

Another Generation

Von Jitsch

Epilog: Another Sunrise

Johann Andersen blinked and found himself in a hotel room that had one big window overlooking a small harbor. It was the middle of the night and the sky was covered by a thick layer of clouds, but the lights on the buildings that surrounded the harbor, and their reflection in the water, looked like gemstones that were a thousand times brighter than the stars.

He needed a moment to orient himself, then he slowly walked towards the window. He could see his own reflection in it, and was almost startled to not see an 18-year-old student in a blue vest but the person that a younger Jūdai had nonchalantly called 'old man'. He touched the glass of the window and it felt cool on his fingers. He looked old, too, he thought. Tired, with rings under his eyes.

He certainly felt old after everything that had happened. He had spent 10 years following the growth of Yūki Jūdai and his trusted spirit partner Yubel, after all.

But for this body it was still the same night where he had called an ambulance, claiming that the old man had just collapsed on the street and that he had been around to see it by chance. He had left the man's deck that contained Vampire Vamp with its now deceased owner. He had left his contact info just in case, seen the ambulance drive off, and then returned to the hotel alone. He had tried to sleep but not been able to, and it was then that he had decided to use the wish that the Rainbow Dragon had offered to him a while ago.

Or had he?

Johann turned around and took up his deck, which was lying on the bed just as he remembered. Crystal Beast Ruby Carbuncle appeared on his shoulder as a spirit and rubbed its face against Johann's. It never failed to make him smile, even now.

"Rainbow Dragon...?" he asked in a hushed voice.

Nothing happened.

Johann looked around the room. The digital clock next to the bed showed 1:02 AM. Could he have fallen asleep, after all, and just dreamed everything?

He looked at his reflection again. He was wearing street clothes, even boots. Not the look of someone who had just been asleep.

He let himself fall backwards on the bed and spread his arms. Ruby jumped on the bed next to him and looked at him with its big, dark red eyes. "Do you remember any of it?" he asked.

Ruby inclined its head. The cat-like beast looked confused.

"Of course not," Johann sighed.

He looked at the ceiling for a while, then shook off his boots and tried to close his eyes. Although he was terribly tired, sleep still wouldn't come.

After a while, he got up again. It was 1:27 now.

After strolling back and forth in the room for some more time that felt way longer than what the clock said, he got into his boots again, took a coat, put his deck box in one of the pockets, and headed out. Ruby followed him, expressing some worry about his unusual behaviour with little squeals.

The boardwalk around the harbor was silent. There was a light drizzle coming from the clouds, but he ignored the little droplets that settled on his clothes, face and hair.

When he had reached the other side of the port basin, he strolled further into the city. Occasionally, cars sped by, but he was left alone, wandering empty streets.

If this had really happened, if he had not made it up in his sleep-deprived mind, then it meant that he had created a world that was doomed from the beginning. The wish for Jūdai to lead a happier life had dragged everyone into darkness, without hope of being saved.

His alternate self, that optimistic and hopeful young boy that he had in fact once been, had turned it all back. But he could still remember it - didn't that mean that somewhere, somehow, that alternate reality still existed?

His thoughts were leading nowhere, just like his footsteps.

He was still wandering when he realized that the sun was rising. The rain clouds had hidden it, but at some point there was a gap in the clouds and a ray of light fell on Johann from between some buildings. He chose to follow it.

His aimless wandering had brought him back to the docks where the duel had taken place the night before.

He stepped out on the pier and somehow, he was not surprised to see a familiar silhouette. Someone in a red jacket was sitting at the edge of the pier, one leg bent with the foot stacked under his other leg which was dangling over the edge and above the water.

Next to him was the semi-transparent silhouette of a white-haired woman with bat wings and black clothes.

"I knew it was not right," the vampire woman said just when Johann came into earshot. "But I just couldn't say good-bye... He treated me well, and the thought of living on without him was just..."

Jūdai nodded silently, simply acknowledging the words.

"I can't thank you, but maybe it was for the best..." the vampire said sadly.

"Sometimes love makes people do more terrible things than hate ever could," Jūdai mused, lost in thought.

The monster and Jūdai both fell silent after that.

Johann was going to leave quietly, but when he turned he must have made a sound.

Winged Kuriboh, the small ball of fur with wings, appeared next to Jūdai with its typical call and alerted his partner, who abruptly turned his head.

"Hey..." Johann said sheepishly and raised a hand for a greeting.

"Hey," Jūdai replied, quickly relaxed again but without the cheerfulness that he usually displayed when they met.

Johann inclined his head towards Vampire Vamp: "Did you take that deck back? I'm sure I left it with that man..."

"I only took her card," Judai replied and showed it to Johann. He did not elaborate how he had obtained the card and just added: "When people die, their cards and monsters often end up in the hands of collectors who only care about the monetary value."

"Oh," Johann said. He had not thought that far.

The Vampire Vamp monster spirit slowly flew over to him.

"Thank you for what you did last night..." she said. She sounded tired. "I might actually have said yes to dying with him... but now I realized he would not be happy knowing that. He always said I would be better off following someone younger..."

She sniffed.

Johann was not sure what to say. "It was just terrible enough to see one person die..." he murmured. Before his eyes flashed the memory of the other Jūdai falling over and stopping to move.

"We have to thank you too," Yubel said. Johann was surprised to see that the monster had appeared next to Jūdai. Given his memory from the alternate world it did not seem that unfamiliar anymore, but usually Yubel didn't come out in his presence.

"Cut it out," Jūdai murmured, scratching the back of his neck.

Yubel did not: "He sometimes forgets that things don't end when a duel ends, even if justice is served. Thank you for reminding him of that."

"No — It's me who forgot something important..." Johann said. He came closer and stopped next to Jūdai. There was still rain over the nearby ocean, visible only by how dark the clouds were and how blurred everything below, but closer to the harbor the clouds were dissipating.

"We can't choose our reality, so we have to live with the one we have and make the best out of it," Johann voiced the thought that his night-long wandering had helped him arrive at.

Rays of light broke through the clouds near the harbor entrance, forming specks of light that danced on the waves. Judai got up to see it better, so he was standing side by side with Johann. Vampire Vamp and Yubel lined up next to them as well.

"This reality sucks more often than not," Jūdai agreed. "But we shouldn't forget that there is always a new day to come and you never know what it has in store for you."

He pointed, but everyone had already seen the rainbow that had formed over the sea.

Johann blinked, and found that he had tears in his eyes.

"Yes," he said. "As long as we have that, there is hope for the future."