

# K Powerless

Von Alma

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## Kapitel 1: Raging Fire

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This short fanfiction of approximately 10 chapters deals with a different ending of K in episode 13. Therefore it contains heavy SPOILERS – do only read it once you have finished season 1 (for your own peace of mind). The first chapter was a dream I had some time ago of an alternative ending. Please enjoy.

Mature Content just in case (violence).

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A hard swallow shook his throat, and forced him to heave for air for a second. Feverishly, he tried not to lose sight of this man before him, but the black strands of hair reaching down to his nose didn't make it easier. His vision was blurry, but it was hard to overlook the red hair of his opponent, even more so in contrast to the snow surrounding them. He breathed calmly, unlike his counterpart. One could see that his body was crumbling - even though he was too stubborn to admit it, of course. Sweat shimmered on the forehead of the red-haired man, his body shook with every violent, shallow breath he took. What worried him most, however, were the black spots that ran over the king's body. Even without his glasses, he could see the black burns trailing up over his fingers and his neck. It was apparent, he couldn't withstand it for long.

Reisi twitched briefly as he realized how much pain Suoh seemed to be in. The heavy panting of his opponent made him cringe even more than the wintry cold that slowly devoured his limbs. There was not much time left. For a moment, he lowered his sword, and focused on the golden eyes of the king before him. The icy cold wind seemed as if it tried to cut up his face. It fueled his despair even more. He could already feel how his fingers started to freeze - slowly, and without mercy. He still had enough volition to move them, but he felt his will to fight eroding with every passing moment. The longer he forced himself to fight this man, the weaker he felt, the more he seemed to lose the ground beneath his feet. He knew it could not go on like this much longer. Eventually, they had to stop playing around, and start fighting seriously. Just the thought alone turned his stomach.

"What's wrong, Munakata?" Suoh scoffed with a spiteful grin which concealed half-heartedly how much he was struggling to contain the flames burning inside of him. Reisi could see very well how every breath, every movement tortured him. Ready for battle, the redhead was still holding his hands in a combative position. "Was that all you've got? If you don't get serious soon, you will not be able to stop me."

Reisi forced himself to keep his face expressionless. He had already shown a great deal too much. Desperate, he was still looking for a way to change Suoh's mind, to make him listen. But he felt that no words of his would be able to move his heart. He wanted to help him, but everything Suoh cared for was his revenge. And under this weight he burned to ashes – slowly he was falling apart. It was just like he actually wanted it to happen - as if he wished to be scorched and left to die. He was not

fighting Reisi seriously. He seemed to be saving his strength for something else. Reisi's eyes narrowed a little more, and he hoped that his opponent could not see his inner chaos. His voice was no longer calm and untouchable as before. "If you keep this up, you'll leave me no choice ... Suoh ... It's still not too late ... or is your pride more important than your life?"

"Tsk" With a bitter grin, he began to move, dashed towards him, and let the fire consume him even more. "Don't interfere in my business, Munakata!"

It was not hard to dodge the blow for it was never intended to hurt him seriously after all. With a twist, he slipped the attack and swung his sword half-heartedly in Suoh's direction at the same time. The heat on his skin prickled uncomfortably as the second shot hit him and bounced off of his aura. This time it seemed as if his opponent didn't want to waste any more time. Blow after blow, he pushed back the man in the uniform, every attack a little more rampant, a little stronger. Reisi felt every strike hit him harder and resounding in his bones like a brutal echo. It was funny how much he had to force himself to show honest opposition. Suoh's eyes were getting closer with every assault and seemed to pierce his heart with every inch that crumbled between them. Reisi felt as if he was close to drowning in those eyes. As if those golden eyes were about to drag him down with him into the black abyss that opened in the flames. He had to do something. He finally had to do something. He could not allow Suoh to be devoured by his rage and flames.

The final blow went straight to his face. The impact shook Reisi violently and almost made him lose his footing - even though he was protected by his aura. A loud gasp escaped his throat and made him stagger two steps back. Blinking, he raised his sword again and went into a defensive position. His fingers obeyed him less and less, as the cold swept into his bones. The icy wind that cut his face, gradually let his blood run cold. An exhausted smile slid from Suoh's mouth just like the sweat that ran down his forehead as he saw Reisi like that. Scornfully, the Red King bared his teeth, trying to dissemble the pain of the fire that continued to dig into his skin without any sign of mercy. "You look pretty exhausted."

"So do you," Reisi replied with a forced smile. And it was true, the man in the uniform had no energy left to continue playing this game. It felt as if it would tear his heart from his chest. Just how could he talk some sense into that stubborn man? How could he keep him from digging his own grave? How could he make him see that he did not want him to die?

The smile with which Suoh replied was more honest than before, and drove another dagger right into Reisi's chest. It was almost like so many years before - almost like in the beginning. Back then, when everything was still in order and Suoh had done nothing but smile for him. Suddenly, sorrow distorted Reisi's smile and for a moment the pain flared from the depths of his soul to the surface. He felt his heart pounding in his chest, in his temples, his tongue and his fingers. And he felt that it went quieter and weaker with each beat it took. His mouth opened, but there was no sound. His violet eyes, however, spoke volumes. They shimmered in the dim light like dying flames, pouring his heart out to his opponent, begging him to stop already.

It made Suoh catch his breath. Confused, he stopped and stared into the familiar face

that was no longer calm and seemed to shout at him without making any sound. For a moment, he forgot himself and the pain on his skin. Slowly, uncertain, he lowered his scorched arms. His eyes crossed with those of the black-haired man until he seemed to be lost in that violet sea. All he could muster at that moment was an incredulous whisper. "Munakata ...."

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"Hahahahahah! What, what, what? "A sudden cry shrilled through the snow and caught the attention of the two kings. A girl stood there, only a few feet away, and put her hands on her hips, leaned forward and watched them. Her face twisted into an antic ugliness as a laugh poured out of her mouth - mad and dangerous. "No time for tenderness, my dears. I thought you were here because of something else. Hehehehe!"

From the corner of his eye, Munakata could see how Suoh's face bent and distorted with rage. He snorted, grunted, and the next moment the flames consumed him once more. His voice rumbled like a dangerous thunderstorm. "You ..."

"Suoh, no!" He grabbed him, tried to stop him, but the redhead was already running, increasing the distance between them in fast, big leaps. Suddenly, the blood rose to Reisi's head and started itching terribly in his veins, pumping frantically in his legs until he dashed forward as well. As fast as he could, he ran forward, drew his sword and activated his magic to outrun his friend. But fate was not on his side.

A fearsome laughter tore the girl's face apart and flashed towards them like a white bolt of lightning. Her screaming was like a raging storm as white arrows bolted out of her eyes into freedom. It only took a few seconds before the white spirit of the Colorless King had cut through the air and disappeared once again. Just a moment later, the girl's body crashed to the ground lifelessly.

It was Suoh who suddenly stopped and doubled over like he was about to throw up. Not being able to respond that quickly, Reisi slid past him, staring aghast at the unconscious girl on the ground. The sight of it sent shivers down his spine. It took him a number of accelerating heartbeats until he was able to grasp the situation. Only slowly, unable to breathe, Reisi turned his head around and took a glimpse at a violently panting Suoh. The king choked and gasped heavily for air as if he were close to suffocating. Between the breaths, however, his mouth distorted into a devilish grin, the insanely widened eyes fixed on the ground. He chuckled, and it sounded like an avalanche of stones.

"Ha .... Haha.... Hahahaha ... Looks like I am the winner this time..."

Reisi held his breath. His eyes widened as he understood the full capacity of the situation. Hastily, he stepped back a pace and swung his sword in the air defensively. For one terrible long moment he was unable to breathe, his voice trembling. "S-Suoh?"

"Ha... Hahahaha!" His body convulsed, whether with laughter or pain Reisi could not tell. His counterpart straightened up, his muscles still trembling with every

movement, and stared at his hands. His pupils were dilated, his eyeballs flushed with red and his brows still sparkled with sweat. Suoh's deep, rough voice sounded, but the words were those of another man. "It's incredible ... this power ... this energy. Hahaha... This is just incredible! "

It was the first time in a long time that Reisi felt something that came perilously close to panic. He still had difficulty with breathing properly. There was a hot lump blocking his throat and a burning trail of blood pounding from his heart to his temples so strongly that his vision blurred. He felt his legs growing weak, his heart crying in despair. Instinctively, he took another step backwards and held his sword in both hands, wishing he had never taken off his glasses in the first place. Before him still stood the red-haired man he knew so well, but the grin on his lips was nothing he had ever seen before. It was as if an icy knife drilled into his stomach as "Suoh" finally looked at him and bared his teeth.

"You are next ..."

A barrage of fire rolled up against him before he could even blink. Hastily, Reisi forced his arm into the air to activate his aura, trying to repel the attack. He succeeded, but only at the very last second. He could feel the pressure of the hot flames charring his clothes, still lingering to destroy everything in their path. The wall of fire bounced off of him and scattered into the wind, but at the very same moment Reisi could see again, a fist skyrocketed at him, slamming with a massive force against the blue cocoon around him. All he realized then was that he swallowed mud the moment after. His head was spinning and he felt snow and earth between his fingers as he found himself on the ground. Behind him, he still heard the disturbing laugh drumming against his bones.

"Hahahaha! That's the way it should be. Crawl in the mud before me! Hahahaha! "

For a moment, time seemed to stand still. Reisi stared at the soil beneath him and heaved for breath. He felt how drained his legs, his magic and his lungs were already; every muscle and sinew begged him to stop now. But he also felt something growing inside of him, boiling, and, eventually, breaking furiously to the surface. All of a sudden his fingers were no longer cold, the drumming of his heart pushed into the background and he no longer tasted the blood in his mouth. Trembling still, but not wavering, his fingers pressed tightly around the handle of his sword as he straightened up. His entire body rustled of adrenaline, but his eyes were fixed and full of poison. A low growl rattled through his throat as he raised his sword, ready to attack. A hissing crawled through his clenched teeth and his eyes narrowed in the anger that shook him.

"... How dare you? ...This is not your body ... I will not let you abuse him! "

Another mocking laughter rolled up against him and the golden eyes flashed of ridicule and amusement at the same time. Arrogantly "Suoh" made a dismissive gesture. "Oh? As I see it, this already IS my body now. ....The energy of the Red King is mine ... from now on... his flames obey me alone! "He blinked and an abnormal grin distorted his face before he struck again and sent a huge fireball at his opponent.

Munakata was prepared this time, which did not mean that it was easy for him to evade this daunting attack the red-haired man threw heedlessly in his direction. This was a completely different level than before. Suoh had never really wanted to hurt him, but this man used all of his power to put him out of action. Reisi barely jumped out of the way before he was running towards "Suoh", unsheathing his sword along the way. With an expectant, blood thirsty face, the redhead was ready to greet him. Another fist of fire shot up to meet him and fizzled past Reisi's ear. Deftly, he ducked his head to avoid the attack before the black-haired man slammed the hilt of his sword into his opponent's belly. With a painful groan, the Colorless King staggered back and choked. It confirmed what Reisi had hoped for. Perhaps the Colorless King had Suoh's powers now, but not his skill and experience to use them. As quick as a flash, Munakata attacked again and rammed the grip of the sword against the jaw, the kidneys and the lungs of his counterpart.

Panting, the man began to tumble in front of him, seemed almost close to falling. But before Reisi could launch another attack, an explosive heat urged him to move back. With an animalistic and hurt roar, a huge column of flames suddenly spiraled into the sky in front of him, causing Reisi to gasp for air desperately. Hastily, he staggered back, trying to protect himself with his aura, but the flames were growing wilder and even more unrestrained the longer the cry continued. Below him, the earth began to crumble, the snow melting within the blink of an eye till the air around him seemed to be aflame itself. It put him in an unprecedented terror. If he did not stop this, then... "Stop that! You are going to destroy him! "

The pillar of fire burst and blew from the man who stood in its midst. Panting, but still with the wrong, lunatic grin on his lips, the Colorless King examined him. The black burn marks spread out even further, now even charring Suoh's clothes. Reisi could see how much the king had to fight with the flames, but it seemed as if he didn't care that much.

"Hah ... why should that bother me? I don't need this body any longer... Everything I wanted, were his powers... "

Those words fueled the anger in Reisi's heart even further and he lost control of his voice. Suddenly, he was overcome by his emotions and an engulfing fear. "Free him!" he roared, shaking in despair.

Drunk with power, "Suoh" licked his lips and looked at him. "Oh ... even if I could, I would not. The Red King is no longer ... there is only me. The only king this world needs." Grinning, he raised both arms and let the flames play between his fingers. Not as controlled and deft as it should have been, but much more brutal, much more destructive. "There is no point in resisting, Blue King. You can not kill me. Even if this body here disintegrates into dust, I live on. And then I'll take over your body ..."

Anger flickered in Reisi's eyes, combined with even more despair. He could not think clearly. Yet he looked feverishly for a way out of this situation. But what should he do? If Suoh was really already... if he ... if he was not...

A new flame attack interrupted his thoughts abruptly. The fire slammed into his aura,

leaving him shaken to his foundations. For a moment, Munakata had to close his eyes to recover from the sudden and brutal impact that hit him. He felt his legs tremble and he gasped for breath. Another headless attack almost tore him off his feet. The flames raged around him, hammering repeatedly against his defense, ready to relentlessly burn down everything that stood in their way. Reisi had enough to do, dealing with the flames. However, when suddenly "Suoh" dashed at him with his fist clenched, it was already too late. His aura began to crack, break, and the unimaginable force of the attack simply swept him away. It felt like several ribs had been broken, although Reisi instinctively knew that was not true. Just one second later, the black-haired man crashed into a tree several meters away and eventually slid to the ground.

The world around him began spinning, and for a few excruciating seconds, he could not breathe at all. The charring pain still drubbed him, seemed to attempt breaking him as the strike had done with his magic. Disoriented, Reisi fumbled for his sword, but all he got between his fingers were snow and frozen ground. He coughed from the pain and felt how something sticky and hot trickled over his temple. The steps that were headed for him rang in his head like a distant, surreal echo. He groaned and tried to sit up, lost his balance and fell again. Only in the last second his reflexes saved him from tasting mud again when his hands cushioned the fall.

The familiar and yet so utterly strange voice crept into his ears like a snake in its nest, lurking, just waiting to devour him. "... The end is inevitable. And it's pointless to fight against it. You're tired. You don't have any strength left. Just accept it already. That would save us both a lot of time. "

The man in blue blinked again and forced himself to avoid eye contact with the man before him. He struggled to his knees and let his eyes circle through the melting snow once more. Hot blood ran down from his temple to his jaw, dripping onto his clothes. He felt a violent pain in his head, his ribs and his shoulder, but he swallowed it all down his throat – even though the beating of his heart and the searing of his wounds made it worse with every second. There had to be a way. There just had to be a way to beat this king. Without hurting Suoh's body... Without losing him... There was still a chance, right? ...Right?

"Looking for this?" the voice sounded spiteful and just a second later the tip of Munakata's sword cut the air and loomed before his nose. The avalanche of laughter roared at him again and resounded aching in his ribs. It was a disgusting feeling. "Let's bring this to an end, shall we? I promise you, you will not even feel anything. You are a clever one, right? So let's make this as pleasant as possible. Do not make me hurt your body even further.... "

Reisi's breathing began to rattle as he stared at the ground. Shaking his head, he tried to regain his magic, to set up his aura once more. He could feel the panic beginning to strike roots in him, pulling him further and further into despair. He was about to lose his grip completely. He had no strength left – he knew. He didn't stand a chance against this man who used the Red Kings flames so recklessly, so brutally and with no self control at all. Compared to this man, Suoh really had held himself back all this time. The thought seared a spot in his heart and made him muster all the strength he had left. Briefly, his magic flashed, flickered until it began to regenerate. The attempt

was honored with another devastating blow which sent Reisi back to the ground. He whirled back until his head hit the soil very hard. Stars danced around him and he could feel the cold of the ground below him ooze into his limbs. He wanted to open his eyes, but as soon as he became aware of the risk it brought, he pressed them together again.

A foot slammed into his belly and pushed him to the earth a little more. It startled the black-haired man, but instead of following the instinct to widen his eyes, he kept them sealed. Helpless, he fumbled around him for help and tried to stabilize his magic, but he already knew that he was at the end of his tether. The reckless manner in which this man used Suoh's magic broke all dimensions. Even now, he pressed him to the ground with all of Suoh's magic power and made Reisi unable to move. He restrained himself nothing like his friend had or at least had tried to do. No, the king destroyed everything, even the body in which he was. Munakata gritted his teeth.

"If you keep this up ... his Sword of Damocles will drop ..."

The devilish grin grew even darker and an amused laugh tormented his battered body. "What do I care? As long as there is a body I can flee into, I will not die. And now I've got the Red King's power. Nothing will be able to stop me."

It was the moment when Reisi - for the first time in a long time - was thoroughly overcome by fear. It ate through his body like a virus and paralyzed his limbs. He tried to fight back, but the more he struggled against it, the more he seemed engrossed by it. His breathing began to rattle heavily when he felt the tip of his sword on his shoulder and the voice of the man in front of him sending an icy chill down his spine.

"What is it, Blue King? You don't stand a chance against me. Give it up and look death in the eye like a man!"

In shallow, violent spurts, Reisi's breath escaped between his teeth. With his last strength he shook his head. Was there really nothing he could do? Nothing at all? He didn't want to kill Suoh. But even if he did - it wouldn't kill the Colourless King as well, wouldn't it? There was no way he could physically beat this opponent. The despair caused his heart to almost stand still. But there had to be a way! His voice shook violently and yet there was a last spark of strength in it. "... You will not... get me."

"Oh, I beg to differ." He could hear the grin without needing to look at him. A moment later, however, the tip of his sword dug into Reisi's shoulder and tore the flesh apart with a single, silky movement. With all of his strength, he suppressed a scream and pressed his eyes shut even harder. His magic flared up again, but this attempt was stopped by the blade that further dug itself into his tendons. Sweat beaded on his forehead and with all his might he tried to do anything but look up. He would not show that bastard an opening. Reisi resisted the urge to wrest himself from the blade. It elicited an unhappy grunt from the Colorless King. His voice grew louder, but the sword in his hand didn't move another inch.

"Give up!"

Violently, Reisi shook his head and heaved for breath as he felt the despair devouring him from within. "I won't! I will not surrender to the likes of you! I would rather die! "



"Dead you won't do me any good." Hissed "Suoh" and the next moment Reisi felt his sword drawn out of his flesh, felt how the foot was taken off of his stomach. But the short freedom was ended when the man placed himself on his belly with his full weight on it. Munakata almost blinked when he felt hot hands closing around his neck. The redhead's face twisted into a grotesque mask yet again. "... I will make you look at me..."

The pain that followed these words was like nothing Munakata had ever experienced in his life. When the flames of "Suoh"'s hands spread on his neck, and cut off the air he was breathing, a cry sounded to the air that didn't seem to be human. Desperately panting for freedom, trying to push against the flames with all his might, the black-haired man could not fight the urge any longer. Abruptly, his eyes shot open and even though he was completely blind with pain, he stared helplessly into the sky above. For one moment the world didn't exist anymore – only the feeling of himself dying. He couldn't even perceive the deep voice of his "friend" anymore.

"Gotcha!"

Another cry sounded and Munakata believed to be truly unconscious for a moment. The pain that haunted him was indescribable. Like hundreds of toxic pinpricks – no like piercings of a knife - it felt as if someone would slice the skin off his bones; as if someone would stab him over and over again. One last time his magic tried to materialize, flickered violently like a flame in the wind until it finally managed to cover him protectively. Panting and sweating, he raised his arms, trying to reorientate himself, but the roaring, relentless pain that thundered against him made it impossible for him. Another scream rang out, but only now the blue king noticed that it was not his own. And it was not until this moment that he realized he was not pinned to the ground anymore and no flames tormented him any longer, though their remaining bite still drove him close to the unconscious. The pained cries grew louder, even more frightening and haunting and made Reisi blink. Ahead, he saw "Suoh's" shape as it staggered to stand and held its head. Again and again the flames broke out, enveloped him, but sputtered at the very moment they came to life. It was not the familiar voice now that writhed in pain and screamed in anger.

"No! NO! What are you doing? Stop it at once!"

Suddenly, "Suoh's" head jerked back and forth and his arms whirled through the air as if to defend himself. Breathlessly, Munakata stared at him, but the colorless King seemed to pay him no attention. His cries grew louder and even more macabre, literally begging for help.

"Ahhhh! No! Let it stop! You'll kill us both! NO! Stop it! LET ME GO! "

"Suoh 's" body shook even more violently as if he was hanging from invisible threads. His fingers dug into his temples, his pupils dilated and showed unimaginable fear. He seemed to fight against something, but it gorged him from the inside. Munakata was too dazed by pain to understand what was happening. All he saw was that "Suoh" was

brought to his knees, holding his head, beginning to tremble violently. The cry he sent to heaven seemed to cut him and everything around him like a knife did with a piece of paper. It rang so loudly and so harshly in his ears that Reisi instinctively squeezed his eyes shut.

"No! NO! AHHHH! Please stop it! Have mercy! I do not want to- No! DON'T! "

A twitch drove through the man's body as if a volley of bullets slipped through him. For a moment there was silence before his eyes rolled inwards, and his body crashed to the ground. Everything went silent. His body lay still, showing no sign of life whatsoever. It brought Reisi's inside to collapse. Defeating all his pain, the man in uniform got to his knees and slid towards the lifeless body of the Red King. Breathless, with trembling hands and a heart torn apart by fear, he grabbed "Suoh" and pulled him up. Completely limp and motionless, his body rested in Reisi's arms and showed no signs of life anymore. Violently, the black-haired man wrestled for air. Just from the corner of his eye, he saw the red Sword of Damocles above him starting to dissemble and scatter into the dawning sky.

"... Suoh? ...Suoh, do you hear me? Suoh!"

From the distance the sound of steps drew closer, but Reisi couldn't hear them. All he focused on was the lifeless man in his arms. Desperately, Reisi started to shake him violently, making his body fling back and forth like a doll. It worsened the pain in his chest even more and took his breath away for one last time. The burns on his neck triggered water to his eyes and made him tremble to his core. His voice rose inadvertently, as he clutched to the man in his arms with a last remnant of foolish hope.

"MIKOTO! Wake up! "

## Kapitel 2: A Cold Awakening

A cold shiver ran down his spine and tingled uncomfortably on his scorching hot skin. Sweat spread over his forehead, leaving him panting heavily for air. The heat was everywhere, burning him up from inside out. He felt like he was aflame, like his skin would melt under this horrible torridity just like wax did from a candle. It was a well-known heat. Like destructive burning coals of fire scorching his skin, like lava striking against his body, leaving him to ashes. It felt as if he would burn up for good.

And yet, over and over again, there was that frosty chill that descended abruptly into him. Like an ice cold bath after a long time spent in an overheated sauna. The constant alternation of cold and heat gradually rose to his head and made him dizzy. His muscles tensed as if they were close to be torn apart. He heard a faint echo in the distance. Someone called for him, it seemed. Only slowly, his heavy eyelids opened and he stared through the fog that surrounded him. There was a smell of charred flesh and blood. His muscles began to tremble, this time because of a renewed cold snap. With blurred eyes he stared into the grey thick mist, hearing the echo approaching.

A few awkward steps long he tried to move, but when he realized his body would not obey him as he wished; he stopped midway. The echo grew louder, as the mist around him darkened until he was surrounded by a dim starless night. He heard voices talking in a tangled mess. There was Izumo's voice and Anna's... and other ones, he believed he knew. An image flared up in front of him. He needed to blink before he could recognize the big man coming closer. With his elegant sword drawn, the man in the uniform ran towards him, his violet eyes stinging with emotion. Blood dripped down his forehead and from his shoulder down to his feet. Mikoto held his breath as he saw how the white floor began soaking in red until there was nothing but blood below his feet. He could not understand what was going on. Desperately, he opened his mouth to say something, but before he could even make a sound, the man in the uniform crashed to his knees. A painful scream parted Reisi's lips, as flames rose between his fingers clutching around his throat. The cry pierced through his heart, resounding brutally in his head. Pained, Mikoto bit his lips.

Another icy shiver flashed through him, followed by more violent growing heat. He could feel his heart pounding fiercely against his chest as he watched Reisi's motionless body sink to the ground. The soil beneath him seemed to lose solidity until it turned into a blood red sea of quicksand. Mikoto stumbled to regain his footing, but Reisi's fallen body began sinking into the sand until he was close to drowning in this sea of his own sandy blood. The fog grew even thicker and made it harder for Mikoto to breathe. Every breath started burning like fire and tasting like blood. Frantically he made a step forward, felt his feet being sucked into the drift sand. His hand was reaching for Reisi. He stumbled one more step forward until he eventually fell headlong into the red sea of blood.

Another blow of heat pressed against him, causing his eyelids to squeeze shut. Blood went into his lungs as he tried to breathe. Coughing, he opened his eyes once more,

finding himself in a dark sea of hazy hot blood. Reisi was in front of him, his lifeless body sinking further and further into the darkness below.

Fear nestled in his heart, causing him to swim after the foundering body. But with every stroke he made, with every inch he came closer to Reisi, the heat became even more unbearable. It was as if the sea in which he swam was boiling. He felt his mind slipping away from him, his body slowing dying because of the fever that plagued him. Strands of black hair sunk deeper and deeper into the hot dark void below and the more he struggled to save him, the quicker Reisi seemed to disappear. Around him it grew darker and darker, and even hotter. And then, for one moment, he thought he could not bear it any longer. He was asphyxiating.

A voice gouged into his heart and burned it to ashes. It was a laugh that pierced him, like a spearhead. The mask of a fox appeared in front of him, sending another icy rain of arrows through his soul. All of a sudden he was no longer in a sea of blood, but in a ubiquitous hell of fire. He could feel every lick of the flames biting holes into his skin, torturing him, promising to burn him alive. With each passing second, he felt the power being sucked out of his muscles as if the fire would melt every sinew and nerve and cell of his existence. There were other, unfamiliar voices that roared around him, trying to speak to him. But he did not understand. All he was able to hear was the devilish laugh that made his blood boil with anger. Vigorously, he tried to defend himself against the flames, aiming to be freed from this hell. But all of that just made the heat even more unbearable. Mikoto could barely breathe; every gasp was filled with acid. The dizziness was close to seizing him for good. He felt his life being ripped out of his chest.

Another scream cut the air, and made him lose control. And then, all of a sudden, he broke out and an avalanche of fire rolled through him. Someone screamed for mercy and he saw a face contorting with pain. Then, he began to fall. The ground below his feet gave away and the voices turned into bitter screams as he saw the mask getting farther and farther away. Helplessly, he tried to hold onto something, but there was absolutely nothing there except for the flames. The deeper he fell, the more he was embraced by the raging fire until the abyss of the scorching heat engrossed him completely.

And then, from one second to the other, he plunged into a sea of icy cold.

A chill, so cold he thought he would freeze to death, cut through his body. Slowly and brutally, as if he were a fish that was cut sideways to be filleted. All of a sudden, there was only coldness, an icy wind that whistled through his emptied body like a squall through a vacant house. And darkness, a dangerous and frosty darkness. It seemed to cut his skin off his bones, making him unable to move. For a few painful moments, he was not even able to breathe. It felt as if he were still falling, sinking endlessly into the dark icy water, into the void that spread beneath him. Something was missing. Something was not there. He felt helpless and terribly weak. There was a reflection of himself falling. He tried to reach out for it, to save himself from being sucked into the black hole that opened. Hopeless. His face contorted with panic, as he plunged into in

the nothingness - the void devouring him completely.  
And it was cold. Terribly cold.

"Mikoto."

Abruptly, his eyes tore open. The fog disappeared, and with it the flames, the unbearable heat, the sea of blood and the echo in his ears. Only the cold remained, glued to him, promising to dismember him if he would dare to defy it. Mikoto stared blindly through the stained reality that spread out before him. He saw a few colours, red and green, a little blue and an excessive white. He couldn't make out more than that. The only thing that was completely clear were the voices that floated through the air.

"Mikoto?"

"He's finally waking up!"

"Shut up! Quit making such noise!"

"Mikoto-san!"

"Mikoto..."

He felt a hand on his, and it was as if the touch would burn him. Hissing violently for air, he began to blink. And with every glance, the colors and shapes mixed anew. He was so terribly dizzy, every inch of his body ached, burned and itched. He felt so weak, as if the next gust of wind could tear him off his feet. And then there was this cold - this dreadful cold that seemed to freeze him to the ground. It was so painful, so stressful to focus on the voices, and the colors in front of him that he was almost willing to give up trying. Only the thought of returning to the inferno and the sea of blood stopped him, made him fight against his senses.

"Mikoto."

Sluggishly, his head fell to the side. The first thing he saw were two large, beautiful eyes, framed by hair as white as ice. A smile appeared on her thin lips, as she noticed that their visions met. Her voice was so soft and quiet like falling snow.

"I knew you'd wake up..."

"Mikoto-san!" a loud, euphoric shouting made him wince, as Yata suddenly came into his field of vision. The smile on his face was as bright as the sun. Yet at the same time, however, the young man with the beanie got a tremendous clout. Izumo hissed angrily and pushed him back. "Are you mad? Shut up! And pay some attention, damn it!"

"Hah... I'm sorry..." The young man blushed out of embarrassment, but could not resist a grin.

Mikoto felt a lump in his throat that made breathing impossible. Slowly, powerless, he

let his eyes slide through the round. Anna and Izumo were right next to him, then Yata, Kamamoto... Shōhei and Chitose, Kosuke and Erik... Dewa and Bando... they were all here. A new flash of cold shook him when he moved his gaze further through the crowd. There was a vase of flowers beside him and the beeping of a device in his ears. It smelled strange in here and it was way too bright. The realization froze him to the bed he was lying in. He was... in a hospital, wasn't he?

"Mikoto-san! We're so glad you're awake!"

"Yeah, we were all worried!"

"How are you? Can we do something to make you feel better?"

"We have bought you a cake!"

"Would you let him wake up properly first?! Nobody wants your stupid cake!"

"...How could you say such a cruel thing?"

"Shut up."

"Do not tell me what I have to do!"

"Do you want to pick a fight or what?"

"Just come at me!"

*"I told you all to shut up!"*

Suoh needed a long moment before he could breathe properly again. He was able to distinguish reality from dreams now and so he knew that this was really happening. Yet, he still felt miserable, nothing but miserable. His muscles barely obeyed him. The pull of gravity seemed to have increased tenfold, pressing him brutally into his blankets. It felt as if someone had sucked him dry. He had no power left. Not even to move a toe. And then again, there was still this cold that just would not go away. This relentless cold that made him shiver constantly and with every painful breath he took. The cold, which froze him onto the bed in which he lay, made him unable to move. He was still alive? But why...?

"Oh, ignore these fools Mikoto." It was Izumo's quiet voice that was laughing now. "We're all just glad you woke up. For a moment... well... we really thought you were dead..."

The red-haired man slowly shook his head and ran his fingers over the sweat on his forehead. "What happened?" His voice was weak, tense as a string just before the rupture. It made him cringe in fear.

"Uh... to be honest... we were hoping you could tell us." The blond man grinned, scratching the back of his head. "But it doesn't really matter right now. Try to get some rest first. You look terrible. Hahaha, no offense."

"What..." Mikoto gasped and blinked back to his friends. "What... happened?"

The short, helpless silence was broken by a silky, young voice. "...You were asleep. For three days."

Silently, Suoh looked at the girl and their eyes met in a very deep and intimate moment. For a second it seemed as if she could look into his soul, down to his very core, falling prey to the frosty devouring cold as well. Violently, the man had to

swallow, but his throat was too dry for it to bring any relief.

"Ah yes..." Izumo sighed. "We brought you to the hospital after you had broken down."

Heavily, the leader closed his eyes and felt a stab in his heart. He opened his mouth, but did not have the strength to speak. So he was alive. But what about...

"The Blue King has helped us." Anna whispered, almost as if she had read his thoughts.

"Tsk!" Hissed Yata and crossed his arms. "Yes, like we needed his help. Damn Blues."

"Yata, just calm down already." The blond tall guy admonished him with a sharp look before he turned back to his friend. "Well, there is not much to tell, Mikoto. The Colorless King seems to be dead, and therefore, the whole incident is shelved."

Briefly, Mikoto shook his head to recollect his thoughts. But this terrible cold did not stop jerking him.

"Yes, we all knew that our leader would defeat him!"

"Yooooosh!"

"Homra is unbeatable!"

"No blood - no bones – no-!"

"Would you finally stop making such a rumpus?!"

Again, it was Yata who came closer, grinning, while the others in the background sang their anthem. The relief made his lips curve into a beautiful smile. "We're so glad you've finally woken up, Mikoto-san. I knew you could do it! I always believed in you! But still... when your sword of Damocles disappeared, we thought we would never see you again."

"Ah..." was all that Mikoto could squeeze out of his bruised throat. Incredulously, he looked at him. Yata confidently waved and gave him a poised smile. "Do not worry, Mikoto-san! We will always be Homra! Who cares if we have powers or not!"

Time seemed to stand still. All of the sudden Mikoto widened his eyes and opened his mouth. His heart stopped and he heard a clatter in his chest as if something had been broken. The cold was holding him in its frosty claws, seemed to poison him from within. Now he knew where it came from and what it was. Instinctively, he tried to activate his magic, to awaken the flames within himself - even at the risk of burning down the whole room. But nothing happened. Nothing moved. There was absolutely nothing. And where once the flames had been giving him nightmares, there was only icy emptiness now. A sea of a vacuum in whose heart he perished in the cold.

He was alone. He was completely alone in this endless wintry naught. The realization froze his heart. With huge eyes, he stared at his friends. His voice cracked like a sheet of ice.

*"I... am... no longer a king?"*

---

"Captain." High heels clacked and clashed, as the blonde woman saluted and bowed reverently. With her usual businesslike, solidified face she turned to the man in the big comfy chair. "...We have received word that Suoh Mikoto has just awakened."

For the young woman it was hardly possible to capture the reaction of her boss adequately. It seemed there was no movement of his at all, he didn't even look at her – just fitting another jigsaw piece into its place with an unfazed expression on his lips. And yet, she had the feeling he held his breath for a moment, as if his eyelids lowered out of the much needed relief. Or perhaps it was just her imagination. Maybe it really was. With a calm and untouched expression Munakata Reisi closed his eyes and paused for a moment before he turned back to his puzzle.

"Good. You know what to do, Awashima-kun."

"Yes." Her body tensed up some more and her voice fell into a monotonous tone as she closely examined his mien. "Of course, Captain. We will have the hospital guarded by our men. Also, the Silver King calls for an appointment with you."

"Hm." Was all the man in the uniform replied for a long moment. Seri was not sure if he could feel how intense she was staring at him. But she just couldn't dissuade herself from watching him closely. While the long black strands of his silky hair may have hidden the stitched wound on his forehead, the black burn marks on his neck grabbed her attention vividly – despite his attempt to conceal them with his uniform buttoned up to his chin. The sight made her shiver.

"Tell him he may visit me, whenever he wants." Munakata finally replied, still not awarding the woman with any eye contact. "Is there anything else, Awashima-kun?"

"No." Seri answered abruptly, but she did not move an inch from the spot she stood on. Her body stiffened even more and she stopped breathing. Her heart began to beat violently in her chest as she struggled with herself. "Nothing... that's on the agenda, at least."

She could feel the look he was giving her now, making her cringe inevitably. He seemed to try making his face look friendly, but she felt something dangerous emanating from his eyes. His voice was very calm and collected, but at the same time watchful and very admonishing. "Nothing... that would be on the agenda?"

"Captain." It was too late now. Too late for her to back down. She lowered her eyes as well as her head and bowed slightly before she could muster the courage to speak. "I hope you know that you are not obliged to be here, Captain. You... have the right to recover from the fight. ...Your injuries-"

"My injuries are no excuse to avoid my duties." He cut her off pitilessly. The blonde woman recoiled at this rebuke. She could feel the voice of her superior growing even



colder. "Moreover, a couple of scratches won't be able to stop me from doing my job."

"...My apologies." Awashima replied reverently and bowed her head even lower. "It's just that..."

"I am honored by your concern, Awashima-kun. But it is not something you should concern yourself with. ...Is there anything else?"

"No." She swallowed hard and held her breath. "Excuse me."

Very quickly, she turned around and left the room. Outside the door, Awashima stopped and allowed herself to exhale again. Her eyes met the floor and for a moment she stayed where she was. If only she were able to help him...

---

A dark, cold and starry darkness embraced the sky furiously that night. The wind had snowflakes dancing through the streets, as it brushed the ice from the roofs of the buildings. It was particularly cold this night, for the clouds had been driven away by a glowing firmament which smoldered hazily through the bright lights of the lanterns. Two days had passed since word had reached out concerning the official "death" of another king. It was 2 a.m. and the streets were swept clean. Most buildings were dark and the big lanterns on the sidewalks looked like waiting guards keeping the sleeping safe. Except for one part of a certain street.

The light of the lamps above them were turned off, leaving the street in a dark and dangerous twilight. Except for the snow which occasionally drifted in their paths, there were no signs of movement at all. And except for the gentle wind there was only one sound breaking through the silence of the night. The clicking of a lighter being snapped open and shut playfully, forcing a flame to dance dangerously in the darkness of a little alley. A choked and mischievous chuckle followed and materialized in the cold as a thin, wet fog. A glance drifted through the night and a grin flashed on a pair of slim lips. The house they could see from across the street was asleep it seemed.

"Now or never, boys."

The men behind him joined in a destructive, thirsty murmur, as they dashed forward through the darkened street. And their reflection shimmered against the silver plate of the bar they approached.

"Maaan... I really have to say, it is strange without our powers." With his hands buried in his pockets, Shōhei wandered through the dark streets, pulling a long face.

"Pfft tell be about it..." A short moan escaped Saburōta's mouth as he folded his arms

behind his head. "...But who cares? As long as all of us are alive, everything's fine."

"Yeah, probably." Sighed the boy with the baseball cap and the short, auburn hair. "...Still... Mikoto-san looked pretty beaten... Must have been a really tough fight he had."

"Well, but we can do nothing about that now. All he needs is some more rest. Everything else depends on the future. I mean... whether with or without his Sword of Damocles, our boss is a tough one. Another two or three days in the hospital and he is back on his feet."

"I don't know..." Shōhei whispered uncertainly. "It's almost three days since he woke up... and he still looks terrible."

A clout made the boy groan and drove him close to tears. "Ouch! What was that for? " Saburōta bared his teeth and looked at him offended. "Mikoto-san isn't our leader for nothing! No one can compete with him! And even if he just sleeps all day – that means he needs to gather his strength! So don't talk nonsense like that and believe in him!"

"Alright already! Relax!" He dodged a second clout and danced a few steps forward. "How about telling me that nicely next time?! Why are you so mean to me?!"

"I would be nice to you if you weren't such an idiot!"

"You're the one to talk!"

"Grrr, now you've done it! Prepare yourself to die!"

Shōhei was just starting to run away from his friend, when he turned into the next street and suddenly came to an abrupt halt. Saburōta was just about to hit him again, but as he followed his gaze, he stopped as well. A red violent light reflected in his widened eyes. In the darkness of the street, flames shot their way out of a building. It was Shōhei who was able to form words first. His voice trembled mightily.

"Hey... isn't that our bar?"

---

The sun stabbed his eyes uncomfortably and he had to raise his hand to grant them some shade. It was such a beautiful day. An almost cloudless sky, a pleasant, bright sunlight and a warm wind from the sea. A much too nice picture for the sight that presented itself to him. The soot from the flames had spread up into the street. The windows were smashed and its wood frames charred. They looked like skeletons reaching for help with their bony fingers. The entire facade was black with the remnants of smoke and where the shimmering platinum sign of "Homra" had once shone, now was another message sprayed all over it.

*Don't mess with us.*

A click snapped his tongue and he folded his arms. Around him were crowds of police officers. Some talked with his subordinates, some with members of Homra. And he was sure, Kusanagi-san was here somewhere, clinging to the last remnants of his whole pride. Fushimi clicked his tongue again, for he had long noticed that Misaki was not here. And he himself shouldn't be either. When his captain had learned of the incident, he had explicitly excluded him from the mission. Not that this would have fazed Fushimi - he had come anyway. The worst punishment his boss could give him was to suspend him from duty for a while. And even that would not bother the black-haired man. He would not be deterred from doing what he wanted. Especially not by an arrogant boss like that.

Unerring, Saruhiko went to the police chief, who was just being questioned by Kamo Ryūhō - the appointed leader of this little mission. He slid between them and forced the long-haired man in blue to take a step backwards. "Scepter 4 takes over the case. The police may now turn to more important things. "

Kamo gave him an icy look and growled softly as he drew an aggressive step closer again. "Fushimi... you should not be here."

"And yet here I am. Have a little more respect for your superiors." Hissed Fushimi and was well aware of the irony of him saying such words. But he was too cranky now to think about it. With a bored and antiseptic look, he turned to the older man with the mustache, who led the local police. "Send the current information your men have gathered to our headquarters. Captain Munakata will deal with it. Have you found anything interesting?"

Kamo still growled in the background, a fact that made the police chief look irritated and frightened at the same time. He did not trust these men in blue. But he was way too afraid of their powers to say something inappropriate. So all he did was nod at Fushimi and tried to hide his emotions. "Not much. The inside of the bar was severely damaged, as well as the upper rooms. Stolen were some alcohol and some valuables. We're still unclear about who could have done it."

Annoyed, Fushimi turned away from him and walked past his subordinate. "Pffft... and you call that police work."

He barely noticed the two evil eyes which plowed into his back. And he wasn't interested in the slightest. With heavy feet, he joined the remnants of the bar. It smelled pungently of soot and alcohol and nitrogen from the fire extinguishers that had been used. With all this smut and grime the room seemed even darker and more stifling than it had always felt. In the middle of the debris Saruhiko stopped and looked around. Tables were overturned, chairs smashed and half the alcohol demolished with the broken bottles hanging lost in the rack. The ceiling was barely visible below the soot and the rest of the room had been ravaged by the flames as well. Everywhere lay fragments of glass and wood, a baseball bat and some other things the fire made unrecognizable. The jukebox in the corner was knocked over and its records were on the ground - scattered and destroyed.

"Tsk". Once again, the black-haired man with the glasses folded his arms and let his view circle. He felt strangely afflicted in this place. It was like a stab in his chest. Not because this room might have meant something to him - no, indeed he really didn't care at all about that. It left a bitter taste because he knew that this probably meant the end of Homra.

The whole thing wore him down. Not only that these idiots of Homra now no longer even had a home, but because the police was too stupid to see the connections. It was obvious who did it. Cowardly and treacherously, just like one would expect. But on the other hand, Homra had it coming. Those who made many enemies were massacred mercilessly in a moment of weakness. Once again Saruhiko hissed and closed his eyes. He had to get out of here. The stench of memory left him sick.

---

A gentle light drifted through the window of his room. He could watch the sun set in the distance. The sun seemed to set the sky ablaze as if the clouds were on fire and only a soft pink and dwindling blue tried to quench them. A soft, cold wind swept through the half-open window onto his bed and made him shiver. Not that it was ever really warm since he had woken up. Nevertheless, Suoh made no effort to move or slip under his blanket to escape from the cold. Wordlessly, he looked out the window and waited. For what he did not know. Maybe he waited for the cold that had imprisoned him to finally release him from that unconscious state. Maybe he waited for himself to finally feel better, finally feel stronger. Maybe for a return of his fire, the hot flames that had devoured him for so long. Or maybe he was just waiting for a visit. A visit from Anna, Izumo and his friends. Or for *him* finally giving a sign of life.

Gulping down a quick surge of anger, Suoh lowered his head and closed his eyes. Since he had lost his powers, he was terribly unbalanced. Cold anger seethed in him, over and over again, ever since he started to remember correctly what had happened. He remembered how that bastard of a king had taken over his body. And what he had done to him. He remembered how he had had to watch helplessly as the Colorless King had tortured Reisi. Even now he was shaking with rage at the very thought of these images. He remembered exactly now. How he had tried to fight back. How he had tried to stop him. How it had driven him mad.

And then everything had gone blurry. He remembered that he had tried to direct the flames towards the Colorless King. The very flames that had brought him so many years of nightmares. And then, quite suddenly, it had somehow worked. His fire had turned against the new king and had gone out of control. He remembered the king slowly being devoured by his flames, the new power he had quenched to obtain. And he remembered clutching to his soul, forbidding the colorless spirit to leave his body. Someone had helped him, he guessed. Mikoto recalled other voices, other personalities buzzing around him, pinning the king down to where he was. And the flames had gone even more out of control, burning everything in their path, cracking the very core of this alien soul in his body. Then all had been quiet. Still and cold and without the burning which had tormented him for so long.

He had done a lot of thinking, tried to explain it logically. But it seemed sure the Colorless King had fallen victim to the flames that he himself had endured for so long. The King had not been able to withstand the brutal raging fire that had come with his new power. He was consumed by the power he had wanted and had burned to ashes through it until neither his soul nor his stolen powers were anymore.

With the death of the Colorless King, his Sword of Damocles was gone. His power had been taken from him the moment, the Colorless King had entered his body. And with his power gone, the only thing that remained were his body and his soul. Suoh's gaze went down at his hands grievously. There was a ghastly itching everywhere - his fingers, his arms, even his chest. The rampant flames had engulfed his body and had left their disgusting remains all over his upper body. Black and charred, red and hurt, the burn marks curled across his skin and made him cringe. It burned, itched and felt as if it would never stop. But even though he felt faint, exhausted and without any footing to hold on to - he knew that burning. He was already used to it. Reisi must have endured the same pain, the same marks. The thought made him sick.

His eyes closed anew and he held his breath. Never would he have thought, he would feel so empty without his powers - so eerily weak and useless. Every attempt to get up gave him a hard time. He felt so heavy, his legs so weak, every step an insecure tumbling. That was humiliating enough. Even worse was the cold that still had him in a firm grip. He did not know if it just stemmed from the fact there were no more flames burning him from the inside any longer, or whether it was something else which grew in his chest, making him feel as if he would freeze to death. He knew only one thing: never in his life had he felt so miserable, had his body felt so alien and wrong; never had he felt so fragile.

Nearly ... but just nearly, he wished it would have ended differently.

A knock drew his attention to the door. His head turned only ponderously. Unsolicited, someone entered and closed the door with a gentle push behind him. A blond man was standing at the door, not sure if he was able to look at his friend or not. Izumo looked awful, beaten and at the end of his tether. Only for a short instant, he managed to look at him before his eyes slid back to the ground. He shook his head and his voice was barely more than a thin breath when he finally managed to squeeze the words out between his teeth.

"Mikoto... I... something happened."

## Kapitel 3: Algid Anger

"I'll take you to him. Please, follow me."

An prosaic, unemotional look drilled through him like an arrow and drew an uneasy grin from his lips. These Blues really were quite icy people. He obediently followed the blond woman and the penetrating clacking of her heels. On their way, he unobtrusively led his gaze through the blue headquarters. It felt cold and sterile here, almost like in a hospital. The corridor was dark and narrow and seemed full of hidden secrets. A smile appeared on his lips again, but he was not comfortable at all. This was not what he originally had in mind. It was nothing like what he had imagined.

A slight sigh escaped his throat, but no words followed. Instead, he continually let his gaze circle around the building before the woman in front of him stopped abruptly. She motioned him to wait, knocked on the massive door before her and opened it after a few seconds. A brief conversation broke loose to whose words he paid no real attention. Eventually however, Awashima Seri came back into the hallway and asked him to enter the room with a simple gesture.

Light-footed, he strolled into the small office; a room that mixed the classic Japanese style so elegantly with Baroque furniture and modern architecture. Everything in this room was neat and accurate, properly sorted and put into place. He was convinced he wouldn't even be able to find a single speck of dust here. This time he refrained a sigh as the Blue King got up from his chair and approached him in a few steps. In respectful distance the man in blue stood before him and bowed correctly, before offering him an odd, friendly smile.

"Ahhh, welcome to my office, Silver King. May I offer you some tea?"

With his eyes closed and a gentle smile, Weismann shook his head. He knew that it was only polite to refuse the offer, even though he could no longer stand such formalities. "Thank you, Blue King. But I'm not in the mood for tea."

Once again, the large uniformed man bowed and looked at his young guest with the short white hair and the big innocent eyes. Weismann felt his analytical gaze cut through him like a knife does through butter. It did not help to make him feel more comfortable. Munakata Reisi gave him a tired smile.

"Too bad, I would have liked to share a cup of tea with you." The empty phrase to the rehearsed answer flowed from his lips like second nature. "What brings you to me?"

Shortly, Weisman took a deep breath and then tried to break through the sterile formality of this conversation with an honest smile. "Nothing special really. I just wanted to see how you are."

Only for a brief moment it looked as if Munakata's brow furrowed. But then he laughed softly and closed his eyes. "Well, I don't think you need to worry about me. I serve the order, the city and you. "

With a silent smile, Weisman looked at the man before him. Just a few weeks ago nothing that had happened on earth had been of any interest to him. Neither who was king and why nor what they were doing with their powers. But the events of recent days had roused him in a brutal manner; brought him back to reality. And since his feet had touched the earth again, he had realized that his work had gone completely out of control. That people suffered; more than he had ever contemplated.

Munakata Reisi watched him closely again and the look in his cold, violet eyes was like the flash of a knife in the dark. Weismann tried to figure this man out; to see behind this mask of his. But the Blue King could no longer deceive Adolf K. Weismann. He was able to see right through him.

This man before him was a man without scruples, reckless and dangerously intelligent. A man who asserted his very own concept of order against all obstacles, including the law. And he did it so cunningly, it would keep his slate perfectly clean. An prosaic calculating man with no respect for the law, authority or privacy. A man who nonetheless learned to function perfectly in this bureaucratic political clockwork; leaving his true motives completely in the dark. A consistently suspicious and analytical person, who seemed to mock everyone with his arrogant manner. A loner who couldn't trust anyone. And a person you couldn't trust either.

The white-haired young man took a deep breath. He felt the urge to let his eyes wander through the room, but he stared into these violet eyes instead; those eyes hidden behind his glasses as in an attempt to conceal a secret. Indeed, Munakata Reisi was a dangerous man; a man who revealed nothing about his true self, who let no one close to himself. For Weismann, the Blue King was far more dangerous than the irascible, uncontrollable Red King. At least the Red King had understood what the true purpose of the Dresden Slates was. This man however, couldn't be more off track. He had created an ice-cold and flawless organization of subordinates. No place for feelings or affection or trust. This place, Scepter 4 was more like a cold stone in the middle of a dark ocean. It was soulless and hard and with no warmth.

"However..." the man in blue broke off the silence after a few moments, his eyes still located on him clinically. "...I have the feeling that you might be here for another reason."

Weismann could almost smell the slight, angry panic which now emanated from Munakata Reisi. He could not blame him, for he himself had been the one who saw Munakata's carefully constructed mask crumble. One week it had been. A week since he had come too late, one week when he had only been able to pick up the pieces of a fight. He remembered exactly how he had seen the two kings. The Red King lying

lifelessly on the ground, the Blue King bowing over him, feeling his pulse. The man had not noticed him, had completely blanked him out. And then, at the moment when suddenly their looks had met, he had understood.

It had been just a tiny moment when Munakata Reisi had shown fear, but it had been long enough to be burnt into his memory. A tiny moment of weakness that had betrayed him forever. And Adolf K. Weismann understood very well. There was someone who was important to the Blue King. A secret he had, a secret which at that moment he was no longer able to hide. A secret that now connected both of them involuntarily. Weismann was pretty sure, the Blue King right now wished for nothing but the opportunity to cut that secret out of his memory. Munakata Reisi regarded him as an enemy, warning him with every single gesture, with every glance that this had to remain secret between them. He could see it in his strained facial expressions, his stiffly held back and the dark glint in his eyes.

Weismann briefly wondered whether he would be able to blackmail him with their little secret, but actually had nothing of the sort in mind. He had no desire to poke around in his past or in his wounds. And he didn't need the Blue King to rebel against him either. A sincere smile followed a short sigh when he lowered his head and closed his eyes.

"Not really. But I have to make a decision soon and I wanted to get some things straight first."

"I see..." replied Munakata darkly and more than suspiciously.

Weismann felt the violet eyes cut through him again, trying to violate him, trying to silence him for good. He really wished this conversation wouldn't be so terribly uncomfortable. Unsettled, he let his eyes further circle the room. "I've heard Scepter 4 dedicated itself to the monitoring of the former red clan..."

The man in the blue uniform stiffened noticeably, as if he smelled a ruse. His voice cracked dangerously, but he tried to remain formal. "Scepter 4 is a special unit that deals with unusual phenomena and events. In the ranks of the former red clan is a Strain. In addition, the attack on the clan's bar was made because of reasons afflicting with the past, when the Red King still had his powers. Moreover, we also suspect a Strain in the ranks of the perpetrators. So I do not see why you should be surprised by Scepter 4 simply doing its work."

The white-haired man laughed softly, but avoided direct eye contact. "...I didn't say that you have to justify yourself. It was just an observation on my part." Weismann noticed how these words incredibly angered the man before him, but he didn't wait for a response, but rather just kept talking. "I'm glad you take care of the situation, Blue King. I think the issue is in good hands with you. Unfortunately, I myself can't do anything to affect things anyway."

"I do nothing other than my job." His counterpart replied hard but somehow



seemingly soothed. His attitude however remained abrasive and suspicious. "And it's not your job to take care of such things. These are the duties of the police, the government and Scepter 4."

He nodded slowly and sighed with a broken smile. "...No, that's not true. All of this is my fault, it is solely my responsibility. And I should be the one to straighten it again." That was true. He had turned his back to the world long enough now. It was time that he took responsibility and made sure that such a thing would never happen again.

Before Munakata was able to respond, Weismann raised his head and looked at him, a cheeky grin flashing over his lips. "Maybe I should suspend you from service for a while. You really deserve a vacation after you put your life on the line to save the city."

The face of the man in blue darkened. Weismann had it very right. This man considered him as an enemy and he looked as if he were close to erupting like a volcano. But even so, his voice was calm yet. "I do need neither holidays nor other benefits. In addition, we are about to apprehend the perpetrators of the attack on Homra's Bar. The city needs Scepter 4 now more than ever."

Grinning, the man with the white hair waved off and laughed. "Don't worry, Blue King. I would never discourage a dutiful man from his work. I was just teasing you."

Of amusement, however, there was no sign at all in Munakata's face. And although Weismann was not afraid of him, it made him feel uncomfortable nevertheless. He shrugged his shoulders and looked into his eyes openly and apologetically. "I'm sorry if I attacked you. I know that you probably have a lot to do lately. It's just, I need the advice of a man of your status..."

For a brief moment, the Blue King closed his eyes and breathed deeply. Seconds later, he seemed to have taken his stance again. "No, I'm the one who is sorry. Forgive me. Tell me what you have on your mind."

"Well ..." he began uncertainly, scratching the back of his head. "...Should I bring flowers to the Red King in the hospital, or do you think that is inappropriate?"

Wordlessly, Munakata stared at him, wondering if that man wanted to make a fool of him. But instead of taking the bait, he took a deep breath and pushed his glasses into place, using just his middle finger. "...I don't think I'm the right person to be asked such a question..."

A grin slipped over Weismann's lips, as he began to shrug. "Well, I was asking you because you had a lot to do with the red clan in the past. I am deeply in your and Suoh Mikoto's debt. After all, he's the one who killed the Colourless King – and that even though it was my fault all of this happened to begin with. Without his effort, none of us would be alive now, I guess." For a moment he closed his eyes, but as his counterpart didn't respond in any way, he opened them again. "I am indebted to all of

you. ...And I want to offer you all a compensation. ...Do you think the red clan would accept money to rebuild their bar?"

Once again, it took a long incredulous moment before Munakata reacted. His uncomfortableness to answer was highly palpable. "I don't think the red clan would accept any help. But you may try. As for me... I don't need any kind of compensation, as I mentioned earlier."

A loud sigh followed and Weismann finally gave up. However, he got what he came here for in the first place. He wanted to form an image of each of the kings. And as for Munakata Reisi, he had the feeling he captured him pretty well. The white-haired man looked towards him once again, this time with an open-hearted smile. "Well, then. I won't know unless I try, right? Thank you for your valuable time, Blue King. It was an honor. "

"It was an honor for me as well." Formally, Munakata Reisi bowed once more before him to pay him his hypocritical respect. "Come and see me whenever you feel like it. I am your faithful servant."

Weismann couldn't resist an amused grin. A perfect liar, indeed. The Blue King just couldn't resist to put a pinch of hidden mockery in his every word. Cunning and conniving. And a little pitiful.

Weismann took a few steps toward the door before he turned around again. His smile was sad when he looked him in the eyes one last time. "You know, Blue King... Have you ever thought about what I wanted to accomplish with the Dresden Slates?"

As the man in the uniform didn't answer, knowingly that he didn't have to, Adolf K. Weismann's smile broadened a bit. "...My original goal was... to create something beautiful. ...A place of belonging for people who had lost everything. Who don't belong anywhere anymore. A family for those, who are alone. It... was not about sacrifice or duty. Not about supremacy and subordination. I... wanted to create something that makes people feel good, feel loved and safe. Something that could make them happy..."

Munakata looked at him wordlessly, but it seemed as if the Silver King didn't expect an answer anyway. Instead, he winked at him with a sad expression and closed the door behind him, leaving the Blue King alone with himself and his office. Finally, Reisi followed the urge to fold his arms and close his eyes. His mouth bent and he held his breath. A faint, bitter growl escaped his throat as he tried to breathe again. "Well ... that didn't quite work out, right Silver King?"

A knock forced his head to lift again in surprise. Fortunately, he had regained his self-control, so he gave permission to enter as businesslike as he always was. A green shock of hair appeared as Akiyama entered, saluting to his superior briefly. He looked at him with a serious and uncomfortable expression. He knew, the message he had would not please his Captain. Quickly, he swallowed for courage and tried to keep his

voice flat and composed.

"Captain!"

With a liquid hand movement Munakata meant for him to relax. "What is the matter, Akiyama-kun?"

The man stiffened further, and his gaze was fixed and full of worry. "It's about Suoh Mikoto."

---

With a silent look and big lilac eyes, she looked at the two men before her. Like two giants towering above her. It wasn't the first time she felt as if they would belong to a different world. The big man with the sunglasses didn't look at her; he hadn't for a while now. Since the night her home was burned down, he seemed to have avoided sleep. Thick dark circles shone under his brows and his hair seemed flat and unwashed. Soot still clung to his clothes and his hair was covered by a fine dust of wood chips. He once again had spent the entire day at the bar, working with the others to clear the debris of their home. It was a tedious and tiring job and it tugged violently at him. She could see how broken he was, although he tried to cover it up.

And yet, Izumo tried to be strong for his friends. He assured them repeatedly that this was not the end, that they would rebuild Homra and make it even better. He smiled, but it was not quite the smile she knew. In front of her, he couldn't hide his true feelings. And he knew. That was the reason he avoided looking at her. Even now, he didn't look directly at her; he only yelled a few words in her direction before he disappeared in the next room. Since she had lost her home, she lived here with Izumo. His apartment was quite plain, located in the middle of the city, in a small terraced house with a nice view over the cityscape. It was small, but it was comfy for her. And she liked it very much.

Her eyes rolled back from Izumo to the man standing beside her. Two tired, lackluster eyes met hers and for a seemingly endless moment all they did was look into each other's eyes. She could see how exhausted and worn out he was. Could feel how powerless he felt. And yet here he was, standing next to her, holding her hand. His bright red colour was gone; only the burns that covered his arms, chest and part of his back, glowed like a fire in the ashes. He wasn't feeling well and yet he was here. Her eyes gave him a smile, although her lips didn't move. Even if she couldn't see his unique red glow, Mikoto remained Mikoto. Nothing had changed. Nothing at all.

"Anna, Mikoto!" it called from the kitchen. "Could you please bring me the bag from the hallway?"

It was the white-haired girl who grabbed the bag next to her, but Mikoto took it from her without a single word and carried it slowly into the kitchen. Anna followed him

silently. When he arrived in the kitchen, Izumo smiled and put a knife into his best friend's hand. Mikoto hated to be pitied and chaperoned, so the blond man condemned him to peel the potatoes. Obeying and without protest, the former king sat at the small table and began to do as he was told. Anna heard Izumo talk without really paying attention to what he said. She knew that side of him - he talked and talked and talked, simply to avoid having to endure the silence. And he really tried stubbornly to lighten the mood.

It had been only a few hours since Mikoto had left the hospital and found a shelter at his friend's place. Neither a doctor nor a nurse had given him permission to go. Although his condition was not critical anymore, the pain blockers he had received had some side effects. Side effects such as dizziness, depression, pain and feelings of suffocation. However, Mikoto showed no reaction at all. She felt what he felt, but it didn't bother her. She knew he would smile again. She was sure of it. It couldn't get any worse, right?

The air in the small kitchen became hotter and more humid the more ingredients Izumo threw in the small wok. It hissed and sizzled loudly and gradually filled the room with a pleasant spicy smell. Neither Anna nor Mikoto talked much, but they did their best to help their friend preparing dinner, washing the dishes and setting the table. The girl looked dreamily at the red bubbles of the detergent on their fingers, as a chime broke the silence.

"Uhh... and who could that be?" Izumo sighed and looked toward the door, irritated. Hastily, he dried his hands with a towel, before he gave his friends a brief hint. "You make sure nothing burns, okay?"

The only response that he drew out of them was a silent nod. Mikoto went back doing the dishes for Anna with total disinterest, while she tried to peek around the corner. Anna knew who was at the door. But she still wanted to see.

With a jerk, Izumo opened the door and his face contorted in surprise as he recognized the person in front of him. With the man in blue an icy cold surge of air followed, making him frown involuntarily. His mouth bent dissatisfied, as he pressed his hand on his hip. "Tsk... right now is really a bad time, you know? Can't you come back later?"

The man in the blue uniform was not impressed and straightened his back. With an businesslike look, he cleared his throat. "Kusanagi Izumo of Homra... We know that Suoh Mikoto is with you."

"So...?" Izumo replied unimpressed, leaning against the frame. He looked at the middle-sized man with the green, shaggy hair, but he couldn't remember if they had met before.

Akiyama looked at him fearlessly, and kept his voice businesslike. "The former Red King and his followers are now under custody of Scepter 4. A contravention against the conditions will not-"

"Woah woah woah, slow down here." The blond man interrupted him with a heavy frown. "What do you mean by "custody"?"

An objective, unfazed gaze drilled through him. "...The red clan, Homra and all its members are wanted for vandalism, hostage-taking and troublemaking. Because of the special circumstances all of its members are still on probation. If you comply with the instructions of Scepter 4, your punishment may be canceled and the charges withdrawn."

"Huh?" Defensively, his counterpart crossed his arms and cocked his head. "Pro... bation?"

"The restrictions..." warned Akiyama in a dark tone. "...include three conditions. First... all members of the former Red King's clan and the Red King himself... must refrain from further acts of violence, taking of hostages or damaging of property." Just for a moment, the uniformed man gave him time to let it sink before he continued. "Secondly... no member of the former Red King's clan nor the Red King himself are allowed to investigate the incident of the arson attack in Homra's bar. You are forbidden to act in any way, including any attempt to take revenge."

"Give me a break!" Izumo interrupted him with a disgusted face. "Since when do you think can you demand any sort of accountability from us? We do things our way. Scepter 4 is not in charge of us."

"Well, it just so happens that we are." Akiyama replied with a very cold expression. "In case of any resistance, all members of Scepter 4 have authorization to detain the members of the former red clan. These regulations are designed to protect the public as well as the members of the former red clan."

"You want to arrest us?" Izumo hissed angrily and glared at him. "And you really believe that this is a good idea?"

"Times have changed." The man in blue answered unwaveringly. "The red clan is completely without power. You're now ordinary citizens of the city. And Scepter 4 had overlooked your criminal goings-on long enough. Homra has violated several laws and the treatment that you're now experiencing is more than accommodating. You can be glad we haven't arrested you already. You are wanted criminals. From now on you move on very thin ice."

"Grrr..." Izumo growled briefly and for a moment he seemed as if he were about to lose it. But he knew what he had to do. He knew he had no choice. This man before him was right. Maybe they had it coming all along. Basically, he had expected it. They had to account for what they had done. It was foolish to think they could escape this mess without sacrifices.

Finally, he pulled himself together and breathed deeply. Defeated, he closed his eyes and hissed. "...Fine. As long as you Blues do your job properly and find those who

torched my bar..."

"Information in this regard are strictly confidential and will not be revealed."

"Yeah, yeah, all right. ...What is the third condition?"

"...Third..." The man with the green hair continued his monotonous speech. "...the former Red King Suoh Mikoto must submit to medical supervision. As long as no medical report confirms the stability of his condition, he has no right to leave the hospital. Should he refuse to fulfill this requirement, we will consider him a risk for his environment and he will be arrested at once."

A roar shook the frame of the door and had Izumo wince. A hand grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back recklessly. When Mikoto stepped between his friend and the man in blue, the air around them turned into poison. The cold fury in his golden eyes was so terrifying that Akiyama began to swallow. He resisted the urge to move back a step just in the last second. The threatening, deep voice that thundered against him now, made him cringe.

"You will fuck off immediately. And you can you tell your captain something. If Munakata has to tell me something, then he should come here by himself and talk with me face to face!"

Trying to regain his composure, the little man in front of him opened his mouth, but Suoh only hissed louder and slammed the door right in his face. Leaving a silenced Izumo behind, he stomped through the corridor and disappeared into the living room.

Only hesitantly, the blond man dared to pursue him, still waiting to be called to the door by their unwanted guest again. But when he arrived at where Anna stood, she took his hand and whispered softly.

"The man in blue is gone."

An uneasy feeling swelled inside his stomach, as Izumo nodded. Only seconds later, Mikoto appeared before him once again. He had his jacket thrown over his shoulder and had put on his shoes. The raging anger was corroding his face, much more than ever before. It made Izumo shiver in fear for a second. He gave him one last wistful look.

"Mikoto... please... don't do anything stupid now."

"Tch!" he hissed and turned his back to him. "I'm coming back, don't worry. But enough is enough. I will settle things - once and for all."

## Kapitel 4: Burn Marks

The door fell softly into its lock and clacked as the mechanism locked again. For a long moment, he just leaned against the wood and held his breath. He was terribly tense; every muscle in him longed and screamed after a hot bath and a relaxing massage. As for the pain on his throat- well he didn't want to think about it. It still stung terribly with every single movement he made. Wordlessly, and mindlessly, he looked down the hallway of his apartment. It was dark, but he wasn't in the mood to turn on the lights. The gentle moonlight, which penetrated through his window into the adjoining room, was enough for him. Slowly, painfully, he forced himself out of his boots and stored them on the threshold of his door with too much care, followed by the jacket of his uniform. He just hung it on the wardrobe beside him. Briefly, he wondered whether to strip his uniform altogether, but that seemed like an unnecessary effort. So he left it at that, grabbed the small plastic bag he had brought with him and strolled into the kitchen with big, tired steps.

Actually, he wasn't even hungry. His appetite had been gone for days now. But along with lack of sleep, this was a dangerous combination. Therefore, he forced himself to take the food out of the bag, grab two sticks out of the drawer and eat. Normally, he hated such a hasty, uncultivated way of dining; eating right out of a take-away box like an animal. But what was the point now in creating a pleasant atmosphere? What difference did it make when he was eating alone? Either way, it seemed pathetic.

Arduously, Reisi chewed on the badly fried tofu, which had become entirely oily and bloated in the stale teriyaki sauce. It seemed like hours until he finally managed to swallow the first bite. He did so only out of obligation, but even the food wouldn't make him feel better in any way. Especially not today. The thought alone made his body tense uncomfortably again. He resisted the urge to scratch the burn marks on his neck. Instead, he chose to swallow his food down in pain. It would have been better if he wasted no more thoughts on it, but he was far from that.

Since the meeting with the Silver King, he felt even more nervous and tense than before. He had been completely defenseless. Threatening him had been out of the question. He had nothing to use against him. He had nothing to refrain him from telling anyone about what had happened on this day exactly one week ago. And if he really did reveal his secret... A suffocating lump grew in Reisi's throat, forcing his eyes to shut in pain. He was really afraid of the consequences. His integrity, his status and his reputation now depended solely on the decency of a king. If he wanted, Weismann could betray him easily; he just had to say a few words. That was the last thing Reisi needed. He still had a few scores to settle and to straighten things out. And he was only able to do that as Captain of Scepter 4, as the head of the Blue clan.

Disgusted, he looked into the nearly untouched food-box and decided that a few bites probably were enough to keep his head above the water. Without further ado, he packed it all back together and put it in his refrigerator. A brief pain slipped through his shoulder when he heard the muffled sound of the closing door. Only for a moment, he tried earnestly to massage the stress away, but as soon as he had begun,

he quickly gave up again. It didn't make sense anyway. And as long as he hadn't accomplished what he was aiming for, he couldn't relax. Dejected, he closed his eyes and remained in the darkness of his apartment, took a deep breath and tried to relax at least a little.

He heard his kitchen clock ticking, and its harmonious, calm rhythm sounded almost like his heartbeat, which was pounding through his neck. It also reminded him of how late it was. Much too late. But he didn't mind working overtime - he preferred his office rather than being here, in this lonely, silent apartment, which seemed to stare at him with its reproachful eyes. He always felt watched here, monitored, strange and powerless. This was not his home. But where was it instead? Was it in the headquarters; in his big, comfortable chair? With his clan? The very same people who didn't even want to come to their New Year's Eve party?

Resigning, he lowered his eyelids, and took a deep breath. No, he had no home and no family and friends as the other clans had. He served the safety of the city's citizens. And nothing else should have been important to him. Duty and responsibility were his family.

Suddenly, an aggressive ringing from his door tore him from his thoughts and made him wince. For a moment, he could feel his excited heartbeat pounding wildly against his neck, making him terribly dizzy. A quick shake of the head helped him to regain his composure. Suspicious, he stayed where he was and waited breathlessly for another ring. And it came, even longer and shriller than the previous one. Only a few people knew where he lived and his subordinates would reach him on his cell phone if something had happened. The person, who was so impatiently abusing his bell, could only be one man. It demanded a lot of strength by Munakata to get moving and walk towards the door.

A third, angered ringing accompanied the opening of the door and worsened his headache. When the door was fully open and left him completely unprotected to the fury of his counterpart, his breath stopped for a second. But Reisi's face was unimpressed and cold as always, a perfect businesslike expression as it was appropriate to his status. Suoh, in contrast, looked like a frantic animal. His face was contorted with rage and anger, his brows pinched together, his lips curled and his fists clenched. A violent gasp rattled through his body and made him seem more dangerous than he actually was. The sight drove a bolt of pain through Munakata's body, but on the outside he was completely unfazed and indifferent. He did not even attempt to greet Suoh, he knew that the red-haired man would take care of that.

Suoh's loud, menacing voice thundered at him, lashing out at him mercilessly. "You shitty bastard! Just who do you think you are?!"

"Hello, Suoh," Was all Munakata replied, "What brings you to me in the middle of the night?"

"Do not play dumb with me! You know exactly why I'm here! What the hell, huh? Are you fucking kidding me?"



The man with the black hair closed his eyes and pushed his glasses back up with his fingers. "I don't know what you're talking about."

This fueled Suoh's anger even more. His fist began to tremble. "Mu-na-ka-ta..."

Yet, Munakata's eyes remained closed as he made a repelling gesture. "Everything I do is following and executing laws. Unlike you, Suoh. Homra has made itself guilty to a number of criminal offences and now you must take responsibility. I'm only doing my job. Really, you should thank me that you are still able to roam free."

"Thanking... you?!" The red-haired man seemed about to lose control, but Munakata interrupted him immediately.

"Yes, thanking me. What do you think who paid the expenses for your hospital visit? It was paid through taxpayers' money. Did you really think after the stunt you pulled on the Ashinaka High School grounds, the world would just go on as before? You have caused huge damages - both in my headquarters and on the school grounds. A few hundreds of innocent students were injured and traumatized. Do you think, I could let you go through with that?"

"Tsk" angrily Suoh struck through the air once. "Do not talk to me like that! I'm not one of your subordinates! And what's this shit about the hospital anyway, huh? Did I ask to be taken there?! No!"

"Maybe you didn't, but your friends did." Now he looked at him again, and his violet eyes showed no emotions at all. "Why are you so angry, anyway? Everything has turned out like you wanted. Isn't that so? You are no longer a king, and you can live your life carefree together with your friends. Isn't that what you've always wanted?"

The red-haired man tensed tremendously, and drew himself up to his full height. Munakata could see how furiously he was gasping for air and how close he was to losing control. "*Come again?!*"

"Isn't that so?" Munakata was not deterred or taken aback in any way. Instead, he folded his arms and looked him straight in the eye. "...You are now absolutely powerless, Suoh. You are no longer a king. But you have friends, a family who are by your side. And you are their leader. So take on some responsibility and adhere to the law if you don't want to see them in jail." For a moment the man stalled and he cleared his throat before he spoke again. "Besides... your life is now my responsibility, Suoh. As someone who was in conjunction with the Dresden Slates, you're under the aegis of Scepter 4. It is my job to monitor your health and safety."

A long, tense moment Suoh just stared at him, his body trembling with rage, his eyes dark with poison. He didn't dare to abide his eyes, for a moment didn't even dare to breathe. The growl coming from the bottom of his throat echoed throughout the corridor. "You're enjoying this, aren't you? ...You're enjoying that you're the one who kept his powers while I'm the one who lost it. You're enjoying this... to have such

control over me. ...That you have the upper hand now... and that I have no other choice than to obey you..."

That seemed to strike Munakata. And for a second he couldn't hide a painful twitch. It seemed as if he wanted to avert his eyes, but he forced himself to stare at him instead. "I'm doing my job, nothing else."

"Sure thing." Suoh spat ironically, but hurt as well. "And yet you do not even have the balls to say these things to my face. You sent one of your minions instead. Now you're probably too high-ranked to talk face to face with me, huh?"

"...You destroyed our headquarters. If anything, it's all your fault I have more work than usual."

Disgusted, the redhead bared his teeth and narrowed his eyes even more. "You have no right to decide on my life. And I most certainly will not dance to your tune."

"...Then you leave me no choice but to arrest you."

That sparked Suoh's unbridled anger anew and his quivering voice echoed loudly through the corridor. "I'm sure you were just waiting for that, huh?"

"Yes." Replied Munakata with a hard and unyielding voice. His eyes drilled into his and for the first time Suoh could see that he meant it. "Even if you feel humiliated by it. With you behind bars, I could at least make sure that you're safe and get proper medical care. Rather than having you run off from the hospital as stubborn as you always are even if it may lead to a deterioration of your condition. You'd probably even deliberately start a fight on the streets just because you feel like it! You're not thinking at all about those who are worried about you! No one matters to you! All you care about is that you get your way!"

A long, tense silence slid between the strained breathing of the two men. A low rumble sounded from one of the doors in the hallway and made Munakata's ears prick. Most certainly Suoh had awakened the whole hallway with his yelling and the Blue King knew too well that his neighbor just loved to eavesdrop private conversations. Suppressing his anger, he continued to stare at his old friend and tried to regain his composure. It was much harder than before.

Mikoto still looked angry, but his attitude was much calmer now, much more collected. He stared directly into the violet eyes before him and held his breath. "Why are you avoiding me?"

"I am not." His counterpart hissed much too indignantly.

"Yes, you are. And I want to know why."

"I have a job and responsibilities."

"... And you're talking a lot of crap." Suoh growled, growing impatient.

"Is that all you wanted?"

Suoh's lips pressed harder against each other as he looked at his opponent. He was still pretty mad, but he couldn't help but notice the strange gleam in this violet eyes that put him off balance. Just like with their last fight. He wasn't just imagining things, was he? There was something in those eyes, something that shouldn't have been there. And he just had to be sure. He needed the certainty.

"Reisi..."

It was hard to overlook how the black-haired man winced at this word. Just a little, but it was enough. His mouth curved downward and his fist clenched, but Mikoto wasn't intimidated. His voice was much calmer now.

"...We really need to talk."

For the first time now Mikoto thought he could see anger in Reisi's eyes. As stiff as a poker he stood there, trying to subdue him with nothing but his penetrating gaze. He seemed to struggle violently with himself, perhaps seeking for another insult. For just a moment, Suoh believed his counterpart would simply slam the door in his face. Eventually, however, the black-haired man closed his eyes, defeated, and took a step backwards. He wasn't able to look at him, as he showed him inside with a simple and silent movement of his hand.

Without a word and an averted gaze as well, Mikoto accepted the invitation and squeezed past the black-haired man through the narrow door space. Only a few steps, however, he managed to walk into the corridor before he stopped again. Trying to gather his thoughts and clear his head, he stared through the darkness of the hallway. He was still angry, but now more with himself. He was ashamed that he'd been freaked out like that. That wasn't him. That wasn't who he was.

Briefly, he glanced down at his burned hands and clenched them into fists. He hated that. Since he had lost his powers, he was not himself anymore. He no longer had control over himself. Suddenly, there were so many emotions he couldn't control. There were so many things that seemed to bury him under their weight. He felt exposed, defenseless against all the things boiling up from inside; all these emotions he had been suppressing for so long. He shivered as the scent of Reisi's apartment crashed against him, filling his lungs like poison. All of the sudden, he felt terribly helpless.

Behind him, he heard the door shut, taking the last shred of brightness away. He felt Reisi behind him, as if he was lurking in the darkness that surrounded them. He was looking at him, he could feel it down to his bones. And the thought made Mikoto shiver. It was just like in the past, except that they had completely changed roles. Back then, Reisi had been the one freaking out over every little thing, screaming at him

when they had fought. And he had been the one who stayed calm and quiet. The one who had endured Reisi's moods and the anger he had let out on him. He had simply accepted it, never honestly trying to fight back. Mikoto had always been the type who avoided serious arguments. He just wanted his peace and quiet. But Reisi had always been the one destroying that.

Funny how things sometimes changed...

The sound of footsteps approached and made him stagger for a moment. He could sense how he drew closer. And every step made him feel more helpless. Suddenly, it was horribly cold again. Just like in his dream, when he plunged from the sky of flames into the freezing cold sea of darkness. He was so cold. He felt so defenseless, powerless, alone. His eyes shut and he tried to fight against that feeling. But Reisi was right. He was no longer a king. He was powerless. And Reisi was superior to him now, in every respect. In this condition, Mikoto couldn't even hurt a fly. They were no longer equals. Without his fire, worlds separated them, tearing apart every common ground they had. Turning them into total strangers. Erasing everything that had tied them together. This realization made the feeling of weakness even worse. Perhaps he shouldn't have come in the first place...

The tall man with the glasses stopped beside him and gave him a calm look. The darkness seemed to have eased his anger. "...Would you like some tea?"

Seriously. What on earth was wrong with this man? How could he possibly think he would like to drink some of his disgusting tea now? Mikoto wanted to toss a sharp comment at him. Instead, he realized he was shaking his head. "No, thanks..."

A sigh rang from Reisi's throat, but the black-haired man did not move an inch further. Instead, Mikoto could still feel his burning gaze on him. He seemed to wait for Mikoto to make the first step. And the red-haired man seriously wondered if Reisi could see how uncomfortable he felt. The darkness and the moonlight around them made him just a little less uncomfortable, but the man with the golden eyes was grateful, nevertheless. He took a shallow breath before he turned around and looked into his opponent's eyes. He didn't know what to say, where to begin. Let alone, how to find the right words. But he finally needed an answer.

"...Why are you avoiding me?"

His eyelids slid over the purple of his eyes, as he took a deep breath. For a second, Mikoto almost believed he wouldn't answer. But as his lips parted again, a cold shiver trickled down his spine.

"...I still owe you a thank you, Suoh. Because... you saved my life."

Mikoto's mouth twisted inevitably. Why was he evading his question? And why did he still call him by his last name? Was he really worth so little to him? Did Reisi want to oust the past? Continue to pretend nothing had happened between them? And why

was he suddenly beginning to thank him? A violent swallowing bruised his throat, but he wasn't ready to give up just yet. His glare was relentless.

"...You didn't answer my question."

"...You didn't only save me, but also the whole city. Without you... I would be dead now... and the city in ruins..." He was still not looking at him, deliberately failing to hear what he didn't want to hear. "That's why ...I am in your debt, Suoh."

"Reisi..." he whispered, unable to take his eyes off him.

"I'm only doing my duty. I can't let you go unpunished. You have broken laws... and you have to answer to your crimes."

"... Why did you break up with me?"

This question tore open his opponent's eyes. Wordlessly, with his mouth slightly open, Reisi stared at him but didn't seem to be prepared to answer. Nervously, his gaze plummeted to the ground again and he eventually closed his mouth.

The cold within him was growing even more intolerable at the sight of this. It felt as if he would break apart under it. A tiny, wounded smile crept across Mikoto's lips and his eyes dropped to the ground as well.

"Ah, forget it. Stupid question."

After all, he did remember Reisi's exact words at the time. He broke up with him because they simply weren't compatible. Because Mikoto was a lazy good-for-nothing, with no perspective and no ambition. Because nothing mattered to him. Because he was selfish and just abusing his power. He was the exact opposite of Reisi. Any more different wasn't possible. His smirk ached and felt wrong, but he couldn't stop smiling. Because the worst part of it was... that it was true. Still. After so many years. They were just too different. They just weren't made for each other.

Again a cold, helpless silence that built between their breaths, separated them like a wall. Mikoto wanted nothing more than to leave, but something detained him. He couldn't even describe it. Maybe it was Reisi's overwhelming aura that froze him to the spot where he stood. Maybe it was his shrinking fighting spirit, his weary limbs and exhausted body. He just couldn't move. Desperate, he raised his head again and let his eyes glide over the figure of the man before him. He stopped on Reisi's neck, completely hidden under the white scarf he was wearing. It hurt him just by looking at it.

A painful swallowing squeezed down his throat as he tried to keep his voice even. "How are your injuries?"

Again, it took a seemingly endless moment before the black-haired man answered. His voice was calm and controlled, but there was also something subdued in it. "It's only a

scratch... The Colorless King never intended to kill me in the first place ..."

What a terribly stubborn man. Golden eyes met him reproachfully. "I hardly think that it is only a scratch. ...Besides... you should let the wounds breathe... otherwise they'll never heal."

"As I said... no need to worry."

This made the redhead only angry once more. And since he had already revealed a great deal too much there was no point to hold back any further now. He took a few steps toward him until Reisi couldn't retreat any further. With an abrasive, provocative gesture, he tore the scarf from his neck, forcing the man before him to bite his lips in pain.

Even through the darkness and the light of the moon, he could see the burns on his neck very well. Crimson and black, they had eaten into his flesh, leaving him hurt and stigmatized. Like an ugly memory, they ran between his chin and his collarbone. The sight drove a knife into Mikoto's heart.

A strangled gasp escaped Reisi's throat, and he glared furiously at his opponent. "What was that for, huh?"

The red-haired man didn't bother to make eye contact. Instead, his glance wandered tirelessly over the wounds on Reisi's neck, even though the sight of it made him sick. Carefully, he raised his left hand and stroked the scars with his fingertips. The touch felt burning hot for him and freezing cold for Reisi. The burn marks on Reisi's throat exactly matched the burns on his own fingers. Under his touch his opponent winced in pain. Mikoto closed his eyes, but couldn't take his hands off him.

"I'm sorry." He whispered. "...It's all my fault."

The black-haired man held his breath and stared at his friend, his eyes unsteady with emotion, showing the hurt it had caused him. He tried to struggle for words, but only a lump formed in his throat. Defeated, his glare fell to the ground once more. All he could muster up was a thin whisper.

"That's not true. It ...wasn't you who did this. It wasn't your fault. ...And... without you, I would look far worse. "

"...Don't try to justify it. It is my fault..."

"Suoh"

Why? Why did he call him "Suoh?" Why did he still call him by his surname, like they were strangers? Was he just imagining things, after all? But he had seen it in his eyes. Had seen how Reisi had fought for him. Did he still have feelings for him? Or did Mikoto just wanted Reisi to feel something for him? Just another stupid pipe dream. One last time, Mikoto led his fingertips over the wounds he had inflicted before he

retreated. No, this really went too far. He had to wake up already.

But then, all of the sudden, a hard grip on his wrist made him flinch. When he looked up, he saw violet eyes screaming at him as if they wanted to tell him something Reisi himself didn't have the heart to say. The redhead swallowed hard under this intense, almost wistful gaze, and felt his legs growing even weaker than they already were. For just a moment, he thought there was longing and regret in Reisi's features. The notion shook him violently, made him quaver helplessly inside.

Silently, Reisi's gaze let him free and trailed to his chest instead. Mikoto could feel how his glance cut through his skin like a burning knife. And the warm hand still holding his wrist made it even worse. Suddenly, he felt his heart pounding strongly against his ribs, filling him with a warming heat from tip to toe. He had troubles breathing and every new try just made it worse because the air was filled with Reisi's smell. It made him feel awfully dizzy. The silence pulled at him, but when the former king opened his mouth, Reisi moved again.

Just an inch he pulled closer, but it was enough for Mikoto to struggle for air. The black-haired man still held his wrist carefully, when his second hand pulled at the sleeve to reveal the burn marks on Mikoto's arm. He could see how pained his counterpart looked as he trailed the almost completely burned flesh. It caused Mikoto to shiver violently, even though his body went hotter the more distance his "friend" closed between them. He felt his pulse haunt him like an earthquake, echoing through his bones. It was too much for him. Inevitably, his breathing began to rattle loudly, attracting the Blue King's attention.

When their eyes met again, Mikoto knew it was too late. Too late for him to deny any of his feelings. Right now, he wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around Reisi's neck and embrace him, be close to him and find strength in his arms. In this moment, he felt so powerless, so weak and abandoned, he just wanted to be allowed to rest for a while. He longed for an anchor in this endless cold sea he was floating in; he yearned for some warmth and peace. He wanted to be accepted, respected by this man for who he was and what he felt. He wanted to break the barrier that stood between them, to melt the ice in Reisi's heart. Nothing else mattered in this moment.

But he just couldn't move, didn't have the courage to step closer. All he could do was to gaze into these beautiful calm eyes that made him feel so light and forsaken at the same time. All what was left to him was to cling to the warmth Reisi's touch planted into his frozen heart and hope it would never disappear again.

Reisi's eyes narrowed as his lips parted to say something. But he seemed at loss of words and thoughts as well. Slowly, his hand dropped, making them lose contact. However, when the warm touch of their fingers ceased, the man with the glasses moved one step closer, making the air between them grow thinner and thinner. Mikoto could smell him, taste him already for every breath he took was full of him. It made him dizzy and sick. But still, he was lifting his chin, closing his eyes and raising his hands again, desperately yearning for any kind of contact. As their breaths collided and their noses touched, he felt a soft warmth fill the cold that plagued him. A warmth that made him feel completely at ease.

A buzz brought Reisi to a halt.

Breathlessly, he turned his head to the side as a second buzz broke the silence. He felt Mikoto's fingers clawing violently into his shoulder and how his unsteady breath bounced hotly against his cheek. When he turned his head back to meet his golden eyes, he knew he shouldn't have. Their lips were only inches away and every part of his body longed to close this distance. Mikoto swallowed hard as the buzzing continued, mocking them with its insufferable tone. Why wouldn't it stop already? Helplessly, he looked at Reisi, his eyes screaming at him not to turn away now. But Reisi's glance raced down and drilled into the ground. Only a whisper escaped his bruised throat.

"...I'm sorry... I have to answer this..."

Of course he had to. Of course it was more important than him. What wasn't more important to Reisi than him? It only took a few seconds for the horrible cold to return and eat away at his soul once more. It filled him up from tip to toe when Reisi retreated and pulled his cell phone out of his uniform. Rejected and powerless, Mikoto stayed where he was. Reluctantly, he stared at the floor and cursed the world and whoever had the nerve to call Reisi now. Luck just wasn't on his side, was it?

Or maybe this was just what had to happen. Maybe he should finally learn from all those hints given. It was better if they stayed "friends" or "enemies" or whatever they were. They had had their chance, and it went terribly wrong. They weren't made for each other after all.

"Suoh..."

Mikoto knew that he was supposed to look at him, but he refused. As long as he used that name, he wouldn't respond at all...

From the corner of his eye he saw Reisi approaching, dressing in his uniform again. Mikoto still averted his gaze, even though they were close again. His penetrating scent filled the air again, but now it just made him sick, sapping the power from his legs.

"...I have to go."

Cumbersome, dejected and crestfallen, he managed a nod and closed his eyes. Of course. What did he expect? How high had the chances been that Reisi would have stayed instead of cowardly running from him? He had done this every time now, hadn't he? Running away from any conflict with him... anything that involved them being more than just "friends".

"I..." The Blue King began, softly, almost whispering. "I'm sorry, Suoh. It's very important... But... you're welcome to stay... if you want. ... You're right... we should



really talk."

Mikoto didn't reply. He neither had the courage nor the desire to deign his "friend" with a look. He didn't notice how Reisi had raised his hand, wanting to touch him but lowering it again just before he did so. Resigning, he turned around and forced himself back into his boots. Tucking the sword onto his belt, he turned around one last time. But Mikoto, still hadn't moved an inch and still refused to award him with a single glance. Painfully, Reisi lowered his head again, taking one last deep breath before he put his fingers on the door handle. Words were on his lips, without him having the courage to say them.

## Kapitel 5: Scorched Lips

Impatiently, he tapped on his bracer again and again and again. His arms were folded, his legs slightly crossed as he leaned against the wall behind him. No one looked at the other, all eyes were silently directed somewhat nervously to the ground. The waiting was what annoyed him the most. If it were up to him, they would have long since stormed the building. They were strong enough to do so, but instead they had to wait for their captain like children for their mother. Annoyed, Fushimi clicked his tongue and was thus awarded with an admonitory glance from his superior Awashima. But that didn't particularly interest him, he just looked in a different direction. They were waiting for quite a while now; it seemed like hours to him. Dark clouds gathered above their heads. It smelled like rain. Once again the man in the blue uniform clicked his tongue and growled softly. This intolerable man should finally get his ass in gear.

The sound his female superior exhaled sounded like a pleased, relieved groan. She always made this sound in only one situation - when she saw her captain or spoke about him. So Fushimi didn't need to turn around to realize that he had finally made it here. But he did it anyway, his annoyed glare sliding back to his superiors dismissively. His captain looked even worse than before, even though he already had looked like shit since the day the red clan died. Even so, there was something in his eyes that caught Fushimi's attention. His glare was unsteady and nervous, almost as if he was hiding something. Annoyed, the young man turned up his nose and looked away again. He had no desire to deal with the problems of others. Especially not now, when he had his own. What did he care about other's problems, anyway?

His name was called in an admonishing and dissatisfied tone, but he just waved it aside and obeyed. After that, everything went past him as if the time had run three times as fast. He was hardly conscious when they finally stormed the building and crashed the mafia meeting. The fights, the shots, the screams glided past him like a movie he was too tired to watch. He was supposed to be excited, thrilled to get vengeance for Homra's bar, but there was nothing. He was feeling completely empty and uninvolved as he knocked some Yakuza down and disarmed them. It felt wrong, completely surreal, nothing like he had dreamed it would. Nothing mattered now, since Homra had ceased to exist. And he just didn't know why. It made no sense at all. Even more so because Homra hadn't meant anything to him, and still didn't.

It probably took only minutes before the building was completely under their control. Most of his subordinates had been left behind to deal with the small fish. Only he, his captain and Awashima were now in the big, wide and sumptuously designed room that hosted the meeting of the Yakuza bosses. The room was a mess, even though Fushimi didn't remember fighting. Before them, some pretty important men of the Yakuza lay writhing in pain. Most were injured and disarmed. Without a word or emotion, Fushimi stood next to one of the defeated men, looking into nothingness.

It hadn't been very hard to follow the track the arsonists had laid on the day they had burned down Homra's bar. The graffiti had been a pretty stupid idea and he was sure, the henchmen who did it paid dearly for their mistake. But even without this lapse,

nothing would have changed. Scepter 4 had been monitoring the activities of the Yakuza for some time - they had only needed a chance to strike. There were no Strains here – their hypothetical existence had only been a false pretense. Fushimi slowly shook his head to regain his senses. He felt as if he was about to lose contact to the real world. But either way, the case was closed now. And Homra could finally calm down again... or maybe not. At least, the greatest danger was averted for now. Or at least, it seemed that way.

Words were heard, a command Fushimi had missed. From the corner of his eye he saw Awashima retreat back. He understood he should probably go as well. But he didn't. Apathetically, he looked back to his captain. The imposing man in blue bent down to one of the Yakuza, pressing his blade against the man's throat. His violet eyes were stinging and full of dark anger. His captain's glance grew colder than ice, and his voice cut through the room like a blizzard. He whispered, but it was loud enough for Saruhiko to hear.

The words made him shiver involuntarily.

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He heaved a little, gasped and felt his lungs gradually beginning to burn. His head was buzzing, his thoughts stumbling over each other until his head began to drone. But he only allowed himself to stall when he was sure he was close enough. Only little by little his pace slowed down until he finally stopped. For a long moment, he left his eyes closed and took a very deep breath. He was sweaty and his uniform stuck to him from the cold of the night. It would rain soon, he felt it in the air. But he didn't care in the slightest. All he could think about was what he would do next. Additionally, he surely looked horrible right now. Quickly, he stroked through his hair in a hopeless attempt to make it look good again; he tugged at his uniform until he had the feeling it was sitting properly once more. He waited a few seconds before his pulse and breathing had normalized from the powerful sprint, he had done to come here. He didn't need to know Reisi had been *running* back. It just didn't fit to Munakata's demeanour.

Although his behavior just now hadn't been exactly appropriate either. However, he was sure no one had heard his words so he had nothing to worry about. Slowly, his legs continued to move again and carried him in a leisurely step closer to his home. However, he stuck to his decision. They had arrested the whole gang of Yakuza, with only one exception. Munakata thought it to be more efficient to let one go. A bearer of warning to the others. He was free to tell everyone what had happened. Including how he had threatened him. The Blue King didn't mind abusing his power, as long as it served his purpose. And if it led to the red clan finally getting their peace and quiet, all means were justified. Even threats of violence, extortion and torture.

He could already see the windows of his apartment. Reisi could dissemble his nervousness very well, though his pulse was beating faster and faster. He didn't even know what to do, what he intended to do. But he knew it was beyond time to talk with him. And he couldn't deny that he longed for him. That the thought of being

alone with him was enough to make his heart beat like crazy.

Slightly annoyed by this thought, he closed his eyes and tried to slow down his pace. He didn't want to come off as a teenager who couldn't wait meeting his girlfriend. The closer he got however, the faster his legs started moving. Eventually, he stood in front of his apartment door and was struggling for air again. He blushed when he realized how childish and stupid he acted. Shaking his head and swallowing his nervousness, he tried to relax a little. Though it was harder than it looked for his pulse was beating ridiculously fast. Forcing himself to become calm, he unlocked the door and stepped into the twilight of his apartment. With a clack, the door eventually slid back into the frame, leaving him alone with the darkness in which midst he stood. It took him some effort to keep his voice calm and indifferent.

"Suoh?"

He got no response. For a moment he didn't move, before he took off his boots and sword and the jacket of his uniform. Nervously, he slid down the hall, calling his name again. He walked through every room, but in the end he knew he was alone. Alone, just as before, as if time had gone backwards, as if he had just come home and nothing of this had ever happened.

He was alone again. Alone with the darkness and his cold apartment, staring at him with its dead eyes. Alone with his heavy heartbeat and the burning in his chest. Alone with the pain that now came and the breathlessness that followed. Alone with himself and the sole memory of him. He was such an idiot.

Powerless, he leaned against the wall beside him and closed his eyes. Yes, he really was a terrible idiot. Nothing more than that. Just a lonely, incompetent idiot.

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The air surrounding him was thick, cold and hard to breathe. The utter darkness around him held him in its claws, making him unable to move. He felt so weak, as if his legs would give way any moment; so cramped and confined that his heart threatened to burst under the pressure. For it was everywhere. His smell. Reisi's smell.

Mikoto got goose bumps and shivered slightly from the cold climbing up from within his limbs, his chest, his heart. It was even more devastating now than ever before. He wanted to stop breathing, wanted to stop experiencing this scent, but he couldn't help it. And every single gasp let the pain sink even deeper until his entire lungs were filled with this suffocating, strangling, cold memory. He felt nauseated. Reisi had been gone for a while now, but Mikoto could still feel his presence, taste it on his tongue. Violently, he swallowed and clenched his fingers into a fist. It was as if he would stifle just standing here; in this apartment loaded with memories and pain; he just couldn't escape it. He had to get out of here.

Violently, he gasped for air again but ended up pushing even more thick air down his constricted throat. Half blind, he looked around and didn't know what to do. He

couldn't stay here, he just couldn't stand it. But his legs still felt so weak; he wasn't even sure if he was able to go a single step. Angrily, he gasped for air and tried to regain his strength. But he didn't find it. He couldn't change the fact that he was no longer strong - that he was now a normal person, powerless and insignificant. And that he had nothing more in common with him. Everything they had together, which had held their fates together, was lost. They were living in completely different worlds, now. And he just couldn't keep up with him. It was over. This time for good...

Mikoto's face contorted in despair as he closed his eyes and held his breath once more. He tried to suppress the trembling of his muscles from the chill, but he didn't do particularly well. It was as if the cold that accompanied him since his awakening had fully spread, dominating him from head to toe, filling him with nothing but endless emptiness. And there was nothing that he could do about it.

A buzz made him pause and purse his lips. Something vibrated in his pocket so much, it worsened his own trembling. Very slowly, hesitantly and afraid to let it slide out of his hands, he reached for his cell phone and held it between his quivering fingers. The name, which shone on the display, didn't contribute to his reassurance in any way. An eternity it seemed, he stared at the vibrating device in his hand before he finally had the courage to answer the call. His voice was terribly quiet and it took a lot of effort to keep it calm.

"Ah...?"

"Mikoto?" Somewhat surprised the voice replied from the other side. Izumo had apparently just intended to hang up. He sounded worried. "Ah, everythin' okay with you? I just wanted to make sure 'cause you've been away for a while, now."

Again, it took a full moment before the former king had the strength to respond. Powerless, he leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. "...No... everything's okay..."

"..." A long pause followed before Izumo started talking again. He didn't probe him and Mikoto did appreciate that. "...Okay then... Are you comin' back? Or..." It seemed like he didn't dare to finish the sentence.

It was the push Mikoto had needed. He took a shaky step forward, not daring to breathe. When he felt the doorknob under his fingers, he found the courage to answer again and to escape this prison. "...Yeah ...I'm on my way..."

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His face grimaced at the sight that greeted him. He hated it when he saw his friend like that, for he knew that he couldn't help him. Not in the least. That Mikoto simply didn't let him near him. Especially when it came to that guy. Izumo had to have seen that look on Mikoto's face a hundred times, yet it still hurt and made him furious. Izumo's lips hardened into a thin line as he tried to stay calm and keep a clear head. He knew that just one wrong word would drop his friend into a stubborn, resistant

silence. The blond man gulped and took a deep breath before he settled into the chair across from Mikoto.

It hadn't been two minutes since the redhead knocked on the door and had straightway put himself onto his couch. Since then, he kept his head down and looked away in a futile attempt to conceal his horribly hurt face. He didn't want Izumo to see him like this, that was pretty obvious. But it was also just as obvious that he couldn't hide it from him. So he just exposed himself to it, waiting to get his preachment from his friend. But the blond man had nothing of the sort in mind. Everything was pretty clear to him already. And he would most certainly not cause his friends any more troubles apart from the ones he was going through already. After all, Mikoto looked worse with each passing day. Izumo really was worried. But he just didn't know how to tell him without further pushing him offside.

Izumo brought himself to speak after a few silent moments. He leaned back and looked at the ground, not wanting to harass Mikoto with his gaze. "So... what do we do now? ...Concerning the arrest warrants, I mean. "

This seemed to trip up the red-haired man. Obviously, he hadn't even thought about it. A long momentary silence reigned. Mikoto stared into nothingness before he lowered his eyes and inhaled deeply. His voice was so quiet and faint, Izumo got goose bumps.

"...We do nothing. ...We don't have any choice. It won't get us anywhere... if all of us are spending our time in jail..."

The blond man was shaking with coldness at this sight. Whatever had happened, it had broken his friend. Izumo was terribly shaken, but he concealed it quite well. He smiled slightly and nodded. "Ha, yeah, I guess you're right. We really don' have to do this to Anna. In addition, I heard the food in there is horrible. Hahaha."

No answer, no emotion, not even the slightest impulse. But actually, Izumo had expected that. It hurt, but the blond man managed to smirk, granting his friend a comforting smile. "We will follow you Mikoto, no matter what. We are here for you, Homra is here for you, just like you've been always there for us. It... doesn't matter whether we have our fire or not. We are a family. Everything will be fine... I promise. We are strong even without magic tricks. We'll rebuild the bar and it will be even more beautiful than before. No one can get us down, right? We still have the fire in us. And no one will stop us from bein' ourselves. Isn't that so?"

For a long moment, nothing happened; it seemed as if time stood still. Then Mikoto, too, forced a smile, though it still looked terribly hurt and defeated. He couldn't even raise his gaze; he only managed a faint nod. "...Yeah. You're right..."

Smiling likewise Izumo slightly bowed to him and tried to catch his eye. It made him so angry that he just couldn't reach him, that he couldn't help his friend - but he didn't show any of this resentment. He winked at him and chuckled. "Don' make that face.

This is not you. We're going to get back on our feet."

"Hm." His friend replied quietly and with forced optimism. He still didn't look at him, still seemed to struggle with himself, still had this awful broken face. And Izumo realized that at this moment, Mikoto was probably not thinking about Homra at all. That it didn't matter what he would say and how much he would try to cheer him up. Something had happened - something that made him blank out everything. Izumo didn't want to know. He didn't want to talk about it either. He had enough of that. It was always the same, even now. No matter what this horrible man did, it always led to Mikoto looking like this – heartbroken and dejected. And then it was up to Izumo to pick up the broken fragments. But, he did so without changing anything - without making Mikoto feel better in any way. Angrily, the blonde man led his eyes to the ground until he finally had swallowed all of that down and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and tried to be as careful as possible as he attempted to formulate his words.

"...Mikoto... if you want to talk about what happened... you know I am always here for you."

"..." Silence was the only answer. The red-haired man closed his eyes as well and seemed to hold his breath. He could hear it, even without looking at him. And he also knew that Mikoto didn't want to burden others with his problems. That he always thought he ought to solve his problems alone, that he didn't want to show any weakness.

And yet Izumo remained stubborn; he glanced at him from the corner of his eye and kept his voice very calm. "It's okay if you don't want to. But... you're not looking exactly cheerful. Have there been problems?"

Mikoto's brows wrinkled and he lowered his head even more. His friend didn't quite know how to interpret that. For a few seconds, neither man said anything. Izumo sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"Ah yes... stupid question. Sorry." Wherever Munakata was, there were always problems. Constantly, he interfered with things that didn't concern him. He was like a piece of gum you just couldn't get off of your shoe. Subconsciously, the blond man crossed his arms and pouted. Arrogant, malicious and terribly self-important. No consideration for others, always pushing his opinion down everybody's throats. Horribly obnoxious. He really wondered why Mikoto was so attached to-

"...I... just don't know what to do..."

Mikoto's soft voice interrupted his thoughts, letting Izumo stare at him for a speechless moment. But his friend didn't look back, sucked for air and tried to remain calm.

"...I'm tired of this shit... but... I... I just can't..."

As Mikoto's hand clenched into a fist, it was more than clear to him. Actually, it had

always been clear to him. A sad but understanding smile flickered across Izumo's lips as he nodded. It made no sense to be angry with Mikoto, to rack his brains about why his best friend felt that way about this man. And he wasn't lying. He was there for him, no matter how difficult the subject was for him.

"...Yeah, I know. ...You don't have to say anything..."

It almost looked as if his friend was grateful for that. He shook his head slightly. "...I don't want any of this shit... But I can't help it... it's just not going away. And... I'm so sick of waiting for him. I can't take it anymore..."

His eyes closed as Izumo inhaled deeply. It was just unbearable how hurt and unsure the otherwise so strong man before him appeared. He didn't know what to say. He didn't know what was the right thing to do in this situation. But he knew that most certainly it didn't matter what he would say in a futile attempt to console his friend. He was not the one who could help Mikoto. It simply wasn't possible for him.

Only quietly, the deep voices from the living room penetrated through the door to her ears. She lay in Izumo's bed, staring at the ceiling with big, blank eyes. Anna didn't need to listen to the words to understand what was going on. She had never needed words in order to know what was going on in Mikoto. And yet his broken, whispering voice made her feel weird. Powerless, she lowered her eyelids and bit her lip. She couldn't bear to see the two of them so sad. She wanted to watch them smile again. She wanted everything to be good again - that none of them had to suffer anymore...

"...*I just want it to stop...*"