am able to keep up."

She nodded and turned back to her table which seemed to conclude the conversation. The children began to brush their teeth (he had even remembered to bring a toothbrush, so that Natsue wouldn't nag at him again) and clean up their tables. Misses Teimei played the teeth brushing song to order them. He really liked those rituals by now, even found himself humming the simple melody sometimes. After rearranging the tables, he followed Ayako to a separate room that he remembered as a staff room in the construction plans.

With the closing of the door, the atmosphere changed, her whole body becoming high-strung. He turned around, silently regarding her until she said: "As head of this kindergarten, the other teachers wanted me to ask you some questions."

"Then please do so." He kept his voice free of emotion, making it a cold and calculated one that was a warning in itself.

She did not seem to like her position, fidgeting and avoiding his eyes. Still she took a deep breath and said: "The teachers would like to know why you continue to come to this kindergarten. It is not as if you are unwelcome, you own it after all, but seeing the

marks on Chiho, they ... we began questioning your motives."

»That was rather straightforward for an Omega. What about her? Isn't she the type you like?«

»You want me to answer this question with asking her out? Do you have any social tact?«

»No, I think we established that already.«

He said instead: "There are various reasons why I come here, it's not one alone. One reason is that I wanted to know how this idea worked out and I did not trust anyone to give me a fitting impression because that person would either be on the side of people despising Omegas or one that liked the idea of this kindergarten for one reason or another, either way contorting their opinion. Another reason is that I am very lonely because there is nothing but work in my life, so my good friend Kuroko Tetsuya advised me to visit his mother and ask her for advice. The third reason is that I found I rather like playing instruments for the children."

"Well ..." Ayako looked rather surprised, searching his face for the truth. "Then why did you hurt Chiho like that?"

"Look, I don't know what she told you exactly. She asked me out for a date, I consented. I found that I had no romantic interest in her and told her so. She wanted to sleep with me anyway. I told her what she would have to expect from that and she consented again. All without any kinds of persuasion or pheromones, I hope you noticed that I completely tone them down here. If she told you I forced her in any way, then I have to admit I would not know when or how." He sighed with a sliver of annoyance. "I would normally tell you to mind your own business but I am rather fond of this place, so I'd like to clear this up. What are the other teachers afraid of?"

Ayako looked down but balled her fists. He knew that gesture from Kuroko, it was when one's protective instincts warred with their submissive instincts. His alter ego would have used pheromones or intimidation now. He decided to take a seat instead. It made Ayako look up in surprise before a slight smile graced her lips.

"They were afraid you would use this place as your hunting ground, like some other Alphas have. We just want to have a safe place to work. It's actually a problem that any Alpha can just strut in here and throw their pheromones around. I mean no offense, you never did that, but others aren't as courteous. If you as our employer proved to be someone who did that, we would completely lose trust in this place, so ... we wanted to believe in you. We want to keep believing in you."

»She sure knows how to stroke someone's ego.«

»Not mine. I think that's very sad.«

»Sob.«

"I opened this place because the public opinion of Omegas is grotesque."

»Just like your own«, his alter ego calmly reminded him.

"I found that a lot of Omegas are not what public opinion makes them out to be, but rather have unique talents that should be shared. Especially when it comes to child-rearing, having two Alpha parents seems to be a disadvantage. It was part of my calculation that some Alphas, as well as some Omegas, would use this place as dating grounds. If that endangers people in any way, I would like us to develop restrictions that ensure the safety of everyone involved."

"Thank you." Ayako closed her eyes, her voice full of emotion. It seemed like she was close to tearing up.

»I have to admit, you are smooth when it comes to women«, his alter ego complimented him.

She finally sat down opposite him and took a few deep breaths to get herself under control. It seemed like she did not want to cry in front of him, something he would appreciate as well. It had been years since he ever saw anyone crying and he did not have the slightest idea how to console someone.

"I'll ask the others to come up with some ideas for that discussion", she finally said after half a minute. "I am sorry to have confronted you like that, I just noticed that I asked my employer about his sexual preferences and suspected him of preying on his employees. I am terribly sorry for my rudeness. I am prepared to face consequences for that." She lowered her head, a picture of demureness.

"Lionesses protect their cups, I get that principle. I am not offended. I just hope this is hereby cleared and I won't have to face any further suspicions on that ground." Maybe he should try dating her. His alter ego was right, she wasn't too bad a choice. Definitely more than a bit older and by now she knew a bit of what he was into.

"No, don't worry. I'll also speak with Chiho. I had a feeling her account wasn't truthful and I am inclined to believe you more than her. I am just not sure why she omitted or lied about things." Her dark eyes sent him an imploring look.

"Well, my impression is that she took this job exactly to look for a mate. She was rather obvious about the fact that she wanted an Alpha that would faithfully support her, caring more about his status and money than his character. That was the reason why I ended that date before we even got to dessert."

"Oh." Ayako's face fell. "Yes, that actually explains a lot. She gave off a strange feeling from the start, so that was the reason ... thank you for sharing that, I know I am asking some rather personal questions."

"Say, did I personally name you head of this kindergarten? You seem to be quite a good choice." He smiled full of pride.

»You know you did, you abysmal liar.«

»I did not lie and if I do, I am not abysmal.«

»Arrogant prick.«

»You're worse.«

»Always.« His alter ego actually sounded smug.

During that slight interaction, Ayako was blushing furiously, stammered something nonsensical and finally thanked him. It was kind of cute. After a moment, she tried to change the topic by talking about singing and warming up voices and if he had any specific techniques he liked best or if he wanted to share in hers or warm up by himself or- he had to interrupt her or she would have continued to blabber on. First of all, he still had to decide if he really wanted to do this, so he got out his phone.

Had he actually agreed to sing? Well, the hard part was hers, certainly, but could he time his voice without any preparation beforehand after only hearing the song twice? She would sing the part sung by both alone, but it would still leave him with some lines at the beginning and in the reprise. In the reprise he would just have to repeat her lines but in the beginning, he would have to give hers. She wrote them down for him, promising to give him cues when to start. And all that while he played a song he had never played before. So much for relaxed playing.

They started with that, so he would get it over with, everything afterwards would be a piece of cake. So he played violin to the sheet music scrolling in his phone by itself, singing at her cues, trying not to make a complete fool of himself. It wasn't exactly perfect, but hopefully good enough. Natsue liked it alright, loudly applauding her mother who smiled sheepishly and thanked him deeply. She sang "O mio babbino

caro" next as by her daughter's request while he played piano. His only regret was that he could not play piano and violin at the same time, her voice required the whole set of instruments. She was magnificent, even better than last time.

To be honest, he was truly envious of Natsue by now, he wanted to hear that singing every night as well. It was Ayako this time that asked the kids for songs they wanted to hear. Natsue had some more songs that seemed to be in her mother's repertoire, other kids wanted some children's songs. He held up his hands as well which made Natsue point at him. Her mother chided her for that before asking him if he had any wishes. He asked her for "Nessun dorma", an aria from Puccini's opera Turandot. She simply nodded, took his phone to get the lyrics right and waited for him to ready his violin, fully trusting him to know the music by heart. He did of course, it was one of his favorite songs.

»Do you try to make her understand you by the songs you make her sing? This one is about a man who wins a cruel princess by solving her riddles and gives her false hope of not having to marry him if the king can find out his name until dawn. The king and princess order the whole city to stay awake and find out the name, otherwise they will kill them all come morning. So not only does the man get his princess, he also breaks her pride and has the previous monarch kill his subjects, so that those will see their new ruler as benevolent. It's the story of Rumpelstiltskin, just a hundred times worse.«

»This Rumpelstiltskin is intelligent – so he wins.«

»You are as repugnant as that creature.«

»Just as prince Kalaf. His aria is beautiful though. She sings it with so much passion.«

»You should play the Devil's Trill Sonata next. It's a beautiful song as well – first played by the devil himself to charm a mortal into submission.«

»You have some great ideas sometimes.«

So he did. His audience was bewitched.