

A Fragile Moment

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With fresh injuries and a heavy heart, Kouga wonders in the dead northwest part of the wolf territory. Coming across a half-dead wolf, he carries her home after finding himself in a very fragile moment.

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A Fragile Moment

It was over.

"Where are you going?" they had asked in unison, as always.

He would turned towards the two brothers, who were beat and bandaged, the wolves around them keeping them warm.

"Away..."

"Forever?"

He had chuckled, the sound low and weak. His legs ached; bandages were covering his calves, though the blood still seeped through the two wounds.

"No," he had finally responded. *"Just... away, for the night maybe. Maybe a couple days, I don't know. If I don't return by the time you heal, go home without me. I'll catch up."*

Without a response, he had left.

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Kouga stared at the ground as he walked. The northwest forest was dead. Trees singed to a crisp. The wildlife, gone. The humans had fled. The wolves had died. His legs were throbbing again. His feet dragged and dug into the ground. He could barely walk--could barely think.

But, at least... *he*, was gone. Never again would his tribe face such disaster, nor the other cardinal wolf tribes. Never again... never...

A whine.

The wolf prince pulled his head up slowly, though the action was agony to his neck and shoulders. His eyes widened a little at the sight near him. A wolf--a white wolf. Its fur was singed a little and it was bleeding. His stomach churned with guilt as he limped toward the helpless creature, lying deathly still in a thick patch of crisp, dead grass.

"No... no... don't be dead... don't be..." he rasped. He couldn't stand the death anymore. Too much blood had been shed; too many wolves had died. He wouldn't let this one die, he wouldn't! "Please don't be dead," he repeating, falling to his knees. He continued towards the wolf, crawling, dragging his legs in the burned earth. Finally he reached the creature. He set his hand to its head, smiling a little when the

wolf's ears went back for him to stroke its head.

"Don't die on me," he murmured, sitting up against a tree. He bent his knees and opened them, holding out his arms for the wolf. "Come," he rasped weakly, watching it open its golden eyes. He smiled again when it stood a little, scrambling into the safety of his arms. Kouga pulled the wolf close, running his claws comfortingly through its fur as it set its head onto his shoulder.

He felt it tremble.

"Don't be afraid, wolf. You're safe with me."

Kouga didn't know how this single wolf had survived the strange explosion after Naraku had been killed, but it brought tears to his eyes knowing it was alive. He wrapped his arms around it, burying his face into the fur of its neck. He fell into a comfortable doze, lulled to sleep by the thick flowery scent the wolf had hidden in its fur.

When he awoke, he became aware of something warm on his lap. He became aware of the scent of fresh grass touching his legs, sprinkled with cool dew drops. His head was resting on his own shoulder, and his legs spread in front of him. His hand was on the warmth resting on his lap. He felt skin, soft skin. Moving his hand up, he felt silky hair. Opening his eyes, he saw nothing but black. Blinking, his awakening dizziness faded away. There was a girl on his lap. Her head was propped on one arm, while her face was half-hidden by her other arm. He lifted his head and looked around. The forest was dead, all except for a ten-foot radius around him and the girl, which was covered in three-inch tall grass.

Kouga looked back down to the girl, then gasped so quietly, even his acute ears didn't twitch at his own action.

"You," he murmured, stroking his clawed hand through the sunset hair. Her body was pale and bruised. The white fur wrap around her hip was stained red in a few spots, and her armor, broken and cracked, was cutting into her skin. It worried him. Her body could be damaged... in such broken armor.

He pulled the straps away, and pulled the armor off. The action awoke her, though her forestry eyes were hazed and weak. Kouga smiled down at her, stroking his hand against her warm cheek. She smiled back, her little hand snaking up towards him, swaying with her poor coordination. Kouga caught her hand, warming it.

"You're safe with me," he whispered his earlier phrase. He scooped her into his arms, cradling her light body against his chest as he slowly got to his feet. Then he walked.

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"He's back!"

"Kouga's back!"

The few guards on duty rushed through the remaining wolves of the western tribe, repeating the phrases over and over. The wolves gathered on boulders, the border of the pathway into the utopia created after

hundreds of years. They could see him in the distance, walking slowly, and feet dragging. But what intrigued the tribe was the body in their leader's arms. Tiny whispers arose and the wolves smiled as their leader came closer and closer, and soon they were sliding from their seating places, walking behind him.

They recognized the female in his arms, and new female wolves disguised as humans were rare. They knew the significance of the girl in their leader's arms.

"Kouga-sama?" a voice arose when Kouga started the final walk towards the waterfall. The wolf prince turned around slowly to the wolf that had addressed him. "What would you like us to do?"

Kouga smiled weakly and spoke slowly, "Send a messenger to the northern wolf tribe. Tell them their princess is safe."

He turned, making his way through the waterfall. Inside, the cave was dark and warm, a couple torches creating a warm orange glow. Still dragging his feet, Kouga made his way far, far back in the cave. A smile came to his lips once more, seeing it covered in multitudes of furs. The bed would be warm.

He carried the wolf in his arms and gently laid her on the furs, pulling a few from underneath her and sliding under them beside her before pulling the furs over them both. He cradled her in his arms, a secure feeling overwhelming him to the point his eyes glistened with tears, as they had when he'd found her.

She stirred, opening her beautiful eyes and staring towards him with those dead, frightened eyes.

"You're safe," he whispered as he had so many times. He was proud of himself, knowing the dying female would *have* indeed died had he not carried her. "With me..."

She smiled at him, and it made a smile come to his lips.

"Do you love me?"

He was both surprised and shocked at the whisper of a voice. Her lips had moved, but he'd barely registered her words. Finally he laughed softly, kissing a bruise on her temple, and then gently licked her chin in the ways of wolves' affection. "I think I do."

"Will you let me stay, at least until I can move?"

Her words were so slow, so raspy and weak, he could barely understand her. "I've sent someone to tell your grandfather you're alive, and you're with me."

Kouga pulled her close, pressing his nose against her cheek. "Stay safe--stay forever, with me, Ayame."

Owari