

Bless my brother

Zweiter Platz Wettbewerb "Ungewöhnliche Paare"

Von aprileagle

Kapitel 2: Sad Boy

Chapter two: Sad boy

"A really nice brother!"

Haruka shook her head and put some food on the table. She was not a very good cook, but even she was able to put some cheese on some rolls and serve them on a plate. Yaten looked thankful up to her before he bit slowly into one. First he had been excited about the concert and later on so sad about Usagi and her friends that he hardly ate anything all day long. Now his stomach started to rumble and Haruka could not let him starve.

"I would have kicked him right into his nice little ass!" said Haruka determinedly and looked a little bit angry as she sat down again next to Yaten. The teenager was still wrapped up in the blanket, but his cheeks were reddened and he looked a lot better than he had one hour ago. When he arrived at her house and broke down sobbing.

"I guess you would have." Giggled Yaten and served himself another roll. Here he felt comfortable, with Haruka he felt at home. Just the way he wanted so badly to feel when he came to the Kou family - and was rejected by Sejya so stubbornly. "I only wanted to have a brother, Haruka. I didn't want to cause any fight or even trouble. I've already caused my mother so much trouble. I really thought that the Kou's would give me away if there would have been problems with me." Yaten shrugged his shoulders and smiled in memory. "I mean, Sejya had a very soft bedside rug, it was made out of the fur of some big animal. I could have been more unlucky."

"Bedside rug, ha! You've been a small, frightened boy!"

"And he's been a small, jealous boy. Guess we simply needed our time."

"But he could have been friendlier to you! At least he could have tried."

"Oh, I guess he tried, otherwise he would have tried to break my right arm."

"I would have broken his arm earlier."

"When Michiru wouldn't have stopped you, I know." Yaten giggled again. It was an open secret that Haruka and Sejya hated each other and mostly it was not very funny to see them fighting against each other - especially in a fight against their enemies - but from time to time their arguments could be very amusing. As long as you did not get into their line.

"I would have shown him that he's an asshole." Insisted Haruka and took the album again in her hands to turn the page.

"I know, Haruka, but I am different from you." Yaten bowed over to the album and

tried to read the date under a small photo. Haruka looked down at him and smiled sadly. Yes, Yaten was different from her just as he was completely different from his brothers. He was silent, calm and a little bit introverted. Nevertheless he was very loyal and would have gone through every hell for the persons he cared for.

How can Sejya be so blind to miss his feelings? His true feelings?

"I see, here you got your new clothes." Haruka looked at the photo Yaten was examining. It showed a little boy with dark blue pants and a light blue, almost white shirt. Those clothes seemed to make him even paler but they fitted perfectly to his silver hair. He was holding a small bird in his arms and smiled shyly up to the camera.

"Hai. They were all lined and very warm. I've frozen the first weeks at the Kou's castle before the tailor was finally done with his work. After that time I did not freeze so much any longer although Sejya told me more than once that I shouldn't wear so many clothes at once." Yaten shook his head, smiling. He leaned over to the table and took his third roll. Chewing he turned the page and pointed at another picture. Again little Yaten was holding the bird in his arms.

"First I had some problems feeding him, but after a while Birdy started to trust me and ate more and more. It only took two months for him to heal his wing and trust me, Haruka, to say goodbye was not very easy for me." Yaten's free hand stroked over the other two figures standing next to the small boy. They wore their new clothes as well and Sejya looked very proud in a red shirt. "This is the day before we went to the king's palace together to celebrate the Princess's Birthday."

"Princess's Birthday?"

"Hai, it's the most important holiday for us kids. We don't know something like Christmas in our universe, Haruka. Instead we have the Princess's Birthday. It's to celebrate the birthday of the current heir of our universe's throne. Princess Kakyuu..."

"That's the princess you are looking for, right?" asked Haruka knowingly. She was not stupid to interpret the Three Lights' songs and Yaten simply told her their story when she asked him some weeks ago.

"Hai." Yaten knew that Sejya would kill him if he ever found out that he told Haruka their big secret, but Yaten trusted Haruka - and he thought the more sailors knew about their princess the higher were their chances to find her, together. "Kakyuu was the first born and so her birthday was the new holiday. It took place one month after we found Birdy in the woods. I had been six weeks with the Kous and although I loved them all dearly, Sejya could simply not accept me as a little brother."

Yaten shrugged his shoulders and reached for another roll.

"Those four weeks in between had not been very easy for you, had they?"

"Not really." Admitted Yaten silently. "Tahiki and daddy were a lot abroad and so I was together with Sejya most of the time. He disliked me and showed it to me..." Yaten gulped then he leaned back and closed his eyes, the roll still holding in his hands.

"However it was a good time, Haruka. Maybe it doesn't sound this way and certainly I suffered incredibly strong from my real mommy's death, but I was save there. Okay, Sejya was rough to me but I hoped that he would change his behaviour one day. He was a small boy like me, why shouldn't he start to like me one day - just like Tahiki did?" Yaten opened his eyes and looked directly into dark green ones. "During my childhood my mother had tried to protect me from all evils of this world but even she failed sometimes. At the Kou's castle no one shouted at me when I did something wrong. I really expected them to beat me when I threw up my lunch right over Sejya." Yaten smiled sadly. "I shocked him a lot I think. Still now he's very careful when I tell him that I feel sick."

Yaten sighed slightly and looked at the photo again.

"There was no one who told me that I was not welcomed. Sejya often looked at me darkly but he never actually said those words. Just like no one beat me there..."

Haruka wanted to say something but Yaten shook his head to indicate her to be silent. He had a story to tell and it had not even really begun yet.

"The Princess's Birthday was a great event, Haruka. I've never been there personally before in my life and I had been very excited. Maybe not as excited as Sejya who only wanted to have his big gift, but I didn't want to make any mistakes. When I was a small child my mother gave me a tiny toy at this holiday, my father never wanted to waste anything on his bastard, so it was my first real Princess's Birthday I celebrated."

Haruka frowned because Yaten's voice did not sound very pleased in memories.

"But something went wrong?" she asked suspiciously. Yaten did not look up, he only smiled a sad smile and put the rest of his forth roll back on the plate.

"Of course it did, Haruka. Everything else went wrong in my life before, so why not my first Princess's Birthday." He sighed deeply and turned another page which showed all of the Kou brothers again, this time standing in front of a huge portal. A small girl - she did not seem to be older than Yaten or Sejya - came running towards them. Her red hairs were bound together on her back, but they already looked messed. A huge grin shone on her face.

Kakyuu.

"Hai, everything went wrong, Haruka. Although it started so wonderful..."

"Sejya! Tahiki!"

As always the young princess came running to them ignoring every etiquette and her good education. Her red hair was slightly messed and her dark red dress was surely not made for jumping over a little snow hillock. As always she smiled happily at them and shouted their names for some times before she almost flew into their arms. As always she embraced Sejya shortly before she hugged Tahiki long, who - as always - blushed deeply but had to smile in return as she raised her head and started to talk about all the things she just experienced this morning.

Kakyuu.

Sejya had to grin as Tahiki remembered the etiquette and wanted to let go but the little girl held him tighter which caused his face to become even redder. She was eight years old - would turn nine on her birthday tomorrow - and the heir of this universe. Her mother died during her birth and so it was only a matter of time until she would follow her father's footsteps. Oh, and she was everybody's darling. No matter what she did, no matter how wild she ran around and drove her teachers and nursemaids crazy you simply could not be angry with her.

Wish she would live nearer to us.

Kakyuu was as wild as the little brother Sejya always wanted to have although she cried easily, played with dolls, and wore dresses. But she was able to ride a horse, to ride a toboggan, and did not get sick over him just because of a small tomato ragout. Can I exchange her for Yaten?

Sejya gulped down his question, after all he wanted to get something for the Princess's Birthday. Something nice, not a big argument with his parents and house arrest for the rest of his life.

"... and then I told her that..." babbled Kakyuu as always. Until she noticed the third

person standing next to the two brothers. Partly she let go off Tahiki and frowned, then she seemed to remember.

"You must be Yaten, the new brother." She suggested and came slowly over to him. Yaten nodded silently not knowing how to react. He had never been to such an official event before and did not know how to talk to someone as important as the crown princess. Obviously he did not want to make any mistakes, especially not with Sejya being around. However, before he could react Kakyuu already wrapped his arms around his neck and hugged him overwhelming.

"Welcome to our crazy team." She sniggered happily.

Wow, even she's taller than our girlish boy, even if it's only for an inch or two.

Sejya shook his head and expected Tahiki to flip out. It was his princess who hugged the new brother, the mean intruder so openly. He had to be jealous like hell, right? Maybe Tahiki did not want to admit it and Kakyuu was too young to see it, but the Kou's heir fell in love with the wild princess a long time ago, probably at the moment he first saw her. But as Sejya turned his head he almost stumbled stunned backwards, because Tahiki was smiling. Still his face was reddened in an unnatural way, but he was definitely smiling as if this situation was completely fine with him.

Idiots!

Sejya's mood sank as he saw that he was the only one knowing Yaten's true soul: The intruder, the cry baby, the thief.

"Daddy told me that you're from a desert planet." Said Kakyuu and took Yaten's icy hand still smiling trustingly at him. "You've got to tell me more about your home planet. I can't imagine so much sand when there's so much snow laying around here." Before she could really pull him inside the palace their parents came over to them. The king welcomed Lord and Lady Kou in person and after they exchanged the most urgent news they started to miss their kids. Oh, it was normal that they lost their kids out of sight on a day and an occasion like this but today Yaten was with them for the first time. Although Lady Kou trusted her sons completely she was still a little bit concerned and simply wanted to make sure that everything was fine with her youngest son.

"May I introduce, Your Majesty, that's my youngest son, Yaten Kou." Said Lady Kou and went on her knees between Yaten and Kakyuu while the princess refused to let go her new friend's hand. Her father who was even taller than Lord Kou. His red hair was mixed with white strands, he smiled friendly down at the small boy who became even paler, if that was possible.

"Hello, Yaten. Nice to meet you."

"... hi..." was all Yaten could reply. His voice was suddenly very hoarse and he gulped visibly. His green eyes grew wide as the king bowed and ruffled through his silver strands he did not tame in a plaid today.

He's only saying >hi< to the king, the most powerful man in our universe.

Sejya groaned suppressed and was shocked as he saw that the king did not mind at all. His parents would have been angry with him being so impolite towards Kakyuu's father, but it was okay when Yaten behaved so wrongly.

As always!

"Let's go inside. There's something I have to discuss with you." Said the king finally and rose again. "And I am sure that you kids are hungry. Kaki tried the whole morning to steal something from the kitchen but she failed."

Kaki.

Sejya had to grin, because only her father was allowed to call her this way. If anyone

else called her this name she could get very angry.

"... Kaki...?" Yaten of all people had to ask the silent question while the adults went inside. Sejya heard it and grinned diabolically. Surely Kakyuu would be angry with this stupid boy now and finally he would have an ally against that thief! But Kakyuu did not explode as Sejya had hoped. Instead she only laughed her high, clear laughter and pulled Yaten towards the portal.

"That's my nickname, Yaten. Do you have a nickname?" As Yaten shook his head silently she started actually to tell him the story how she got that nickname and why she was ashamed of it.

I can't believe it! She kills everyone but her father who uses that name!

Sejya clenched his fists and followed them inside, sulking.

But of course it's different when that girlish boy says it. As always!

Kakyuu's birthday would only be tomorrow, but it was tradition to start the celebration one day before so that the children would get their gifts on the following morning. It was a grand ball and all noblemen of their galaxy appeared to give their good wishes for the little princess. That she might be a good queen one day. Kakyuu sat on a small mountain of pillows, because she was still too small to sit properly on her throne, and grinned happily as she got one wrapped gift after another knowing that she would have to wait till tomorrow to open them. Sejya and Yaten sat next to her and when there was no guest coming to her she talked to them without pause. Normally Sejya would have sat on that special place where Yaten sat right now but Kakyuu wanted to know more about that desert planet Yaten came from and begged Sejya to swap places. Of course Sejya could not resist as Kakyuu and Tahiki looked so pleadingly at him and now he was sitting next to his parents who only talked to the king about political things. It was BORING!!!

From time to time the king actually talked to Tahiki and an always turning pale Yaten who liked it to talk to the princess, a girl about his age, but not to the king who was too big and too powerful for him. Too intimidating although Kakyuu's father surely did not intend it.

Again Tahiki got more attention than Sejya, but that was okay for him. Tahiki was the Kou's heir and he could easily get all the attention he wanted to have as long as Sejya did not have to take part at all those long, boring political discussions his older brother had to participate almost every week. No, Sejya was not angry with his brother, he was angry with that girlish boy who got more attention as well... for not being the heir, for not even being a real Kou!

That's unfair!

Sejya looked down on his plate and chewed slowly his beloved steak. His look was morose as he saw that Yaten got again some foreign meal. Kakyuu was very excited about it and begged more than once for a small piece of it. Tahiki only laughed and called her a greedy little girl upon which Kakyuu leaned over to him and started to tickle him. Tahiki went as red as the tomato being speared on his fork and burst out into laughter.

They are having so much fun and I am sitting here all alone!

Sejya turned his head and watched some noblemen and noblewomen dancing on the huge dance floor. Obviously they ate their meals a little bit quicker but Sejya did not have any hunger suddenly. He only wanted to have his gift and forget this evening as

quickly as he could.

And that's only because of that thief!

Yes, in Sejya's eyes Yaten was a thief. He had stolen his parents' and his brother's attention from him, Kakyuu preferred to talk to him instead to her friend Sejya and the king greeted him instead of the real son of the important Kou family. Yaten did not only steal his family he did also steal his title from him. Everyone treated him like the second son not like someone from the outside.

He's stolen my family and my friends! That thief!

Sejya chopped his vegetable to a not identifying mass and made an angry face. Of course no one noticed it - as always.

Why can't he simply go back to where he came from? Why can't he just disappear again? Why can't everything be as it had been before???

Sejya winced madly as someone pulled gently but determinedly the sleeve of his red shirt. Although his mother tried hard to convince him to wear some of his new shirts he insisted on this one and so she finally gave up.

"What's up?" he snapped a little bit more unfriendly than he had intended to and frowned as he saw Yaten standing next to him.

"Kakyuu wants to build some snowmen..." whispered Yaten with his typical high voice shyly. "Do... do you wanna come with us?"

Sejya looked up to see Tahiki and Kakyuu standing behind the small boy, looking expectantly down at him. The dark haired boy sighed slightly then he gave in. Maybe he would regret his decision in watching Tahiki and Kakyuu only caring for Yaten but certainly it would be better than sitting here, being surrounded by adults talking about nonsense. At least nonsense for him. Oh, and that music was driving him crazy! Yes, it sounded like a good idea to go out and build his own snowman, no matter if the other two would help him or not.

"Ok."

Much to Sejya's surprise neither Tahiki nor Kakyuu ignored him. Of course Yaten was the centre of their attention, but Tahiki helped his smaller brother with the big snowman's head and the other built their snowmen near to Sejya's so that they formed a whole snow family. Just Yaten's one was too small and so they made a doggy out of it.

"Cool, a real family with a pet." Said Kakyuu and searched for some stones to insert them as eyes.

"Although there's no horse." Laughed Tahiki alluding to Sejya's deep love of those big animals, calling Baranas his own pet. Sejya only grinned. The past hour had been much better than the whole day and he could even forget his anger about the girlish boy. Again Yaten was wrapped up to a ball of fur in his thick clothes. His cheeks were reddened and there was a shy smile on his face while he put two small sticks into the dog's head - as ears - and one in its end as a tail. He looked cute the way he crouched there in the snow and concentrated on his complicated work. Surely he did not want to destroy their works and inserted the sticks very carefully.

Cute?

That's the girlish boy you're talking about!

Sejya made a face and helped Kakyuu with the eye stones.

"Do you want to sneak again through the whole palace this year?" asked Tahiki

grinning.

"I never did..."

"How did you..."

Answered Sejya and Kakyuu at the same time and blushed deeply. Tahiki's grin only grew wider. He knew that it was very hard for the kids to wait until the next morning to open their gifts. Mostly there was one gift near the chimney wrapped up very untidy. Mostly because the recipient could not wait and opened it the night before just to wrap it up again to cover up his tracks. Of course it was forbidden to have a look at their gifts before the Princess's Birthday, however Sejya and Kakyuu simply could not wait and Tahiki knew too well how they managed it to get through the palace unseen. He had done that, too, when he had been younger. Still he was very curious, of course, but he was the Kou's heir and as that he could not do such a childish thing. Well, at least he had to be more careful than ever before.

Yaten rose and pulled again at Sejya's sleeve. Tahiki saw how his younger brother rolled his eyes before he turned and how he looked astonished at the carrot Yaten held high in the air. Obviously he wanted to give the tallest snowman a nose but was too small to reach it. Sejya wanted to take the carrot in his own hands, but Yaten only stretched wider. Almost he lost his balance and crashed into the snowman, but Sejya was quicker and held him back.

"You're too small to do that, don't ya see?" muttered Sejya annoyed but lifted the small boy into the air so that Yaten could insert the carrot all alone. Proudly the youngest of the brother smiled up at the snowman's nose and then at Sejya who only shrugged his shoulders as the small boy thanked him in his high voice. Tahiki watched the whole action and grinned knowingly. Still it seemed to be hard for Sejya to accept his new brother, even after six long weeks, but scenes like this one told Tahiki that they only had to be patient. Sejya secretly cared for the little boy, although he certainly did not even confess it to himself. Some more weeks and the two would be inseparable, Tahiki was sure. Yaten was still very shy and talked little, but he got more curious with every day and smiled a little bit more than he had done when he arrived at the Kou's castle.

We only have to be a little bit more patient.

"Common guys, it's getting late." Said Tahiki after he glanced at his watch. "Let's go back before anyone is searching for us."

Three pairs of eyes looked disappointed up to him and Tahiki had to giggle.

"Don't look at me this way. You know we can build more snowmen tomorrow, ok?"

Three mouths started - more or less visibly - to sulk and Tahiki shook his head in amusement.

"You won't win, you three." He laughed and turned to head back to the palace. "You already look frozen and I don't want to risk that you're freezing to death."

Three hands grabbed his sleeve and turned him around. Three faces showed him pure agony and begged like hell. Tahiki blushed and finally burst out into laughter.

"Ok, ok, but only ten more minutes." He laughed and was immediately pulled back to the snow family. Three kids grinned happily and did everything to distract Tahiki as good as possible. Sejya even stole his watch while Kakyuu used her best charm and Yaten simply asked Tahiki to help him with a snow bird.

One hour later their parents started to miss them because it was their time to go to bed after such a long, exciting day.

Two hours later the servants finally found them and it was not before midnight when they went to bed.

Three little kids were extremely satisfied with themselves.

It was an unfamiliar place for him. The entire palace seemed to be full of ghosts and other monsters, every shadow seemed to move from all alone. The whole atmosphere was spooky and he was afraid of every strange sound.

Where's everyone?

Yaten gulped and groped his way through the long corridors. Another nightmare let him wake up screaming but he found himself alone in the room he shared with his older brothers. Neither Tahiki nor Sejya could be found in their beds although it was in the middle of the night. Yes, it was late, because the ball was already over and surely all adults went to bed some hours ago, just like his parents.

Where are they?

Yaten did not know where the rooms of his new parents were although he would have never dared to ask them for shelter. It was okay to ask Tahiki or Sejya, they were both boys just like he was. He could not ask the Lord to sleep in his bed, he did not want to cause any trouble. No, he never wanted to cause any trouble again. He never wanted to hear again a raging voice calling him a bastard, he never wanted to feel that rough belt on his skin, punishing him for something he had never done. Punishing him for being different from the rest of his family, of his people.

Yaten was a small boy who only wanted what every boy at his age wanted badly: To be loved. By his parents and by his brothers as well.

Where's everyone?

New tears ran over his cheeks and he held the pillow tighter in his shaking arms. Barefoot he tapped over the cold underground and froze while his big eyes searched for any sign of life, natural life.

Maybe they only went to the bathroom. Maybe they'll return soon. Guess I should also go back to wait for them.

Yaten turned and hesitated. His eyes grew wide as he stared into the darkness of the corridor. He left open the door to their sleeping room to have a source of light he could head for. Now it was gone.

What???

The small boy sobbed louder and ran all the way back he believed to have come. However, he could not find his sleeping room again. He stumbled over the pants of his pyjamas and lost his pillow. His hair fell open over his shoulder and he rubbed his burning eyes desperately.

It can't be!

It has to be here! Somewhere!

Yaten cried louder, because suddenly he had to think of his new parents. Certainly they would be not very happy to hear that he had been out of his bed in the middle of the night, running through an unknown palace - as a guest of the king! The small boy grabbed his pillow with his shaking hands and simply ran along the corridor. Somewhere had to be an opened door or at least a illuminated door. His brothers would not put the light out as long as he was not in his bed, would they?

Maybe they didn't notice me leave...

Yaten did not care any longer about the haunted castle he seemed to be caught in, he only thought about his new parents and that they could be angry with him.

No, they mustn't be angry with me!

I must be a good boy!

Where is my bed?

He ran until he felt too sad to continue. More and more tears escaped his burning eyes and he felt incredibly lost. Almost as lost as he had felt on the day of her funeral - his mother's funeral. First he did not understand what had happened. He only stood there with a small flower in his hands and expected her to come back every moment. He really thought that it was only a bad dream and that she would wake him up. He ignored the dark looks of his so called relatives and the gossip they were telling about him. Surely lies. So many lies he had heard all his young life long.

As they finally closed the grave and one of his uncles grabbed his hand to take him with him, because someone had to take care of the bastard that survived the tragic accident by chance, Yaten understood. Suddenly he understood that his mother, his beloved mommy, would never return again and started to cry. He struggled hard against his uncle's hands whose response was even harder. That uncle did not love the bastard he had to take care of all of a sudden. No, he hated the small boy who was so different from the rest of the family. No one ever loved little Yaten. No one except his dear mommy. His dear mommy who left him so soon, too soon...

Mommy! Help me!

Yaten begged for the thousands time since that tragic day that changed his young life completely, but no one answered, as always. No one helped him and he felt left behind, left all alone. Alone in a world that never wanted him. Him, the different one. Please!!!

"Stop crying, idiot!"

Yaten winced madly as he heard the whispered voice behind him. He turned around and saw Sejya standing behind him. His hair was messed and his red pyjamas crumbled. But his eyes sparkled excitedly. Maybe he slept in his bed one hour ago, now he did not show any tiredness at all. The small boy blinked, and blinked again. Then he let go of his pillow and wrapped his tiny arms around the other boy's waist and sobbed even louder. His whole body shook while he searched for comfort, reassurance, and love.

Great, I was looking for my gift and all I've found is our cry baby.

Sejya made a face and rolled his eyes. Shortly he ruffled through silver hair, before he forced Yaten gently to let go. On the bottom of his pocket he found a handkerchief and handed it Yaten to blow his nose.

"What are you doing here, idiot?" he asked and looked carefully around. But no one seemed to have heard them, still they were safe.

Good, everyone's sleeping!

"... had a nightmare..." marbled Yaten and wanted to give him back his now surely wet handkerchief. Sejya shook his head.

"Keep it." He ordered and looked again around. "Those nightmares, can't you make them stop?!" Sejya asked rather annoyed although he knew too well that you could not stop nightmares. No one had nightmares voluntarily. Surely Yaten suffered the most from his nightly crying attack, but Sejya ignored this thought. He wanted to win back his room, especially his bedside rug. Just like he wanted to sleep an entire night without being woken up by a heartrending scream.

"... wish I could..." marbled Yaten guiltily and put the handkerchief into his slip. Then he looked expectantly up to his older brother. "... bring me back to bed..."

Sejya needed some moments to understand the high whisper, then he groaned slightly tortured and shook his head.

"Later, idiot. First we have to find the gifts!" Again Sejya controlled the corridor behind them and suddenly he looked like a plotter, ready to betray his kingdom for a good Princess Birthday's Gift.

"Gifts?" Yaten's mood lightened up. As long as he was together with his brother everything was fine, right? No one would punish him for being together with his brother, no one would be angry with him. Sejya would take him back to bed when he thought it was the right time. In the meantime Yaten could spend some more time with Sejya and that was fantastic. At least better than searching for the sleeping room and being alone there if he was actually able to find it this very night.

"Didn't you listen, idiot?" Sejya grabbed Yaten's free sleeve and pulled him with him. They went through different corridors. The older boy seemed to know perfectly where he was going, certainly he had been quite often to this palace.

No wonder, he knows Kakyuu for a longer time than I.

Yaten smiled as he felt the warm hand upon his pyjamas shirt's fabric, listening to Sejya's excited voice.

"Tomorrow's Kakyuu's birthday. It's traditional that all children get a gift on the morning of the future king or queen's birthday. Kakyuu's birthday is tomorrow so we'll get a nice gift tomorrow morning."

"But... it's night..."

"Right, but the parents mostly put the gifts near the chimney of the big hall for the children the night before they go to bed." Sejya grinned and finally opened a door.

"Trust me, idiot, I've done this some times before, I never failed."

Yaten trusted him. He glanced into the room and recognized the hall where they had eaten their dinner. Sejya let go and ran over to the chimney. Really, there were some gifts lying neatly between some plants. Impatiently Sejya put them away and grabbed for a big one. His face brightened up as he shook it hectically.

That looks like a toboggan.

Yes, it has the right form, the right size, and the right weight!

Finally I'll get a new toboggan!!!

Sejya turned the huge package around and looked at the card - just for his own safety. He did not dare to open one of Tahiki's gifts - he would die because of the boredom inside - and he did not want to open one of Kakyuu's gifts - then he would die because of the girlishness inside.

Surely it's mine!

Sejya opened the card and his face fell as he read the name written down by his mother's neat handwriting.

For Yaten...

Sejya blinked and glanced at the card again, but the writing did not change, the name stayed the same.

Yaten...

What???

He's getting MY beloved toboggan???

Sejya could not believe it. He told his parents so many times that his old one was used, half broken, and too small for him - that it was simply old. Oh, how much did he hope for a new one for the Princess's Birthday. How much did he beg to get one!

And now the girlish boy got it. The small intruder who was not even able to ride on a toboggan down a tiny hill without hurting his clumsy feet!

It can't be!

It simply can't be!

Sejya gulped and tears burned in his eyes. Tears of jealousy, disappointment, and hate. He wanted this toboggan so badly, and his parents knew his feelings too well. But they ignored him, just the way they had ignored him over the past six weeks. Instead of making his greatest dream come true they gave it to Yaten. The thief who stole so much during the past weeks.

Now he even managed to steal my Princess's Birthday Gift!

"This can't be!" he whispered and his voice increased. He rose and stumbled to Yaten who looked up to him in confusion. "Are you able to explain this to me, you little rat?" screamed Sejya, suddenly forgetting that it was in the middle of the night and that he needed to be silent before anyone would wake up and find him out of bed. It all did not matter any longer. All that did matter was his life - slowly being destroyed by that little brat standing in front of him, staring at him so innocently.

It's all only a big show.

But I am NOT going to fall for it!

Energetically he tore the wrapping paper apart and actually held a brand new toboggan in his hands. Just the one he wanted so badly for over a year. It was wonderful. No, it was perfect! It was made of dark wood, had two horns, and a red seat. It felt light in his hands but he knew that it was strong enough to carry him downwards the most steep hills. Yes, it was the most perfect toboggan - and it was not his.

"Are you able to explain this to me, you... you... you intruder???"

Intruder?

Yaten yield away and gulped visibly. He did not understand Sejya's outburst nor did he know an answer of the older one's strange question.

"... nice thing..." he marbled and pointed at the toboggan. It was the one Sejya wanted to have so much, Yaten knew that. Sejya had told him often, twice a day during the past week. Maybe he would forget his anger when he concentrated on his gift, whatever it had been that made Sejya so angry.

As long as it's not me...

"Oh yes, it really IS a nice toboggan, isn't it?" yelled Sejya and threw the gift suddenly to the ground. It did not break but the loud sound made Yaten wince. "It's yours!"

There were tears in Sejya's eyes, the older boy's face was redden and Yaten did not like the threatening glance. He raised his small hands protectively and shook his head. No, this could not be his gift, this had to be a big misunderstanding. He was not even able to use it. No, he did not want any gifts, to have a new family again, to have someone who actually cared for him, that was the greatest gift for him. To know that Birdy was getting better and that some servants were taking care of him while they were gone, that made him happier than any toboggan could have done.

"... no..."

"Oh, yes! Congratulations, you thief! Now you've managed to steal everything from me!" Sejya felt so disappointed, so full of hate, he had to let it all out or otherwise it would tear him apart. "You've stolen my family, all of their attention, and now you've even managed to steal my biggest wish. Fantastic, you only needed six weeks for your plan!"

What?

What is he talking about?

Yaten shook his head again and his body started again to tremble. Tears burned in his eyes as well, but his tears were tears of fear not of rage.

"... please... stop this. You're frighten me..." whispered Yaten pleadingly and tried to

get to the door, to run out, and to search for his bedroom alone. He saw that Sejya was raging and although he did not know why he did not want to stay here any longer. Sejya was saying so strange things. Things he did not want to hear. Never again. However, Sejya was quicker, just as he was stronger. He grabbed the collar of Yaten's pyjamas and held him roughly back.

He mustn't run back to MY parents as long as I am not done with him!

"I shall frighten you? Stop your show, I am not falling for it!" he grit through his teeth and held Yaten tighter as the smaller boy actually started to struggle.

"... please..."

"Mommy only cares for you, you know? It's alike when I am standing near, I am not even getting a glance! Daddy has so little time for us kids, because he's an important man for the king. During the last weeks he spent all his free time only with you, you thief! With you, not with me!" Sejya's anger grew big and bigger. Some tears ran over his cheeks and it would be a wonder if he did not wake anyone up with his yelling. "You're even allowed to sleep in Tahiki's bed! That had been my place. My place, you intruder! Today the king only talked to you, just like Kakyuu. You pushed me out of my place. You are the second son now, congratulations!"

Yaten struggled desperately against those fists around his collar. His toes hardly touched the ground and it was hard for him to gasp for breath. Everything was so tight around his throat.

What is he talking about?

Yaten did not understand his bigger brother, but he sensed that Sejya's anger was his fault. As everything else had been his fault in his young life. Although he tried so hard to be loved this time, and not being yelled at...

"... please..."

"You've taken away my whole family from me! Everyone ignored me since you've arrived! And now you even stole my gift! I won't accept that any longer. Are you listen, you thief? It's enough, I can't take that any longer!"

Yaten swallowed the wrong way and started to cough, but Sejya did not let him go. It got harder and harder for the small boy to breathe. Stars danced before his eyes and suddenly he lost the ground under his toes.

"... please..." he croaked and tried to find hold somewhere. "... go..." He wanted to say >Let me go.< but did not have enough breath to say it completely.

Go?

He's telling ME to go???

Sejya did not believe his ears. He pushed the struggling boy away and Yaten stumbled some steps before he felt the wall in his back and leaned against it. Hard he was gasping for breath and holding his neck.

"You are telling me to go? Who do you think you are giving me such an order?" yelled Sejya, this time louder than before. It hurt. Oh god, it hurt so much! Yaten did not even take away his family, he told him to go so that he could overtake his place completely. But Sejya would not do him that pleasure. No, he would stay and fight for his right!

"Do you really think six weeks are enough to replace me? Forget it! Six weeks aren't even enough to make a good brother out of you!"

"... but..."

Yaten's big, tear filled eyes were driving Sejya crazy. How could this traitor, this thief look so innocently when all he did was to push him out of his beloved family? How could he even dare to look at him this way?

What's going on?

Why is he so mad?

Why is he saying such nonsense?

"... please, Sejya..." tried Yaten to explain and hit the hall's hard ground at the next moment. His right cheek burned like hell. As Yaten looked up he saw the hate shimmering in dark eyes. Sejya was holding his right hand and his whole body trembled with rage. The small boy needed some seconds to understand that Sejya had beat him - and that he really hated him.

Not again...

Yaten lowered his head and stared at the pillow he was lying next to.

Not again...

"Don't dare to call me Sejya again. For you I am Master Kou, is that clear, you little rat?" Sejya gulped, the pain was tearing his heart apart. "I really wanted to have a little brother, you know? Someone I ride out with, someone wild who'd run with me through the woods and go ice skating with me on my secret lake in winter! I wanted a brother who'd be just a little bit like me! Someone I could spend my free time with."

Someone I could have loved...

Sejya sobbed and wiped away some tears.

"And all I've got is you! A boy who wears dresses, has long hairs, and an ear ring. A boy who plays with dolls instead of horses! A boy who's afraid of my nice Baranas and is neither able to ride a toboggan nor do ice skating! I've waited so long for a new brother, you traitor, and all I've got was you! You're such a big disappointment..."

Sejya's voice broke and he let his shoulder hang. Now it was out, all out. However, he did not feel any better. He only felt desperate and wanted to creep under his blanket and never come out. No matter what he would say, Yaten won. He already got his family, even his friends on his side, it was only a matter of time until they all would forget Sejya.

That traitor!

The dark haired boy went on his knees and covered his burning face with his frozen fingers, crying loudly.

"... a wild brother..." he hiccuped, not caring about Yaten any longer. The small boy still laid on the ground and did not respond anything. For some times he opened his mouth, but nothing came out. Silently he stared at his pillow before he slowly came to his feet. Still his cheek burned and his legs trembled so much that he feared to fall down the next moment. His head was filled with only one thought.

You're such a big disappointment.

He never wanted to hear those words again. Words his father yelled so often at him when his mother was not around to protect him. Before he took his belt again.

You're such a big disappointment.

Yaten hoped so much to find a new family in the Kous. A new family and a little bit love. No one of his uncles wanted to take him, the bastard, the different one. No one ever wanted him but of his mother who gave her life to save him. He would have never survived the tragic accident if she would not have protected him with her body. Mommy...

She had been the only one who really loved him, but she was gone. Never would she return. Never again.

You're such a big disappointment.

Maybe it was his own fault. It had to be, because everyone pushed him away with those words: His father, his uncle, and finally Sejya. Of all people Sejya. Yaten noticed

that Sejya sometimes was in a bad mood and tried everything to be a good brother. Whatever Sejya wanted to do, Yaten obeyed, hoping to make him happy. Yaten thought that he succeeded when Sejya started to be friendlier with him.

He helped me to insert the snowman's nose.

He found me on the corridor and wanted me to give me my gift.

A gift he did not want to have at all, he did not even know how to use. No, Yaten only wanted to be a good brother. He wanted to be loved. By Tahiki and by Sejya. Now he had to see that he failed. Again.

I don't want to go back to that uncle!

Tears blurred Yaten's view as he stumbled towards the door. Surely the Kous would give him back. He did not work in their family, he was a burden for everyone. That uncle would be even angrier than Sejya had been if he would return.

I don't want to go back.

I want to stay here.

But at the same time he knew that it was over. He had have his chance and he wasted it, as he had wasted every chance to please his father.

You're such a big disappointment.

Yes, he was a big disappointment. For everyone, maybe even for his mother who only loved him, because he was her only child. Maybe it all would have been different if she would have been able to give his father another son, a real heir, as had often said.

You're such a big disappointment.

Yaten grabbed his pillow and stumbled out of the room, not looking back at a still sobbing Sejya. Everything was over, he knew it. And it was his fault. Everything was his fault. Everything in his life had been his fault, so it surely was this time. Although Yaten did not really understand why. But, he had never understood his faults when his father shouted at him, when his uncles looked so strangely at him.

You're such a big disappointment.

More tears ran over Yaten's cheeks as he simply stumbled through the corridors, not knowing what actually he was looking for. But he knew that he only wanted to get away from this place, from the pain in his soul.

You're such a big disappointment.

"Didn't you tell me that you're too grown up to sneak into the hall to have a glance at your gift?" giggled Kakyuu and wrapped her dressing gown tighter around her body. She was slightly freezing, mostly because of her tiredness. But her curiosity was stronger. She simply could not lie in bed and wait until the next morning. On her way to the big hall she met Tahiki who sneaked as quietly as she through the palace.

"I am only protecting you from ghosts." Smiled Tahiki and blushed as she took his hand and held it tight. To guide him better through the palace, her home.

"That's very nice of you, my big rescuer." Whispered the princes and grinned as she saw Tahiki blushing in the darkness. Then he stopped suddenly and she almost fell over the seam of her nightdress.

"What?" asked Kakyuu surprised, but he only held his right forefinger before his mouth and showed her to be silent. It took some moments but then she heard it, too. It was a desperate sob as if someone was crying.

"What's that?"

"Maybe Yaten had a nightmare..." marbled Tahiki and frowned. When he left his room

Yaten still slept in his room. Okay, Tahiki spent a little bit time to wait near Kakyuu's room for her to come out, but Yaten did not know this castle, surely he would have never found back to the big hall.

Wouldn't he?

Carefully Tahiki opened the door which was only ajar. But there was no Yaten standing there and searching for someone to banish his bad dreams. No, it was Sejya sitting on the ground, crying desperately. Tahiki blinked twice, but the picture before his eyes stayed the same. He did not remember the last time he had seen his younger brother cry, it must have been years ago. Sejya was not a boy who cried often. Whenever he was angry, sad or even frightened he reacted with an outburst of rage, hardly ever he cried at such occasions.

"Sejya? Monster?" asked Tahiki gently and went on his knees next to his brother. Kakyuu watched him in silence and went over to the toboggan. It was new, surely a gift. Torn wrapping paper laid around it and there was a small card.

She bowed to pick it up.

"Hey, little one, what happened?" Tahiki used Sejya's old nickname and brought him carefully in his arms. Just as he had done when Sejya had been a baby and did not know that it was easier to torture his family with rage than with tears. The younger boy winced madly and finally raised his head. His dark eyes grew wide in surprise.

"Tahiki?" he sobbed, not believing that his brother was actually here. Here with him and not with Yaten. As he had been so often during the past months.

"What happened?" repeated Tahiki his question and felt how Sejya trembled even more. More tears ran over reddened cheeks and the boy cried louder again.

"He's stolen everything..." sobbed Sejya and lowered his head again. "Mommy... daddy... you... all the attention and..." Sejya hiccuped. "... and even my gift!"

What?

What is he talking about?

Tahiki hugged his brother gently and glanced over to Kakyuu who looked as shocked as he felt.

"Who stole you your gift?"

"Not only my gift... everyone... mommy, daddy... you..."

"I wasn't stolen. I don't think so." teased Tahiki calming and ran a hand through dark hair. Sejya winced again but did not turn away. "Who, monster. Whom are you talking about?"

"That girlish boy! That traitor! That thief!"

Girlish boy?

Tahiki raised one eyebrow and groaned as he finally understood the meaning behind Sejya's incoherent stammer.

"Do you mean Yaten?"

Sejya sobbed even louder and finally nodded.

Thief?

Mommy? Daddy? Me?

Have I been so wrong about it? I thought they'd be good brothers. Have I really mistaken Sejya's feelings that much?

"Hey, little one, no one took away anyone from you. Neither mommy nor daddy. Nor me. I am here, Sejya."

"But... but... he got all the attention..." cried Sejya and clung harder to his brother's shirt. "You only love him, not me!"

For a moment Tahiki was too stunned to react. He would have never thought that his

younger brother thought this way about their new sibling.

"Fool." He managed finally to whisper gently. "My little fool. Of course I love you. Just like your parents love you."

"But..."

"Of course we also love Yaten, but that doesn't mean that we love you less."

"But he got the toboggan as gift. He, not I!"

So that's the big crisis my brother's in. He sneaked into the hall and found it. That's so typical for him not to read the card properly.

Tahiki smiled relieved. Relieved that Yaten was not here. Surely the little boy still laid in his bed, sleeping deep and tight while Sejya was so desperate about nothing.

"The toboggan is for both of you." Said Tahiki and stroked again calming through dark hair. "Mommy wrote down both of your names. Sometimes I wish you'd be more patient to read the whole cards, little fool."

Sejya's head shot up and he almost crashed into Tahiki's jaw. Dark eyes grew wide and his face paled.

"What?" he hiccuped and looked directly into Tahiki's smiling face.

"It's a gift for both of you, because it's such a big toboggan. Mommy thought that you'd learn Yaten how to use it, that you both are able to sit on it together. Your real gifts are lying in the other corner."

"What?" Sejya's voice was suddenly shrill as he stumbled to his feet. Horrified he stared at Kakyuu who was holding the card in her hands.

"It's true. Here are two names on the card." The princess winced as Sejya grabbed the card and stared at it.

For my Yaten...

... and my Sejya.

No!

Sejya turned the card with trembling hands, but the handwriting did not change. As it did not the first time he held it tight.

"No..." he choked and felt like throwing up.

I misunderstood everything.

He did not steal my toboggan, because it's ours....

"Sejya? What's wrong?" asked Tahiki who sensed that something terrified his smaller brother. "It's not that bad to share it with Yaten, is it? You've seen it tonight, he loves to build snowmen. So if you ever want to have this toboggan for your own just give him some small stones and a carrot and he'll be happy."

Happy...

Sejya felt how his stomach turned into acid.

He did not steal my gift.

The dark haired boy turned and stared at his older brother and Kakyuu who were obviously concerned about him.

He did not steal my brother nor my friends.

Again some tears sparkled in his dark eyes and Sejya trembled even more. Tahiki was by his side because Sejya looked suddenly as if he would faint every moment.

"Sejya! What's wrong with you?"

He did nothing wrong, and I yelled at him. I beat him...

"I thought... and I yelled and... I felt so disappointed... I..." Sejya looked directly into his brother's eyes and Tahiki gulped as he saw the panic there. "I felt so hurt and only wanted to hurt him."

"Yaten?" This time the Kou's heir knew whom his little brother was talking about.

"Yaten had been here?"

Sejya nodded and Tahiki grabbed him as he went on his knees. But he did not faint, he only sat there, staring shocked at the toboggan - HIS toboggan - two tears were running over his ashen face.

"I had been so disappointed and so angry... I yelled at him and said to him that I... that I don't want a brother like him." Sejya hiccuped again and wiped away his tears with an angry movement. This time being angry about himself.

"Everyone only took care of him during the past weeks. Whenever I wanted to talk to daddy he was there and I could not. Whenever I wanted to be near mommy he had been already in her embrace. Whenever I wanted to ride out with you he was sitting next to you on Snowflake, slowing down our ride. I saw the toboggan and read his name on... on the card and... and I simply snapped... I... I called him bad names..." whispered Sejya and expected Tahiki to yell at him, just as he deserved it. But Tahiki did not yell at him, he did not even push him out of his arms. Instead he pulled him nearer and hugged him gently.

"Sorry, I did not see it, little one." Whispered the Kou's heir. "But you could have come to me and tell me about your feelings."

"How? Yaten was always by your side and I... I feared that you wouldn't understand me..." Sejya buried his face in Tahiki's shoulder and closed his burning eyes. "So... so it was... was me who... misunderstood..."

"We really didn't want to make you feel being ignored, Sejya." Said Tahiki and rocked his brother loving. "It's just not easy with Yaten. He's shy and he had a hard time after his mother's death. Imagine Sejya, he lost both of his parents and the rest of his family didn't want him. We only wanted to make him feel comfortable here."

"I feared he would... would take over... my place..."

I should have seen it!

Damn!

Tahiki cursed himself silently. He ought to have known that his brother was still too young to not react like a little child. They ought to have taken more time to talk to the both of them in peace and not only rush things between two political meetings. They ought to have been there for the both of them, not only for a shy, frightened Yaten. Sejya yelled at him. Surely he feels awful. Just like Sejya does right now...

"No one could ever take your place, monster." Teased Tahiki and forced his brother to look right into his face. "No one's as wild as you are and no one would ever annoy me as much as you do." Tahiki grinned and finally earned a weak smile.

"And now let's search for Yaten, ok? Surely he's sad."

And tomorrow I'll talk to mommy and daddy and we'll find a good solution for all of us! Sejya felt bad for the words he said to Yaten - Tahiki did not really want to know what bad names exactly Sejya had called Yaten - that was a beginning.

"I... I..." Sejya trembled but was able to stand up. Still he held the card in his hands and bit hard on his trembling lower lip. "I have to... to..."

Apologize.

Still he was not able to say it yet, but he knew that he had to apologize. Maybe Yaten was not the brother he had always wanted. Maybe Yaten was small, shy, played with dolls, and was afraid of horses. Maybe Yaten was a little bit girlish in Sejya's eyes - Sejya knew that he had not been any better, no, that he had been worse during the past hours. No, during the past weeks. He had been stubborn and unfriendly. Sejya was loud, demanding, forcing Yaten to ride a toboggan although he did not know how to use it, forcing Yaten to touch Baranas although the little boy had been afraid

of horses. Surely he - Sejya - was not the brother Yaten had wanted when he came to their castle.

Damn...

Sejya gulped and rubbed away the last tears from his face. Yes, he had to apologize and to hope that Yaten would forgive him one day.

"Certainly he's somewhere on the corridors." Said Kakyuu and put the toboggan back to the gifts and put the torn wrapping paper behind a plant. Suddenly her own gift was not interesting to her any longer. "It's a very complicate castle when you don't know it. Surely he got lost and is searching now for the sleeping rooms."

Tahiki nodded and thought for a moment.

"Maybe he found back to our sleeping room. Best I'll take a short look while you look in the other direction. We'll meet here again in ten minutes, ok?"

Kakyuu and Sejya nodded, so Tahiki turned around and quickly disappeared into the dark. For some moments the kids stood next to the gifts and both sighed. Finally the princess took the boy's sleeve and dragged him with her.

"Don't look so depressed. First we have to find him, ok?"

However, they did not find him, although Kakyuu knew her way around in the big, widely branched castle. Tahiki even looked under Yaten's bed, but he was not there, either. Three of them went through all of the corridors, but there was no Yaten to be seen.

"Better we call our parents." Sighed Tahiki who actually wanted to sort things out before they had to tell Lord and Lady Kou. It was not that he feared their punishment, which would mean more than just two days of house arrest, he just wanted to give Sejya and Yaten time to talk to each other in peace without all adults staring at them or even interfering.

"But he HAS to be here somewhere..." Sejya did not cry any longer, but still his voice was hoarse - and very concerned. Tahiki could not remember ever having seen his brother like this before. Kakyuu winced freezing and pulled her clothes nearer to her body.

Strange, it has not been that cold some minutes before.

While the two Kou brothers discussed about the necessity of her parents Kakyuu turned and walked over to another corridor. A slight air current was coming towards her and made her freeze even more.

What?

She frowned as she turned around the corner and saw a small door standing open. It was one of the servants doors and she knew that they were closed at dusk. No door would stand open in the middle of the night, because unauthorized persons could intrude and harm the noblemen still sleeping in their beds.

Oh no...

"Tahiki? Sejya?" she asked loudly and interrupted their whispered discussion.

"What's up?" Tahiki turned around the corner and both brothers stared in disbelief at the open door, both having the same idea. The same dark idea.

"That's the handkerchief I gave him before... I opened the gift..." marbled Sejya and his eyes grew wide as he bowed to pick it up. Tahiki looked at it and closed his eyes for some moments to clear his thoughts. Sejya and Kakyuu stared out into the night. It was freezing cold outside and the full moon was shining down at the snowy land. Two hearts skipped to beat as they saw the footsteps in the white winter's material. They were already blurred and Sejya felt a cold wind playing with his hair.

"He did not..." swallowed Kakyuu and wrapped her arms tighter around her freezing

upper part of the body. Tahiki nodded tortured while Sejya's jaw dropped.

That's not his seriousness, is it?

He did not run out into the night, did he?

"He's only wearing his pyjamas..." Suddenly Sejya felt sick again.

"Okay, that's enough. I am waking mommy and daddy right now. We need people to go out there and search him before it's too late."

Before it's too late.

Before he would freeze to death.

Goddess...

Sejya gulped and did not react as Tahiki turned and ran away, surely to wake the whole castle up to find a small boy surely freezing like hell right now.

Because of me!

Sejya gulped again and again. Of course he did want this girlish boy to leave, but he did not want to kill him! He did not want to expose him into any real danger at all!

Yaten, what have you done?

Sejya stepped out into the snow and stared at the footsteps there. They were smaller than his. They were so tiny and so light. Yaten was very slim, he hardly touched the snow when he walked.

He's even barefoot!

Sejya closed his burning eyes and his shoulders hang.

What have I done?

"The other's won't be happy with us." Kaykuu wrapped the scarf around her neck and followed Sejya through the freshly fallen snow. It snowed half of the night and stopped about one hour ago. Now the moon was shining, showing them their way through a frozen world. A white world. A world full of shadows.

"They'll kill me anyway and they simply take too much time. I have to do something. Now!" They've stolen their gifts from the hall, because it was not far away from the open servant door. As every year they got boring pullovers, scarves and gloves. Normally they would have put those clothes away and looked for the interesting gifts, but this year it was the other way round. This year they grabbed quickly their new clothes, put them over their bodies and ran back to the open door to follow Yaten's more and more disappearing trace. The wind was blowing stronger and Sejya feared that they would not find him when they waited only one more minute. Surely it was not easy for Tahiki to wake the whole castle up. Probably it would take him some time. Time Yaten probably did not have.

"I know..." Kakyuu walked behind Sejya who protected her a little bit from the rough wind. First Sejya wanted to go all alone with a torch in his hands, but Kakyuu could not let him go like that. It was her forest and she knew that Tahiki would be very sad if he would find out that something had happened to his other brother as well.

I don't want to see them sad.

Neither of my friends.

"He can't walk that quickly, can he? He's just eight years old and very small. He can't get that far, can he?" Sejya held the torch tighter in his hands and looked searching around, always hoping to see a small shadow standing beneath the next tree, freezing but being alive.

I'll apologize.

I'll make everything up to him.

I just have to find him...

"Maybe we should call his name?" Small clouds formed before Kakyuu's mouth as she spoke. It was incredibly cold for her birthday and she shivered even under three pullovers and two skirts. Her slippers were lined and normally very warm but the snow got through the soft material and turned her feet slowly into ice. She did not want to know how Sejya felt who only pulled two sockets over his feet. As she did not want to know how Yaten felt right now who had no real clothes at all. No clothes but his thin pyjamas.

"Good idea... Yaten!" Sejya's voice increased, for the second time this night, but this time it was full of concern and fear. "Yaten!!!"

I'll apologize.

I'll tell him that I didn't mean my words.

I'll tell him that I am just an idiot and that he shouldn't think so much about the argument.

"Yaten!"

"Yaten!!!"

Both, Kakyuu and Sejya, screamed as loud as they could. Their voices sounded weird in the forest's silence. There were one or two owls striking their wings, but their terrified howls were the only answer they got. The hard frozen snow cracked under their feet as they got deeper into the forest. Everything far away from their way was covered with shadows and the kids would have been scared to death if they would have not been so concerned about the little boy.

"Yaten!"

"Yaten!!!"

Again, no one answered.

"Are there still some footsteps, Sejya?"

"Yes." Sejya stopped shortly and held the torch closer to the ground. He gulped visibly and shook his head. "He fell here, twice, but he went on." He whispered and looked up. His eyes searched their environment, but there was no one near. No Yaten, no one.

"Yaten!!!"

"Yaten!"

They continued their way, Sejya always staring on the ground, because he feared to miss Yaten's trace. Kakyuu watched the trees next to them. Both shouted Yaten's name as loud as they could.

I'll apologize.

I'll never say such bad words again, I promise.

Please, just let him be okay!

"Yaten!!!"

"Yaten!"

Sejya almost fell down as Kakyuu's hand suddenly grabbed his torch and held it higher. He raised his head and his eyes grew wide. They were standing on a clearing now. And right in front of them, under a big fir laid the shadow of a small boy.

"Yaten???" screamed Sejya and ran towards his younger brother. The small boy did not react. His silver hair covered his form and it looked as if he would sleep. His eyes were closed and his face ashen. His small arms were wrapped around a stiff pillow, holding it tight in a bizarre gesture.

"Yaten!?" Sejya brought the small boy in his arms and was frightened as he felt how

cold Yaten was. "Yaten, say something..."

I'll beg for pardon!

Please, open your eyes!

I'll do whatever you want, but please, be okay. Please!!!

"Yaten, don't joke around!" sobbed Sejya and shook the small boy in his arms. Yaten did not react, his eyes kept close and lifeless his arms let go of the pillow as Sejya stripped his pullover and covered the cold body in front of him.

"Yaten, please, stop joking!" But Sejya knew that the small boy was not joking, that he did not hear him.

We've had only been out for ten minutes.

That can't be...

But you needed a long time to tell Tahiki what happened, then you searched the whole castle before you found the open door. Who knows how long he really had been outside in the icy winter's night?

"Sejya..." Kakyuu went on her knees besides her crying friend and touched Yaten's face. "He's not breathing..."

"No!" Sejya shook his head and held the lifeless boy tighter in his arms, trying to warm him. "No! It can't be!"

"Sejya. We've got to do something." Kakyuu corrected the small crown she always wore and took Yaten's hands in her. "Do you hear me, Sejya? We have to do something or he's going to die!"

... or he's going to die...

No!

I never wanted to have such a girlish brother, but I never wanted to kill him!

No!

Sejya blinked as his cheek suddenly started to burn. He looked up and stared directly into Kakyuu's tear filled eyes. There was a determined expression on her face as she held her small hand.

"Stop to freak out, Sejya. We've got to do something. Now!" she said firmly and took again Yaten's ice cold hands.

"Your powers?" asked the dark haired boy and held Yaten a little bit tighter.

"Yes. I am finally able to control them. At least a little bit. But I fear I am not strong enough to use them alone. I need your help."

Sejya nodded understanding. It was well-known that every member of the royal family had a special power they learned to use when they grew up. Sejya had not seen Kakyuu's power yet and he did not know if it would really work, but to look again into light green eyes, he would have done anything.

"What shall I do?"

"Just hold him. Hold him, Sejya, and don't let go. No matter what will happen."

"Ok."

No, he would not let go again. He would not push the lifeless boy away again.

I'll apologize, Yaten.

Please, open your eyes.

Please!

Sejya nodded, held the small body tight, and closed his eyes as Kakyuu went into a trance.

You're such a big disappointment!

No, I am not. Don't say that. Don't...

Yaten stumbled through the cold element, not even noticing that his feet started incredibly to ache. The pain in his heart was too big, covered the pain of his body completely. The small boy held the pillow tightly in his arms as he forced his way through the dark forest. First he had searched for his sleeping room but after he failed in the tenth corridor the whole castle seemed to shrink suddenly. He could not breathe any longer, he could not stay there any longer, so he tried the next door and really found a way out. The fresh air let him breathe again and eased the spinning of his stomach, however, it could not ease the pain in his heart.

You're such a big disappointment!

No... be quiet! Just be quiet!!!

Yaten automatically ran from the castle in a direction where he assumed the snow family to be. His snow bird was not finished yet and he had the desire to complete it now. Otherwise it would be different from all the other snow birds in this world. Yaten knew too well how it was to be different and he did not want the bird to be sad. As sad as he was.

You're such a big disappointment!

I never wanted to be one. I've always wanted everyone to be proud of me: My father, my mommy, the Kou family. Tahiki, Kakyuu. Sejya...

You're such a big disappointment!

I tried my best to be a perfect son and a perfect brother.

You're such a big disappointment!

I failed... again...

Yaten sobbed and stumbled over a root. He fell lengthwise into the snow. His hair fell into his face as he slowly came to his frozen feet again. They stopped to hurt and he hardly felt them any longer. But it was alike to him. He simply ignored it, just as he ignored the shaking of his body, the rattle of his teeth. Tightly he held the pillow in front of his body as a protecting shield.

You're such a big disappointment!

He stumbled two more steps and fell down again.

You're such a big disappointment!

Again he heard his father's voice in his mind and winced wildly as he felt a long forgotten pain on his back.

"No..." he whimpered and held his arms to his head, held the pillow protecting over his face. "No..."

You're such a big disappointment!

Again his father shouted at him. Called him a bastard. A name Yaten did not know what it really meant, but he knew that it had to be something evil. He was someone evil when his father called him this way. When his father hated him, because he was a bastard. When his father was unhappy and punished him again. With his belt...

"No... no..."

You're such a big disappointment!

You're not worth to be my son!

You're not worth to live in my house.

However, he had lived in his father's house as his father's son, because he was also his mother's son. Until his beloved mother died.

Mommy...

Yaten came hard on his feet and tried to run away. Away from the memories crashing

down at him. They were worse than every nightmare had been so far. Again he saw the sand storm coming towards them, coming out of the blue. No one had expected it. Again he felt how the coach they were sitting in was pulled into the air and overturned. Again he felt how his mother held him tight to her body and how she was thrown out of the coach. Again he saw her lying in the sand, her eyes wide open. Again he tried to wake her up.

"Mommy! Come back to me!"

And again she did not wake up, he was left behind in a cruel world that did not want him, that did not need him.

Mommy...

Yaten's legs simply gave in and he fell back into the snow. Tightly he held the pillow to his chest while two tears rolled down his face.

Mommy!

I want to be with you!

Please, take me to where you are!

The uncle who took him after the funeral told him that his mother would rot into the soil now, but he did not believe him. When his pet died he had been very sad and his mother comforted him. She told him that his pet went to a far away planet. To a planet where everyone who died went. A fantastic planet where they all were happy. To a planet where his pet would wait for him for all times.

Mommy? Are you waiting for me? There?

Yaten coughed and tiredness took over his body. Suddenly he only wanted to close his eyes and sleep. He did not want to cry, he did not want to hear that voice again, he did not want to remember that day he lost his beloved mommy.

You're such a big disappointment!

Really? Was he really a big disappointment? Did his mother ever say that he was a disappointment? Didn't she call him her miracle? Her beloved son? Her little Yaten? Didn't she love him the way he was? Didn't she accept him the way he was, even with his silver hair and his skin that burned too quickly in their sun? Didn't she get angry when everyone called him a bastard? Didn't she protect him from every evil of this world - when she had been strong enough to hold it back?

Hadn't she been his beloved mommy and he her beloved son?

Yes, they had.

You're such a cute child, Yaten.

The sad boy suddenly did not feel so sad any longer. Suddenly he felt happy. Happy and free. In his mother's embrace.

You're such a lovely boy, Yaten.

Yaten raised his head and smiled happily into his mother's face as she bowed over him and kissed him.

You're my big miracle, honey.

Sejya felt dizzy as he opened his eyes again. Kakyuu was shrouded in a bright light and her little crown sparkled in all colours of the rainbow. An aura of red light shimmered around her small body and she frowned in concentration. Then this light spread to Yaten and finally reached Sejya. The dark haired boy gasped for breath because that light hurt contrary to all expectations more and he almost let go of Yaten. At the last moment he remembered why he held the small boy in his arms and why he had to feel

this pain.

Is Yaten also feeling it?

Is he still able to feel it?

Whatever Kakyuu was doing, it had to work. It had to help. It had to bring back Yaten.

No matter how. No matter...

Sejya screamed as the pain grew stronger but he did not let go. Stubbornly he even pulled the small boy nearer to his chest. After all it was his fault that Yaten ran out into the frosty winter night. If he had not said all those mean words to him Yaten would have never run away. If he had read that damn card better nothing would have happened.

No, it was not the card, it was me.

I did not want him as a brother so I only read what I wanted to read. I almost wished to read only his name on the card to have a reason for shouting at him.

I am the big disappointment.

I, not he.

Sejya groaned and closed his eyes again. He did not want to see the ashen face of his younger brother any longer, the lifeless face.

I've always wanted to be a big brother.

Now I've got that chance... and wasted it.

But he was such a girlish boy!

So what?

You're not the role model of an older brother yourself!

Sejya pressed his eyes hard together but soon the red light filled his whole mind. He was not able to exclude it, no matter how hard he tried to ignore it.

I should have given him more time before I judge over him.

I should have been more patient.

I should... who the hell do I think I am by judging him???

The red light seemed to burn his eyes and he groaned tortured. Then it was suddenly gone and he stood on a snow covered hill. It had to be a snow covered hill, because it was white, there was no grass to be seen. The sky was as white as the ground, but Sejya could see no clouds as he looked up.

"Mommy..."

A high, whining voice made him turn around. His jaw dropped as he saw a small boy standing next to a floating shadow, which seemed to have no real consistence. However, it was alike to Sejya what this shadow meant, only the boy was important to him. Whatever Kakyuu or the red light did, Sejya sensed that it was his job to bring Yaten back, because there was no princess around. The dark haired boy was all alone with his younger brother.

"Yaten?"

Sejya got to his feet and went over to the small boy who stumbled after the shadow, never really able to reach it although he tried very hard.

"Yaten?"

Sejya took a deep breath and grabbed Yaten's hand. The small boy turned his head and big tears were running down his pale cheeks.

"Mommy..." he whispered and wanted to shake off the tall boy behind him. He did not want to see him again, he never wanted to see anyone else again but his beloved mommy. His dear mommy he could not reach, no matter how hard he tried.

"Yaten, come back!" Sejya winced as Yaten suddenly hit out at his arm and struggled against his grab.

"No, I wanna be with my mommy!" screamed the small boy and tried hard to get his hand out of Sejya's. "You don't want me but mommy does..." He turned around to face again the shadow, stretching his free hand towards it. "I wanna be with my mommy..." What is he talking about?

His mother is dead, he can't go with her.

He can't...

Sejya gulped as the shadow seemed to increase. Wind was playing with Yaten's hair and the older boy almost let go as he tried to stroke silver strands out of his own face. Goddess, it's really long...

Sejya's thought vanished in his mind as he saw how a face was formed inside the shadow. How two arms came out of the dark and tried to touch Yaten's stretched hand. The small boy cried out loud and kicked after Sejya to get to the shadow, but Sejya was faster. He brought the little boy into his arms and held him tight, ignoring Yaten's feet and hands trying to hurt him, to make him let him go.

"I want to my mommy..."

"You can't go with your mommy, Yaten! She's dead!"

"Then I want to be dead!" sobbed the small boy and pressed against Sejya's stomach. The older boy felt like throwing up, but his grab tightened around his younger brother. "Then I want to die..."

"No, you don't want to die!" said Sejya firmly, but inside he was shocked. Was it true? Did Yaten really miss his mother that much that he wanted to die? His - Sejya's - parents were so nice, they cared so much for him, and tried so badly to make him happy, why did he want to leave them? It was only him, the idiotic brother, who yelled at him, but the rest of the family obviously wanted him. His mother adored him, his father even left his political meetings when Yaten needed him, and Tahiki would have done anything for his new brother - which all caused Sejya to be jealous like hell.

He wants to die although almost everyone else loves him?

He wants to be with his mother although the rest of my family wants him so badly as a new son?

Sejya gulped and held the struggling Yaten, gasping for breath as a kicking foot met his stomach again.

Did you lose your mother?

Did you ever experience to lose someone dear, expect Snowflake's foal two years ago?

Do you understand what he's feeling?

He lost his whole family and was rejected by his new one!

But...

It's enough for him to feel one family member rejecting him to think that it's the whole family not wanting him.

Well...

Sejya sighed deeply, finally not being able to ignore his inner voice any longer. No, he did not know what Yaten was feeling, he did not know how it was to lose someone dear, as he did not know how it was to be rejected by someone important to him.

"Then I want to die..." repeated Yaten sobbing and the shadow grew wider. Two eyes stared threatening down at the two boys, but for Yaten they seemed to be yearning, because he started another attack to get free. Sejya only bit on his lower lip and shook his head.

"I won't let you go, Yaten, forget it! I won't let you die, mommy and daddy would never forgive me if anything would happen to you."

"I wanna be with MY mommy..."

"But she's dead and my parents are alive. They love you. They love you as their child and they would be very sad if you'd die." Sejya gulped as Yaten's struggling became a little bit weaker. However, the wind around them got stronger, and so he had to shout to make the small boy understand his words. "They would be as sad about your death as you are about your mommy's. They love you, Yaten! They want to care for you, just as they care for Tahiki and me. They adopted you, because they want you as their son. Because they love you!"

The wind was pulling at Sejya's hair, making his eyes tear.

"I don't believe you!" cried Yaten and shook his head, again kicking against his stomach, but this time a little bit weaker. There were two options: He did not have enough strength any longer to punish the taller boy - or he really listened to him. Sejya hoped for the second possibility as he continued to shout against the wind.

"Mommy cooked for you, she hardly ever cooks, because she has no time. Daddy interrupted more than once one of his important meetings, because he was concerned about you. And Tahiki spend all his rare free time with you, riding out with you and trying to learn you how to ice skate. They would have never done something like this if they wouldn't have loved you!"

"But you hate me!"

It was a simple sentence, a simple statement and before Sejya could even open his mouth to protest, to say that it was not true, he knew that it was his own fault that Yaten thought so badly about him. Sejya had been the one who did not care about Yaten's fear of big animals, who mocked at the strange food Yaten ate rather than Sejya's beloved steaks, he was unfriendly to Yaten whenever something went wrong - and mostly Sejya was the one to blame, not Yaten.

Hell! I forced him to sleep on the beside rug when all he needed was a little bit comfort after a bad nightmare!

I treated him like a dog.

Sejya gulped and grabbed Yaten tighter as the wind seemed to pull the small boy out of his arms.

No, I treated him worse...

"I don't hate you. Yes, I have been jealous, because you got all of my family's attention. I feared that you would take over my part as a younger brother, the second son, and a good friend, but I don't hate you." Sejya felt how two tears escaped his burning eyes. "I've been a terrible brother. I did a lot of silly things... and shouting at you in the big hall had been the silliest of all. Guess you should be the one hating me." I would deserve it.

I've been a real asshole to him.

The shadow filled their whole world, darkened the white horizon and the empty ground. Two eyes, red as a burning fire, stared down at the boys, scared Sejya, but the older brother did not let go. He had done so many mistakes during the past weeks, he would not also do this mistake.

Yaten raised his head to look directly into Sejya's face. Green eyes sparkled and a shy grin played around his lips.

"I don't hate you..." he whispered and blushed slightly. "I love you.... that's why... I wanted you as a brother..."

He loves me?

Sejya's eyes grew wider. He ignored the threatening shadow completely as he stared at the small boy in his arms. Yaten's face looked so innocent, so honest, he meant his

words. He really meant them!

He wants me as his brother? After all that I've done? After all the bad things I've shouted at him? He still wants me?

Sejya sobbed quietly and buried his hot face in silver strands, suddenly liking them as long as they were. How could anyone have such a big heart to forgive him his jealousy, his meanness, and his simply silly behaviour! How could anyone still want him as a big brother after he failed so badly? How could...

However, Yaten could. Obviously he did.

"Forgive me, Yaten." Muttered Sejya and felt how the wind took them, how they lost the ground, how they drifted towards the dark shadow. "I've been such an idiot!"

He felt how Yaten turned around in his arms and held tight to him. The small boy did not want to go to the shadow any longer. Now he wanted to be with Sejya who was suddenly so nice to him, who did not want to let him go, who held him so warm.

Whatever will happen, I'll be there for you.

Don't worry, I won't hurt you again.

Never again!

Sejya knew that the shadow was near and pressed his eyelids together, expecting more pain or even death.

"Sejya?"

Someone shook his shoulder and automatically he held Yaten a little bit tighter. The shadow seemed to have reached them, surely it was a woman, because it's voice was definitive female. Hands were pulling at his arms, trying to free Yaten. Sejya struggled against them.

No!

You won't take him away from me!

"Sejya? Let go! We have to take him back to the castle!"

Castle? What castle? What is the shadow talking about?

What...

Sejya opened his eyes and stared at his mother who knelt next to him. He was not on the white hill any longer, the shadow had disappeared. Now he was back at the clearing, sitting in ice cold snow, holding a lifeless Yaten tight in his arms.

Lifeless? No, Yaten started to breathe again, his cheeks were slightly reddened. There was an honest smile on his lips. It looked as if he was sleeping.

"Mommy?" Sejya blinked surprised and finally let go as his father bowed over him and took Yaten into his strong arms. Concerned he looked down at his two sons and sighed relieved as he saw that they were both alive. Sejya sneezed. Okay, maybe they caught a cold and would be ill for the next weeks, but they would survive this dangerous adventure into the winter forest - in the middle of the night! Only wearing pyjamas!

"Guess I won't ask any further." He said severe, because neither of his sons nor princess Kakyuu looked as if they would be able to answer any of his questions this night. "But be sure, you'll get a hard punishment, each of you! We were very concerned about you!" It was a big understatement. Sejya blinked again and seemed to not have understood his words while Tahiki bowed his head and nodded resigning. Kakyuu staggered and her father held her tightly as they all went out of the dark forest. Hardly she could hold open her eyes and Sejya knew that she used all of her

powers to save them. Both of them, not only Yaten.

"Don't do that ever again!" whispered his mother next to him and Sejya saw tears in her eyes as he looked up. "We really thought that you'd all freeze to death out here!" Sejya stared again silently at his slippers and gulped.

She did not know how close her words came to reality.

How close he had been in losing a small boy who liked, no, who loved him even after all the nasty things he had done. How close he had been in losing Yaten because of his stupidity - and to regret his words for the rest of his life.

How close he had been in losing a brother.

Yaten looked so small in his bed, so fragile. No, he did not look girlish any longer. Not with his long hair, lying open around his head on the pillow. Not with the small piercing sparkling in his ear. Not with the white nightshirt he was wearing. For the first time Sejya realized that Yaten did not look girlish but simply small and fragile. Suddenly Sejya felt the need to protect this small boy - his brother.

Carefully Sejya sneaked through the room. Still they were at the king's palace although Kakyuu's birthday had been three days ago. Since they left the winter forest Yaten had been taken to the hospital wing and had to stay in bed. He had not been allowed to leave his room and Sejya had not been allowed to visit him, either. Mostly because his parents talked very seriously to him. About what had happened in that night and what on earth made Yaten run out into the ice cold night - only wearing his pyjamas, being barefoot. Why his older brothers did not hold him back and why Tahiki and Sejya did not wake up their parents a little bit earlier.

Oh, it had been a hard discussion, however Sejya thought that he had already experienced worse in his young life. Because different to all other arguments and punishments before he felt that he deserved this one. Tahiki did not look too happy as he got to know his one, although it was hard for him to keep his house arrest when they were still important meetings he had to participate. Sejya only took notice of his own punishment and did not complain as he surely would have done earlier. He only asked if Yaten was okay and promised never to let his guard down again. Tahiki did not tell their parents anything about the argument in the big hall and Sejya was thankful. He wanted to sort things out with Yaten on his own. Sejya had learned his lesson, oh yes, he really learned it, he did not need his parents interfering. And as he knew, Yaten did not say a single word about their argument, either. Or better, about the bad things Sejya had shouted at him. He told Lord and Lady Kou that he had been frightened of a nightmare, that he could not find any of his brothers in his sleeping room, and that he ran out of the palace, because he believed to find his mommy in the woods. This story made Lady Kou cry and he held the small boy tight and promised him that he would never find himself alone again in the middle of the night when he was scared.

Next year we won't be able to sneak into the big hall to see our gifts a little bit earlier, that's for sure.

Sejya stepped closer to the bed. It was in the middle of the night and he was not allowed to be here. But three days passed already, he had to talk to Yaten or he would explode like a bomb. There were so many things he had to say, so many questions he had to ask, he simply could not wait until Yaten felt better and took part at their meals again. So Sejya broke again his parent's rules and sneaked into the hospital

room of his younger brother. Yaten was sleeping deep and tight, mostly because of the medicine he got. The small boy caught a bad flu and surely had to stay some more days in bed. However, it was nothing serious, nothing dangerous. Yaten would have to stay in bed and later on to stay in the Kou's castle near by the fireside to feel better again, but he would become healthy again.

Sejya and Kakyuu caught also a little cold that made the dark haired boy freeze even when it was warm inside the room. Just as it was this time. He stood next to the bed and trembled slightly, wrapping his arms around his waist.

Shall I really wake him up? He sleeps so peaceful.

Sejya leaned forward to stroke some silver strands out of a pale face and stiffened as he suddenly looked into light green eyes. Yaten smiled and reached for Sejya's hand. This time Yaten's was warmer.

"I was wondering... when you'd come..." His high voice was hoarse and he coughed. The medicine did work, but it did it's job slowly.

"I have house arrest." Answered Sejya and smiled sheepishly, because everyone knew that he always found a way to handle his punishments more like rewards.

"For the next year?"

"Around."

"Just like me." Giggled Yaten and coughed again, this time a little bit harder. He raise until he sat and Sejya put a pillow in his back to make him sit more comfortable. The older boy sighed deeply and his shoulders hang.

"You shouldn't have got any punishment, Yaten, because it's all my fault. I shouldn't have said all this stupid stuff that only scared you away."

"I've been the one... running out... into the night..." Yaten coughed again and reached for a glass of water standing on the bedside table. Sejya took it and handled it carefully over to him. Silently he watched Yaten drink and suddenly all the well considered words in his mind were gone. There was so much he wanted to tell Yaten so badly... and now he could not think of any clear word at all. There was just one thought in his mind: He wanted to apologize. Just as he promised when they found a lifeless boy in the middle of a clearing.

"I... I..." Why was it suddenly so hard for him to say those words? To beg for forgiveness? Why?

Maybe, because you fear that he'll be the one this time rejecting you?

Maybe...

"I've talked to mommy. The toboggan is for the both of us." Yaten was radiant with happiness. "So you're..." he coughed again and held the glass tighter in his small hands. "You're able use it... and you don't have... to be angry with me any more..."

"Yes, I have been angry." Sejya felt remorse at his stupid behaviour, at all the stupid words he had said. "But I haven't really been angry with you, Yaten. I had been angry with my parents, because I thought they wouldn't love me any longer, but only you. I thought they had given you my beloved toboggan and... I... I simply freaked I guess..." Yaten wanted to say something but Sejya showed him to be silent.

"I've been so jealous about you and said a lot of stupid things, but they were not true, Yaten. You're not a big disappointment. No, it's me who's been a terrible brother..." Sejya clenched his fists, feeling ashamed. "I never wanted to hurt you and... I never wanted to beat you. It was wrong to be angry with you when I had been angry with my parents and with myself in reality. I had been a real asshole and it would be okay if you'd never forgive me..." Sejya stared the whole time at the blanket and finally forced himself to look up again. "Please, forgive me, Yaten. For all the things I've done

to you..."

Sejya's voice faded away as he saw the tears running down slightly reddened cheeks.

Great, he's crying again!

I am such an idiot, I made him cry again!

Can't I do anything the right way?

"Please... hush... did I say something wrong?" stammered Sejya shocked and searched his pockets for a handkerchief. Finally he found one and handed it to Yaten who stared at the fabric and then at Sejya. The next moment Yaten almost jumped out of the bed and in Sejya's arms which were suddenly full with a crying Yaten who cuddled deeply into a warm embrace.

"I just want... to... to be a good... good brother..." sobbed Yaten and buried his face in Sejya's shoulder. "I never want... to be... alone again..." Sejya almost missed the last sentences, because Yaten's voice was full with tears and very silent.

He feared to be alone while I feared to lose a toboggan.

I've been really stupid. Idiot!

"You'll never be alone." He answered softly and sat on the bed, pulling Yaten on his lap and holding him tight, rocking him comforting. "And I promise you that I'll be better from now on. I am wild and often very impatient, we'll have a lot of more arguments in the future. Ask Tahiki, he knows what I am talking about. Sometimes I can be a real pain in the neck. But I promise you, Yaten, I'll never say again that I don't want you as my brother. Okay?"

Yaten did not answer, he only grabbed him tighter.

"I promise you that I'll try to be a good brother to you. Okay?" Sejya felt a big lump and cleared his throat twice. This time Yaten nodded and his crying decreased slowly. The small boy hiccuped and Sejya gave him again his handkerchief to blow his nose.

"So you don't hate me?"

This question seemed to be very important to Yaten. Everyone else would have known that Sejya liked him, because of all the promises the older boy made. But Yaten had experienced so much pain in his young life, he had to be sure. He had to be sure about Sejya's feelings before he could open himself again - even with the danger of getting hurt again. Just as his father and his uncle had hurt him although they had been his family. His so called family.

"Of course not, Yaten." Sejya wiped those crystal tears away and smiled a shaky smile.

"I never hated you. I had been jealous, but I never hated you."

Yaten stared at him for a moment, thinking about Sejya's words. Then he smiled the most beautiful smile Sejya had ever seen, and nodded.

"I believe you."

"Do YOU hate me?" Sejya turned the tables and this time Yaten looked really shocked. As if he never considered this question before in his head. In his ears it sounded silly, spoken from Sejya who had such a fantastic family.

"No!" Yaten shook his head passionately. "No!"

The older boy grinned amused and gently pulled Yaten back under his blanket.

"Then we shouldn't talk about this topic any longer. Let's start tomorrow all over again, ok? As brothers." He whispered and his grin grew wider as he saw a small arm lying under a soft pillow. He bowed forward and was holding a doll in his hands the next moment.

He plays with dolls.

And what?

Yes, and what. I am calling a horse a pet and if I wasn't ten years old, I'd drag my new

toboggan to everywhere where I am going - even into my bed.

"Sleep tight, little one." Sejya gave Yaten his doll back and covered him up. The small boy had a good long yawn. He held his doll tightly and blinked sleepy up to his older brother. Still the medicine did a very good job and made him tired almost all day and night. However, it could not hold back his nightmares. Twice he woke up the last night and no one was there he could turn to, because he did not dare to disturb the nurse and other servants of the king's palace who did not know him.

"... could you stay...?" he asked and yawned again, fighting hard against the growing tiredness in his body.

Sejya hesitated only for one moment. His parents would kill him if he broke the punishment. They would go crazy if another son would disappear again during the night without a trace. Maybe it would cost him another year of house arrest. However, it was alike to him. Yaten looked so fragile and suddenly Sejya found himself being unable to resist those begging green eyes.

Guess that's how Tahiki feels whenever he's caring for him.

But wasn't that his job as a big brother? To care for the pet of the family? No, suddenly he was not angry or even jealous that he was not the youngest member of the family any longer. No, now he was an older brother, this was a responsible job he would do the best he could.

"Shall I stay on the bedside rug?" teased Sejya, wrapping his arms around his freezing body. It was not that cold in the room, but he was still a little bit ill and tired.

"Fool." Sneezed Yaten and raised his blanket a little bit.

"I would have deserved it." Muttered Sejya and sighed satisfied as he felt the warm blanket around his freezing body. Yaten only whispered another amused >fool< as he cuddled nearer to his older brother where he felt as secure as he felt when Tahiki was near. Happily he smiled as sleep overwhelmed him.

For the first time since his mother's death there was no nightmare haunting him this night.
