Catching Up

by thesilverdoe_1

Summary

"It all started that one time he watched her..." - Eriol struggling to believe he has met his match, consequently trying, when he can, to outdo Tomoyo in wit and insight. A story of secret friendly rivalry, of growth, and of course, of love. ET; Second installment in a four part mini series set during and after manga

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

"It looks like things are progressing in a way different from what I've been thinking. I'm having lots of fun as a result." – Eriol Hiiragizawa

Master planner—now that was a quality he didn't think could be challenged. After all, Sakura-san couldn't have even begun her transformation of the cards without his ingenuity and he knew it. So what nerve did she have to suggest he was possibly not the best of the best?

After his departure from Japan, he had kept in touch with both Sakura-san and Daidouji-san through the occasional letter and the even much rarer visits. As time passed, however, their communication had slowed down considerably; but when he heard her melodic voice again ringing out in Japanese on the phone eight years later, he knew it meant business: master planning was about to be required and set into motion.

"So, tell me, to what do I owe this pleasure, Daidouji-san?"
"Good day, Hiiragizawa-kun. I have a plan," she said without preamble on the other line.

"Naturally," he chuckled. "But Daidouji-san, quite a long time has passed since I've last heard from you. Wouldn't it be polite to ask me how I am doing first?"

"There will be time for that later," she replied. "Trust me. I think we'll be seeing each other very, very soon."

"Careful, dear," he said with mock concern. "You don't want to be getting a young-old man's hopes up like that. One might think you actually really missed me."

"You're right, one might," she agreed, sounding worried. "And if that happens, then the other one might think the former one is extremely full of himself."

"Now, now," he chided. "You don't have to be embarrassed to admit you've missed me."

"You don't have to feel embarrassed if I don't," she said smoothly.

"That's still an 'if,'" he observed. He could feel her rolling her eyes and grinned to himself. He had missed this.

"Oh, get over yourself," she said. "Can we actually converse now like the civilized human beings we are?"

"A civilized human being might have asked me how I am doing first," he said genially, "instead of this unsophisticated manner in which you have imposed your objective upon me."

He heard silence on the other line and knew she was rolling her eyes again.

"Alright, Daidouji-san, go on, then," he said. "What is this plan you speak of that couldn't be communicated through the usual snail mail?"

"I found out that Li-kun is planning to propose sometime in the next month," she declared proudly.

"Ah," he smiled. He was glad the two lovebirds were finally about to take the next step in their relationship, but something about this situation just wasn't quite about to escape him. "Er—How do you know this? I'm assuming he didn't, shall we say, willingly tell you."

"What ever do you mean, Hiiragizawa-kun?" she asked innocently. "I'm a little bit insulted by that assumption."

"Oh, I'm sorry. You're right. I suppose he did confide in you about his feelings prior to his confession, to which I give you all the credit for," he amended, bowing his head and twirling his hand subconsciously. "So it wouldn't be too far-fetched to think that he would be willing to confide in you automatically about something like this."

"You're assigning credit to the wrong skills, Hiiragizawa-kun," she contested. "On the contrary, he didn't confide in me at all."

"I see," he laughed, imagining his cute very-red-faced descendant spluttering while Daidouji-san remained sweet and smiling, guessing without any need for wordy exchange exactly what Li-kun planned to do. "So you teased him until he made it blatantly obvious for you?"

"Oh, no, wrong again," she chortled. "He has no idea at all that I know. Not a single clue."

"Of course he doesn't," he said, amused by this turn of events. A small twinge of envy nestled
uncomfortably in his stomach. He liked Daidouji-san very much, but he could never help feeling slightly irritated at how good she was at seeing and knowing people—a feeling that hadn't ever been quite resolved since that fateful day eight years ago. He always thought he was a natural, not to mention he had magic, yet she relied solely on her own wits but somehow was still often able to exceed him in his own powers of observation. She was a true natural, and therefore a true equal as well. "Oh, all-knowing Daidouji-san, how do you do it?"

"Easy. I just sat back and observed," she said casually. "I've been noticing the difference in his interactions with Sakura-chan the last few months and confirmed it for myself when I saw him coming out of a ring shop, trying to be discreet. It was quite entertaining. I could send you the video if you'd like."

"Please do," he said. "So I'm guessing you have plans to enhance the proposal from the sidelines and therefore, you obviously had to call the Master Planner to help you inconspicuously tweak the finer aspects of the situation?"

"Wrong again," she said defiantly, "I am the Master Planner."

"I beg your pardon," he challenged. "Are you not on an international call with me asking me for counsel?"

"You're merely going to be a pawn in my grandiose schemes," she said mysteriously. "I've got it all figured out already."

"Alright, Daidouji-san. You've got me all riled up," he said, daring her to top anything he could have come up with himself. "What did you have in mind, then?"

Forty minutes later, he hung up the phone and sunk deeper into his chair. He had to admit it; she won this round once again.

To break down and discover how exactly Daidouji-san worked, he would have to push some of her buttons. A cruel and regrettable act, perhaps, but he couldn't deny that he found her infinitely intriguing and complex. And with that intent in mind, he knocked on Sakura-san's front door.

"I'm so glad you came to visit, Eriol-kun!" Sakura-san exclaimed, throwing her arms around him. He was glad to see that her entire face was shining brightly with joy as she walked him through the doorway to the living room. She had certainly grown up despite the fact that she was still bursting with that same pure childlike energy. He genuinely hoped that nothing in the world would ever tarnish that about her.

"I wouldn't ever dream of missing a result of something I helped set in motion," he winked, pulling her hand up to admire the ring on her finger while Li-kun stood back stiffly with his arms crossed. "Especially not when it involves my cute little descendant."

"Now, now, I'd hate for you to walk away thinking you deserve all that credit," a voice said from behind.

Upon hearing those familiar silvery tones, he turned away from Li-kun's scowl, something he thought was definitely going to be the highlight of the evening—until he laid eyes on her. His breath hitched. He was convinced then that nothing else that could happen for the rest of the night including his cute descendant's displeasure could compete with the sight that now stood before him.
She was no longer a child. Those eight years that had passed had grown on her well. Daidouji Tomoyo was no less the vision of sheer beauty, with her long dark ebony hair enveloping her form and framing her face with effortless grace. She was wearing an elegant strapless lilac dress that brought out her sparkling amethyst eyes and her ears were adorned with pearls.

She extended her arm and he shook her hand, a smirk playing on his lips.

"Of course, Daidouji-san. Were you worried I had forgotten all about you?"

"Not at all," she grinned. "I know you wouldn't dare dream of forgetting who really was there to set things in motion."

"Of course not," he assured her, eyes glinting with enjoyment.

"We're all sorry Mizuki-sensei couldn't come," Sakura-san lamented.

"She's very sorry, too," he said, bowing his head toward her.

"She will make it to the wedding, though, right?" she asked eagerly.

He looked into Sakura-san's pleading face and couldn't bring it in himself to give her any terrible news.

"You know Kaho," he said finally, "she would never let herself live if she missed something like that. Just make sure she gets an invite; it will absolutely delight her."

"Oh, good!" she sighed in relief, holding her hand to her heart. "I'm glad."

"Sakura-chan, let me see it!" said a voice to the left. Before Sakura-san knew it, Chiharu Mihara had grabbed her hand and held it up to her face.

Allowing Sakura-san and Li-kun to be dragged off, Eriol remained behind and continued to observe. Daidouji-san was smiling the entire time, but there was something solemn in the way she did so when she thought no one was looking. It seemed that everyone but him was currently too preoccupied with the newly engaged couple to have even noticed. But then again, even if they were paying attention, not many people would have spotted or known the difference because Daidouji-san never revealed anything of herself for the common person to compare her differing behaviors with.

Fortunately for him, he was no common person.

Currently, as his memory was sharp as ever and he never would let himself forget such a thing, Daidouji-san was still two points above him and now that he was back here again after years had passed with no ulterior motives, he was determined to finally break even.

"I couldn't help but notice," he coughed quietly, glancing at her from the corner of his eyes, "that not everyone here is thoroughly enjoying the festivities."

"What do you mean?" she asked, staying completely calm. They were both facing forward, observing the rest of the party, and Eriol couldn't help but think how typical it was for both of them to stand back and watch from a distance because their internal worlds were something the naked eye could not see.

He promptly leaned over towards her and whispered in her ear.
"I think you know exactly what I mean."

"No," she said simply, turning away from him. "I don't."

"Someone who, no matter how much they try, can't fully be happy for Sakura-san," he intoned.

She remained silent.

He was amazed with himself sometimes; amazed at how cruel he could be and how he could live with himself afterwards. It definitely would have been too cruel if he had brought it up in the past when she was still a child, but even though it was hardly better to bring it up now, he knew she was old enough to handle it. And aside from wanting to break even, he wanted to shatter her façade, to break into her wall and see a glimpse of the real Daidouji-san that she kept so tightly hidden under layers and layers of Mona Lisa smiles. He was determined. He wanted to water it now—whatever it was that blossomed so long ago.

"How does it make you feel, Daidouji-san?" he asked loftily.

"How does what make me feel, exactly?" she asked modestly.

"To love someone that you cannot have?" he said seriously.

She turned her head to finally look him directly in the eye and he saw, for the first time, something burning behind those pretty amethyst orbs.

"I should be asking you," she said. The feigned innocence was gone. The sweet melodic tone was gone. Instead, there was a subtle yet fierce accusation in her voice.

"Me?" he asked. She's bluffing, he thought. "Ask me what?"

"What happened with Mizuki-sensei? Why don't you explain why she couldn't come?"

Oh, she didn't, he thought as he allowed his mild look of surprise to linger. He had no reason to hide himself behind mysterious smiles this time if he was to be playing this game with her. He was speechless at the way she completely flipped the tables on him but he didn't have to ask her how she knew. No doubt, she had noticed simply because of who she is.

Eventually, he replaced his intensely curious gaze with a small impassive smile.

"My apologies. I shouldn't pry. Shall we say truce?" he asked, holding out his hand. Both parties would leave here unscathed but none the wiser.

"You bet we will," she said threateningly, shaking his hand firmly. He could get used to this less-delicate Daidouji Tomoyo.

"Tomoyo-chan!" Sakura-san's voice rang out. Within the next second, she was beside them and completely oblivious to the tension, which they had both hid from her immediately. "It's time to eat the strawberry cake you made for us!"

"Of course, Sakura-chan," she responded, all smiles again. She was completely back to her normal self as though nothing had happened to faze her at all. "Would you like to do the honors of cutting it?"

And for the rest of the night, she showed no signs of sharing more than a few words with him.
After the engagement party, he never reached out to her again, deciding he had no real reason to and therefore didn't want to initiate anything nor show that his interest in her was in any way growing. He figured there would be other chances to up his own game and sure enough, months later, he decided the perfect opportunity would be to plan a bachelor party for Li-kun. He was looking forward to an excuse to talk to her, and of course, to discuss ways of embarrassing his cute descendant.

"Moshi moshi?" she greeted through the phone.

"Good evening, Daidouji-san," he answered, checking his watch to confirm the time in Japan.

"Good morning, Hiiragizawa-kun," she said, immediately business-like. "To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"I have a plan," he said, mimicking the simple fashion in which she had said it to him months back.

"Those are usually my words," she countered. "But alright. Let's hear the worst, then."

"You wound me, Daidouji-san," he said, feigning shock and offense. "How could you ever say such a thing?"

"Because it's you," she explained simply.

"Fair enough, fair enough," he sighed airily. He wondered if she was still angry with him about his bold intimations to her about Sakura-san at the engagement party or if she had forgiven him because he called truce. Either way, she seemed to be pretending that none of it had ever happened. "A little less than your usual sweet self today, are you?"

"Just tell me the plan," she said, cutting across him. He raised an eyebrow but decided against questioning or teasing her further.

"First of all, are you or are you not thinking of doing a bachelorette event for Sakura-san?"

"You wouldn't be invited," she stated flatly.

"I am aware of that," he said. "That's not why I'm asking, but how dare you?"

She laughed in her usual ringing melodic tones. He smiled in spite of himself. "I'm assuming your plan has to do with the bachelor party then?" she asked.

"Yes," he said carefully. "How would you feel about having both events on the same weekend?"

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

Thirty minutes later after Daidouji-san surprisingly agreed with him and his plans, which mostly involved kidnapping, paintballing, a sumo match, a cigar lounge, and a sex shop, he hung up the phone, feeling smug.

"What's with that face, Eriol?" he heard Spinel Sun say from the doorway as he flew in. After flying nearer and eyeing him more closely, Spinel faltered. "Oh, no. I know that look."

"Whatever do you mean, Spinel?" Eriol asked, fully aware that his creation had no doubt seen the malevolent glint in his eyes.

"You're planning something else that you haven't told her, aren't you?"
"The element of surprise is a necessary component of success in high-strung situations such as marriage," he said very seriously. "That's what bachelor parties are for more or less, wouldn't you say?"

"So basically she wouldn't have approved?"

He smirked in response. He was excited that Daidouji-san had already agreed to his plans, the ones that he'd shared with her anyway. She didn't need to know there were a few other tricks up his sleeve that he was plotting for Syaoran's weekend that he fully intended on keeping as a surprise.

He repositioned himself in a more comfortable position in his chair and lit a cigar, delighting in the fact that he had most certainly just won himself a point. You wait, Daidouji-san, he thought. He was catching up.

-to be continued-

End Notes

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