Enough Blame to Go Around

by rageprufrock

Summary

This is not Touya's fault.

Shindou's friendship was a combination of ramen, unabashed kindness, riotous fights, and endless games of Go. It was a relationship that Touya, over the years, had learned to tolerate; it was lucky that arguing with Shindou was as easy as placating him.

It was lucky that they met at all, Touya thought sometimes, watching Shindou stalk out of the Go salon and seeing all the old men shaking their heads in the periphery of his vision.

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His father and mother called once a week, Sunday evenings at precisely eight thirty. His mother filled up the conversations asking about his health, how he was eating,—"Are you eating at all, Akira-san?"—the state of the house, and if he'd met anybody interesting. His father generally took the phone away from his mother at that point to interrupt the conversation with a steady stream of questions about Go and platitudes mixed in with genuine wisdom.

Touya was usually so caught up being grateful for not having to field his mother's transparent attempts to discover if Touya had a social life outside of Go to pay much attention to either.

One time, his mother had ambushed him at three thirty on a Saturday, a time Touya generally reserved for idly surfing Go webpages and boggling at Hikaru's occasional instant messages. He'd realized the only thing more headache-inducing than having a Yahoo! Messenger window pop up with neon green text on a dark orange background saying, "I'LL TOTALLY CRUSH YOU THIS WEEKEND. WAYA SAYS WE'RE GETTING SUSHI BUT HE'S WROOOOONG!!!!" was his mother asking him if he was ever lonely.

During those conversations, Touya hadn't wanted to cite all the times Shindou had dragged him to arcades, or the mall, or more ramen stands than Touya had known existed in the greater Tokyo area. The reasons behind which he was never specifically clear about; it'd do his mother's concerns good
to know her son had a best friend—the only problem was in whether Touya did.

Shindou was as likely to be seen lazing around with his other friends and dropping by the local high school to tutor at the Go club as shouting at Akira at a Go salon. Shindou read trash manga and agonized over every single chapter of Inuyasha, every single week. To Touya, it sometimes seemed that he was only a bit player in Shindou's life, and not particularly essential as anything other than a rival.

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"Your Go sucks today," Shindou said simply, frowning and crossing his arms.

Touya narrowed his eyes and bit back the immediate retort that rose to his lips. It was true, and he was not prone to lying—much less about Go. Instead, he reached out to the board, beginning to clear the stones, destroying careful patterns of black and white.

"I've been thinking about something," he apologized. "Sorry."

Shindou looked incensed. "If you're not going to play seriously then don't call me out!" he yelled. And just as quickly as he'd become infuriated, the expression on his face softened, and he said, "Everything all right?"

Touya raised his eyebrows at Shindou, saying, "Fine."

Already reaching for his yellow and black backpack, Shindou looked at him skeptically, rifling through the thick mess of papers, game cards, and tatty mangas to retrieve a cell phone. Touya watched in fascination as Shindou flipped it open and stared at it with open frustration for a few seconds before hitting a series of buttons.

The phone was bright orange. Touya briefly wondered if the text was neon green, and debated what he'd do if it was.

"I didn't know you had a cell phone," he said finally.

Shindou glanced up, shrugging. "Mom made me buy one. She said that since I'm out until all hours now, she wants to be able to find me in case I'm dead or kidnapped." He frowned, brows knitting, pressing a few more buttons before the phone shrieked, high-pitched with disapproval over whatever Shindou had done. Flipping it closed and shoving it in his pants pocket, Shindou muttered, "As if I'm going to have time to call if I'm dead or being kidnapped anyway."

Touya thought about the fact that his parents had no such concerns. Granted, anytime he was out, chances were three phone calls would ultimately locate him, unless he was in transit: his father's Go salon, Ogata-sensei, or the Go Institute. The one time his mother had been forced to call his cell phone, Touya had been in a bookstore, buying a book of Shuusaku's kifu.

"You're lucky," Shindou said, reaching out to help Touya separate the white and black Go stones. "Your parents trust you alone all the time."

It wasn't that Touya was always alone, but his mother didn't count Go-related meetings as a social life, which left Touya in an awkward position of admitting that he really had no life at all.

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Eighteen was a poor age to declare a mid-life crisis, so he ignored it, and determinedly spent the next day wandering around his house in his pajamas, watching mindless Japanese dramas and eating
whatever he found in the cupboards.

In the blink of an eye, it was eight thirty, and the phone rang.

He and his mother talked about the house and his laundry and how he'd ransacked her recipe books. "You'll make a wonderful husband someday," she said giggling, and passed the telephone to Touya's father, who was gruff but kind, and praised him--as much at Touya's father ever praised anybody--about his most recent string of wins.

"Though," his father said finally, more hesitant than Touya had heard him in ages, "your Go--it seems wilder than usual."

"Wild," Touya repeated, feeling a trill of fear. He glanced down at his pajama pants and the pack of half-eaten chocolate Pocky in his free hand and felt a faint sense of impending doom, like this was reproach which had been written the moment he'd let Shindou crawl under his skin, since the day Touya had apparently started to feel the need to be like--or liked by--his rival.

"There's no concern necessary on your part," the Meijin reassured him. "Wild is not bad."

They said their polite goodbyes and ended the phone call. Touya laid on his futon late that night and cursed Shindou soundly in his head, replaying recent games and realizing that his father's observation held water. Touya could trace it, the origin of his well-plotted haphazardness. He must have noticed the moment of confusion on the faces of his opponents before they scowled and rearranged their understanding of the game. That streak of unpredictability, that departure from the careful, coquettish battle of white and black Go stones--it all reached to the calloused fingers of Hikaru's hand, moving over the Goban and grinning at Touya above it, as reckless and laughing in his games as he was in life.

At least, Touya thought despairingly, there was nothing orange and green about Go.

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The study session Monday was canceled, and since it was a drizzling, miserable day in Tokyo, no one could be bothered to reconvene elsewhere. As a result, Touya found himself debating whether or not it would be a clear cry for help if he became inclined to wander around Shibuya in some sort of effort to be cool--or at least to hang around people less than three times his age.

Touya had never regretted his path in life, nor did he fear he ever would. Go was his passion, but he worried that in his determination to reach the top of the world of Go, to play the Hand of God, had he perhaps been blind to other things which were integral to life. Touya was forced to admit that he held a deep, awestruck sort of awe for Shindou, who seemed to have merged being one of the rising starts of the Japanese Go world and a teenager seamlessly.

Still, Touya thought with a pause.

He picked up his keys and cell phone and wallet, sliding them into his pockets and headed out the door of the house.

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By the time the bland, pleasant, pre-recorded voice declared that the train was approaching Shibuya, Touya was seriously beginning to regret his decision. The other riders on the train were--thankfully--ignoring him, but Touya could hardly ignore them. They were wearing sneakers with a big star on the tongue, or lacey platforms, and each of them looked like they'd just stepped out of the pages of one magazine or another, busy looking like somebody who'd had better lighting when they'd gotten
their photograph taken. They were draped in lace and mesh and loose pants and long scarves; the girls wore short, short skirts and big jackets, and everybody glittered a little artificially. Touya saw a lot of clothes he recognized from Shindou: loose plaid shirts and big, brightly-colored sneakers. They giggled at one another and fiddled with their cell phones, shrieking and laughing and chatting; they talked about boyfriends and girlfriends and sneaking off to fuck.

Touya had always known he'd been a little bit outside the norm, but apparently there was this whole other cultural movement that had left him in the 1980's he hadn't really wanted to know about until it was too late. It is now officially too late, Touya thought with a deep sense of doom.

When a girl--the third one so far--giggled at Touya, waved at him and winked, Touya felt a sudden lurch in his stomach and ducked his head, hoping against hope that his hair would hide his flaming cheeks. There was no way he was going to be able to do this.

The train stopped, the doors opened, and he felt the moving mass of bodies crowding all around him, and half against his will, Touya found himself on the train platform, surrounded by dozens and dozens of people who looked like the girls and boys on the train, looked like Shindou, actually, but failed to be interesting or good at Go.

Touya resigned himself to avoiding eye contact and hoping against hope that the next train out of this hole would arrive early so that he could make a graceful escape.

"Oi--Touya! Touya!"

His head snapped up; he'd heard that voice shouting at him over a Goban enough that he'd recognize it almost everywhere. He whirled around just in time to see Shindou's bleached bangs in the crowd for a second before Shindou was in front of him, curious and a little flushed.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Shindou asked, grinning wildly.

Touya scowled.

Shindou laughed, holding up his hands. "Sorry, sorry," he said, smiling, "that sounded bad."

"Anyway," Touya muttered, feeling less like melting into the ground from humiliation.

Shindou's smile faltered, and he cocked his head to the side, looking concerned. "No, seriously, Touya--what's up?" He looked around the platform. "This isn't exactly someplace…"

Touya didn't need Shindou to finish the sentence to make the point. After all, Touya Akira had spent most of his life in quiet, heavy-atmosphered rooms with men three times his age fretting over Go stones and nigiri, he'd never gotten along with children his own age until he'd met Shindou, and then, they'd met over Go.

"I was leaving," he bit out, turning to face the tracks, urging the train to hurry up in his mind.

"Hey," Shindou said, conciliatory, "you know I didn't mean it like that. Don't get mad."

"I'm not mad," Touya muttered. He glanced at Shindou's downcast face out of the corner of his eyes and said, "You should go on and do--" Touya realized he didn't really know what people did in Shibuya, only that it had nothing to do with him "--whatever it is that you were here to do."

"You're mad," Shindou said, annoyed. "And you're acting like a baby, now."

Touya rolled his eyes. "I never should have come here."
For no reason that made sense to Touya, Shindou froze, appeared thoughtful, and the frown dissipatated from his face, lightening into a confident smile again, one which Touya found intriguing.

"So you're not like--" Shindou said, waving his hand around the platform in a totally indiscreet way that had at least ten people looking purposefully in their direction "--this, but I mean, should it really bug you?"

Touya glared at Shindou. "That's not what--" he started to say, but Shindou cocked his brow at Touya, because like Shindou could read Touya's Go, Shindou could read Touya. So Touya just sighed and looked away, shuffling uncomfortably.

"So you're weird," Shindou said cheerfully. "That's cool. I mean, you're good at Go--that's cooler than rocking out at Dance Dance."

Touya stared at Shindou blankly, but figured that it was probably a compliment--probably.

"It's not like it's your fault that--" Shindou paused, looking for a word "--different."

It made something in his chest unclench, and he felt the edges of a smile play with the corners of his mouth as the train rolled into the station.

"Yeah, there's enough blame to go around," Touya murmured to himself, and when Shindou stepped into the train compartment next to him, asking loudly, "What did you say?" Touya only smiled.

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