

In Return

Von yamina-chan

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Sai

I hated it. Every time you refused that you know me, it hurts. Not because you were denying my presence or my knowledge. I understand very well, that not many people would believe you if you would tell them about me, a thousand year old spirit who is always by your side.

It saddened me of course that you claimed not to know me, but you had no other choice. I did not hate it because of that, but because my existence made you lie.

Someone as honest as you shouldn't be forced to lie to the ones you hold dear. I heard people call you a "loud mouthed brat" or "arrogant kid" but they are wrong. I know you better. Truth to be told, my first impression was not that good as well. I thought of you as lazy, disrespectful and rude boy who cared only about himself. How wrong I was! You, Hikaru, are quite the opposite.

Sometimes you appear rude, but that is simply because you say what you think. And that is why your tongue slipped quite a few times. Your heart and soul are open and you are willing to share and express your feelings and thoughts. You don't hide them. That's why I hated it that you had to do it sometimes. My presence caused you a lot of trouble and you had to deal with a lot difficulties all because of me.

I am sorry for that.

You are not lazy either. In fact, you are willing to put a lot effort in something that is important to you. With a determination and energy that is impressive.

And my biggest misapprehension was to think of you as egoistic. I witnessed the kindness of Torajiro and therefore I failed to notice yours at first, hidden behind bold comments or a cheeky grin. But you as well own a caring heart.

Despite the fact that you had no fondness for Go when we first meet, you let me play. Well, not that much back then but you let me play nevertheless. You just could have refused me and my selfishness. As much as I would have protested, in the end there is not much I could have done if you would have decided to never place a stone for me. But you did.

The joy I felt every time you let me play and every time I watched someone else while playing is something that is beyond my ability to express. When you started to play on your own, I was so proud of you and so glad that you finally understood the beauty of Go.

I clearly remember the first time you placed a stone by yourself. I was playing Tohya Meijin then, with your help of course. That game never came to an end, since you ran out after you placed your first stone. Afterwards you accused me, that I would have been taking over your body. I explained to you that it was not possible and that you placed the stone by your own and yet you still wouldn't believe me. At that time, our argument wouldn't grow since you admitted to be impressed by Tohya Meijin and then we met Akari. I never brought the subject back again since I thought you were just too stubborn to admit, that you started to like the "boring old man game" as you used to call it. Now that I think about it, I wonder if you were still scared about me. The first and the second day you certainly were. I remember you talking about me taking over your soul, your body...and that you had own plans for your life.

Maybe, before you learned to trust me, maybe you let me play because you were scarred. I think, I would have been, If I were in your place. Then again, I was born in a different time than you. I never asked you, if you were scarred though, so maybe I

misjudged that as well.

But there is something I know for sure: You had different plans for your life before we met. Go was not a part of it.

But in my selfishness I forced you to walk a different path. You didn't complain since you started to love the game for yourself. Well, at least you didn't complain that much. As far as I can tell your life changed a lot. For better or worse, I can't say but you would be a different person today, if you hadn't been able to see the stains on Torajiros Goban.

You changed and started to walk down the path of Go, the path that will eventually reach the divine move.

The Hand of God...my dream. My wish, that kept me in this world or so I thought for a long time. Will you be the one to find it, Hikaru? I hope you will. With or without me to see it.

I saw a lot of Go, when I were with you. I was able to learn about everything that had changed since my time with Torajiro.

And not only about Go, I saw much of how life itself had changed. I still don't understand much of what was going on in your time or how some things worked. The box for example, where we played NetGo against opponents I couldn't see.

You let me play back then with my own name. I didn't play as 'Honinbo Shusaku' nor did I play as 'Shindo Hikaru'. I played as 'Sai'.

I wonder if you knew how much that meant to me. The summer I was able to play with my own name again was precious to me. It is different from playing a game face to face but that luxury was taken away a very long time ago. My opponents are not able to see me, and on that box I wasn't able to see them as well. All that existed at that time was the Go.

I believe it fits to me and what is left of me.

A ghost that had stayed in the living realm for a millennium to play a game. My Go is all that is left from me.

And because of this, I am grateful that I was able to meet you, Hikaru. You let my play and my games will outlive the time I had when I was with you.

And you played not only because of me, and not only for me, but you also played WITH me.

Face to face.

You were the only one able to do that. Every game we played together was something special to me. Even though you had to place the stones for me too.

With every game I was able to see how much you had grown since we met each other. I had fun every time we played.

And yet...yet it wasn't enough for me. You are not the selfish one, Hikaru. It was me.

Even though you changed your life because of me, even though I could play you and was able to watch your wonderful games, even though my presence was the reason for many problems you had to endure, I still wanted to play more.

A good example for this was your Shinshodan game. You were to play Tohya Meijin, the man who was closest to reach the Hand of God among the living. The one I desired to face over the Goban. It was your game. Your welcome to the world of pros. You deserved to play him. And I took that chance away from you.

The games you gave me weren't enough any more and my fear to never be able to play against someone else then you ever again made me greedy.

It was your game and I took it away to satisfy my selfish wish to play against this man. However, the burden of the fifteen stone Handicap I gave myself, to not reveal my

strength made it a really unsatisfying one.

In the end, neither of us was happy.

That I regret most of all in the matter of that chaotic game. I took it away but nothing good came out of it after all.

I am a thief.

This game should have belonged to you, not me. You had worked so hard to reach it.

I failed you, and yet you still worried for me. We went to that Go Event some days later, I remember. As if you wanted to apologize to me. You! There was no reason for it, I should have been the one to apologize.

And then, that day we visited Tohya Mejin in hospital. I couldn't believe it when you suddenly told him about me! Not everything, but you told him that I was a friend of you. At first, I was totally shocked. All the time you tried your best to let no one find out that we were connected. I was sure, that you would keep this secret forever. But you told him and arranged the game between me and him. I did not ask for it, I not even thought about it, and yet you still asked. Of your own free will.

It was one of the best games I ever played. But I think you leaned more from it then I did. And after that game...

I tried to tell you what would happen to me, but you did not understand. You were looking forward to a bright future, yet you could not see the dark clouds right above me. I assume, that was my fault as well.

I never talked with you about my worries or my fear or what scares me. I kept it all to myself. At the very beginning, I didn't trust you enough and later I did not want you to carry any more burdens then you already did. And then, when I finally started to talk about it you wouldn't take it seriously of course. I can't blame you for it.

I did, since it hurt me a lot, but now I understand why YOU could NOT understand.

It grieves me, that I could not prepare you for what happened.

I know, that you will have to face sadness for a while. I do not know, if it will be because of the loss of ME, or because of the loss itself but I know that you have to face pain. It is the way you are. Your kind heart will mourn the lost companion, even though I failed miserably as your friend.

Shindo Hikaru.

I enjoyed every single moment of our relationship, good ones and bad ones alike. I enjoyed to watch you grow in the Go I had been able to show you. I enjoyed the games we played together. I enjoyed everything you showed me. I enjoyed being with you.

You gave me so much in the short time we spent together, but what did I give you back in return?

Hikaru

I never noticed how quiet it is inside my room. When I was younger, I would always listen to some music or play video games during the day. Every now and then Akari would come over and we'd do something to have fun. The only time it had been quiet in my room was at night, when I've been sleeping. Or when I was not at home. After I met you Sai, there was no silence either. We would talk about school, about something that happened earlier the day, about things we would face in the future, about things you did not understand since they didn't exist in your time, about Go... Yeah, most of the time it was about Go. And even when neither of us would say a word, it was different from what it is now. Right now, every time I am in my room there's something missing.

Not only inside here of course, but when ever I listen to this silence I feel my heart ache.

Maybe it is because we played here. I am used to your happy cries when ever I set up the Goban or your whiny begging if I won't. It sure annoyed me a lot, but compared to the silence...

I want them back. The annoying, whiny, childish, curious, naive comments you made. The strange behavior of yours, I never quite understood it. In one minute you could glare at something with a seriousness that could be frightening, in the next you'd wave your arms in excitement. How could you be so childish in some moments and then be so wise in others? Was it because you were a ghost? A thousand years old one even! Or did you always behave like that?

I can't imagine you clapping your hands together with a happy smile on your face when you still were at the court. Even I know that you'd get wired looks then. Come to think about it: that's actually something which is not much different from today. Have you been hiding this part of your personality when you were still alive? Probably yes. I don't think I would have been able to act polite and serious all the time. But you had to. Maybe your emotions seemed extreme sometimes because you were finally allowed to show them. The years you spent in the Goban must have been lonely too, I think.

You never talked about it. And I never asked.

It was enough that you were here, I didn't care much about your past. You had told me a little bit about it and that was enough for me.

I should have asked.

I don't know much about you. I know your name and I know that you loved Go. And that you hate toads. That's pretty much all I can say. Not much, considered the fact that we spent more then two years together. I thought I knew you well, and maybe I did but I don't know much about your life. What else had there been aside from your Go?

Go. Man, you really loved that game. You even got me into playing! Not that I regret it, I have lots and lots of good memories connected with it. But if someone would have told me that I will become a Go Pro one day a few years ago...

Well, if it weren't for you, I would have never started to play. In fact, if it weren't for you, I'd be totally different from what I am now.

And I don't say that because hanging around with a ghost is something really strange, you know. The thing is, you were always with me. Every time I did something that you

thought was wrong, you'd always complain and made me correct it. Like when I was insulting someone by mistake. I don't mean to offend people, it just...happens sometimes. I wouldn't even realize it, if you hadn't said something about it.

My parents let me do what I wanted to do most of the time and just get mad about a bad score in a test or stuff like that.

I thought it was great that they didn't control my actions like some parents would.

Then I met you and BAMM! Everything changed. You were there the whole time and would witness my behavior and my actions. Always. Everyone else knew just parts of my life, you knew all. There was no way I could fool you in that case like I would do with others every now and then. And when I got into some trouble, you were always by my side to support me. Helping me remember names was one of the things you had to do quite often. I could always rely on you for that. And when I was struggling with some homework. I still remember the deal we had at first: You would help me out on that and I would let you play somehow. And even after we started playing regularly with each other you still would give me hints every now and then, so that I could figure the answers out of my own. At least you would do that in subjects you understood.

Or when I was playing a though game. It was good to know that you were there for me. Not interfering of course, but just knowing that I wasn't alone helped me a lot.

For some reason, you always knew what I needed. Whether it be encouragement, comfort or a lecture. I think it had something our minds being connected. What ever the reason was: it was great. Not the lecturing part, but I guess it was necessary every now and then.

Before I met you, I wasn't serious about anything, just drifting along, spending day after day with randomness. I didn't care much about my future. All I cared about was how to enjoy the actual day the most. With you there, I started planning. Without me noticing I started to spend more and more time with Go and therefore I started to do something with me and my life.

In that case you did a better job parenting me then my parents did.

That makes me wonder what you actually were for me. Once I said you were some kind of 'pet'. I was teasing of course, but I remember you took it seriously. If the circumstances had been different, I think you would have gotten more angry at that comment. But when Shinoda-sensei said that I passed the Insei Exam we were to happy to bother about that and later there was no time either, since I got myself into trouble again. Ah, that's an other good example where you have been there for me. But that aside for now. If our places had been reversed, I think I would have been mad at you longer.

I consider you my friend, and in a way I think of you as my teacher as well. Or as some sort of role model, but that counts only in a few matters!

It's not like I don't accept you the way you are, but...well, you weren't perfect Sai.

Okay, no one is. Hell, I am far from it! -And Tohya isn't THAT great either, though some people seem to believe it.

Tohya...he became my rival because of you. The fire in his eyes when he played you was so intense! And his father...he was YOUR rival, wasn't he?

You always wanted to play, but it was different with him. I didn't realize it right away, because I was so caught up with my own businesses that I just didn't notice yours. Just as I said: you always wanted to play, therefore I couldn't see that he was special at first. Or why you wanted to play him so badly.

I mean, you're Sai! You always win, as long nothing disturbs a game.

But playing a really strong opponent is without doubt amazing! And you can improve so much because of that. So of course you wanted to play him.

For a long time I thought it would be enough if you just played against me. And even though I've become a lot better, compared to your skill... There is no way you could improve from just crushing me. The first time I got a glimpse of your determination to play him was just after I got the phone call with the information about my Shinshodan game.

I'll never forget the look in your eyes when you asked to play instead of me. Determination, mixed with longing and sadness. And the day when the game was hold you took my seat and didn't even hear me when I told you to leave it. And when you finally DID hear, you looked so heartbroken. You tried to smile and turned away, so that I wouldn't see the sad look on your face. I still remember how you stood there, facing the wall and not sitting down behind me like you usually did. And even though I still wanted to play, I couldn't stand seeing you like this. And then we came up with this stupid 15 Moku Handicap that you had to give yourself in order to play Tohya Meijin. I was just thinking, not really serious with this, but you agreed right away to these conditions. So big was your desire to play him. Like it would be your last chance ever to play against someone.

It hurt too much to see you so frantically, I couldn't say no anymore, even if I wanted to. But the game was so chaotic! Nothing like your usual style. And you lost. Or we. I didn't get my first game as a pro and you didn't get the game you deserved. It was a mess. That time I felt sorry for you. No one but me knew about the ghost of Fujiwara no Sai. No one was able to see you. And because of that you had to play such a stupid way, so that no one would notice your strength in me. If you had been a real, living human it would have been a lot easier for both of us. You were stuck with me and could only play if I would place the stones for you, and I had this incredible player with me, who was way too strong to let him play if I wanted to play for myself.

The only time I was able to let you play without fearing someone would connect us in one way or another had been that one summer online. Back then you had been happy the whole time. And you could do it with your own name, not with mine. That was the reason that the game "Tohya Koyo" vs. "Sai" was possible. It was over the Internet but this game was freaking amazing! I am grateful, that I could arrange it for you.

It was the first time I told someone that I know you. Know what, Sai? I was totally scared and nervous because of this. But I just had to ask Tohya Meijin that time, since it was the only chance I saw.

And I know that you were thankful for this. But after that game...

How could I have been so stupid to not notice what you wanted to tell me? I don't get it! After all the time we spent together...

And I don't even know WHY it happened. No...maybe I do.

You returned to this world as a spirit, to play Go. But yet, with me, you couldn't. I always told you, not to be selfish when you asked for a game. But that was all you could do. I totally ignored the fact that you had nothing left beside it. And I refused your begging so often, because I might get in trouble. You weren't the selfish one, Sai. I was.

I reduced the reason of your existence to a minimum. You could only watch most of the time. And all the games we played...somehow I feel like I used you to get stronger, not really caring about your feelings.

What kind of friendship is that?! I totally screwed it up!

You were there for me when I needed you, but the other way around...

I am sorry. I really am. I didn't realize how much I must have hurt you all the time.
Fujiwara no Sai.
You...you gave me so much, but what did I give you back in return?