

The Cup of life

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Kapitel 2: Memories

“Goaaaa! It’s now 2-0 for Krawk Island and there are only a few minutes left to play”, the voice of the stadium announcer echoed over the field.

Tandrak was returning to his starting position, panting heavily. He wiped the sweat off his forehead. The sun was burning down merciless. This couldn’t be possible. Krawk Island was an important match to keep their position; otherwise they could fall down three or four ranks if Kreludor, Tyrannia, Virtupets or Terror Mountain won their own games on the same day. The lesser three had gotten incredible good this year. But Hale proved that he really was the game’s greatest goalkeeper ever.

“Will the Draconians still get at least one point or will they have to leave with nothing at all? And the next ball iiiiiis ... a Fire Yooyu. Hawkshanks on the ball, gets tackled by Vickles. Oh, come on, isn’t anyone of you two ever trying the new fighting possibilities?”

Slowly all of the other teams had started to take advantage of the new “hooligan rules”, even the honourable ninjas of Shenkuu and the normally oh so gentle Faeries. Only Darigan and Krawk Island decided to play fair.

“Vickles gets blocked by Collibridge. Krawk Island on the ball. Oh, that doesn’t look too good. She runs, avoids Frein’s block, shoots aaaaand... Great catch, Collifey! A pass to Frein, now to Shaye.”

Tandrak was storming over the field, just cursed that using his wings was still against the rules or else he would have flown. There was no way the power team Darigan would give up and go down without a single point. A fire was burning in his eyes and it was not just the reflection of the Yooyu. He aimed for the goal and shot as hard as he could. Hale jumped, his hands missed but the Yooyu hit his head instead jumped off and landed in the net.

“Goal! A goal in the last few seconds!”

The referee’s shrill whistle sounded over the field. Tandrak was just standing there staring at the ground. It had needed some time but now it was fully sinking in and hitting him like a bad shot Mutant Yooyu. They had lost. Lost. He was waiting for the same anger to grow inside of him like he had felt after that match against Meridell or at least a bit of sadness but there was nothing. Just this plain emptiness. Slowly he walked over to his team mates. Hale and Layton were shaking hands, complimenting for a great match. The Bori had flattened his left ear where the Yooyu had hit him. The fur there looked singed. Tandrak turned away his gaze. He now felt sorry for his heated rage earlier.

When the Gelert left the stadium Hale was standing outside waiting for him. He

slightly pressed a sleeping Snow Yooyu against the left side of his head and his ear. Tandrak stared at him for a while then he asked, "Why haven't you let the paramedics take care of that."

"Blah, never needed damn doctors and now also won't. Ice will do the job as well and that one was the only icy thing that didn't melt away immediately in that heat. I hope I can borrow it for some time."

Silently they were waking through the streets for a while. Now that the game's adrenaline rush was over Tandrak could feel the anger and pain coming up. Why couldn't they get just one more ball pass Hale?

"Hey, cheer up, it was just one game", the Bori said when he noticed the other's grim look.

Tandrak stopped all out of sudden. "One game? Just one game? We already have lost against Meridell and have you noticed how good the former underdogs have become this year? We will stumble down into a pre-winners curse if we don't take it serious and let our guards down now."

The Yooyu on Hale's head woke up and now gave Tandrak a dirty look.

"Heck, get down. That wasn't what I meant. But don't ye think ye're taking the whole shit too serious. Remember, it's just a game, not a battlefield."

"Oh, so that's why you led your team to doom last year, huh?" Tandrak shot out, "Can't be taken seriously if the whole thing is only a game, huh, *captain?*" The last word he nearly spat out. "Listen, I don't need your cheer-up-shit. I don't need anything. Just leave me alone with everything."

First Hale looked at him surprised and also a bit hurt, then his gaze darkened. "Alright, if that's what ye want..." He turned tail and left. Left Tandrak who was still shaking with anger standing there alone.

For a few seconds the Gelert felt like just slamming his fist into a wall but now after Hale was gone his anger slowly faded and he realized what he just had said. Why did he let his anger get out of control that way? He wished this all was just a nightmare and he would wake up in his bed in a few minutes. But no, it was cruel reality. They had lost the game and now he also had hurt and turned down his lover, the only one who could have gotten him out of his depressions at least a bit. He hit his head against the wall. Dammit! Dammit, dammit, dammit!

"Wow, first our worst enemies and now also the Krawks. Two losses within such a short time by such a power team. Now that's really a reason to slam your head against a wall."

Tandrak stopped and stared at the wall for a second. There was something familiar about this voice. He turned his head and tried to focus his a bit blurry gaze on the Darigan Lupe who was standing next to him. Then he made a few steps back in surprise.

"T-Terr? Is that really you?"

"Aw, how sweet. The ball star finally remembers about his long forgotten companion in misery", the other one said in a sarcastic tone, "Seems like fame really makes you forget about people who once were important to you."

"No, I didn't. As soon as I returned to the Citadel and it was clear I would be part of the team I was searching for you but all I heard was that no one had seen you for a long time. I thought you fled like I did or that you were dead."

"And you didn't think about the possibility that I might have grown up and found a job as well? Something that could get me off the streets? Seems more like you didn't really want to get your hands too dirty by searching for a former street kid while you

could live your life in luxury."

Okay, that was too much drama for just one day. Tandrak lifted up his hands in a defiant gesture.

"Wait a second. What do you even want? If it was so important to you to meet me again after you found out I was still alive, why haven't *you* contacted me?"

"Oh, yeah, I forgot that it is hard to understand that people who don't have that much money sometimes can't afford to buy a tv and that the Draconian newspapers come without pictures. I read the news about the Darigan Yooyuball team but I couldn't find a single sign of the name Zephyr in there and I was sure I didn't know any of them. This year I have some business to do in Altador, the same time the cup takes place so I decided to look around a bit. Maybe I could finally see some of our Draconian players. And just a few minutes ago I heard some fangirls in Darigan shirts going crazy about 'that cute Tandrak Shaye' who had just passed them by but didn't notice them because he was too busy arguing with a strange pirate who had a Yooyu on his head. And guess who I found slamming his head against a wall some time later."

His voice now sounded less cynical and bitter but still enough to notice it. Tandrak couldn't help but stare at the other. He and the Terr he knew from his childhood always had been there for each other until... yeah, until... Maybe it also was partially his fault that his former friend now had become so sardonic and cold. He looked down at the ground and silently said, "Hey, I'm sorry that I have disappointed you, that I have let you down."

"And that all for a criminal life."

The Gelert's head shot up again and he nervously looked around. "Please, when I discarded my name I also wanted to leave the swamp I had sunken into behind. If we really have to talk about our past, can't we do that somewhere else?"

"Sacred about your image, huh? But alright, where would you suggest we should go to?"

Tandrak thought about it for a second then he answered, "The Krawk Citadel."

The Krawk Citadel was some kind of café, founded by a crazy DC-KI fan one year ago. A place where inhabitants, team members and fans of either Darigan or Krawk Island could hang around, share their thoughts on the games, cheer after wins or get some comfort from others after losses. Tandrak chose that place because a) it was always crowded in there and no one would care about what they were talking and b) he didn't need to stay all alone with Terr and his new dark personality. He still wasn't sure if his former friend wouldn't be up to something. But so far he did nothing else but ask Tandrak what had happened after he had been cornered by the guards at the edge of the Citadel and he jumped down into certain death.

"I know your wings always had been too weak to carry you so how did you survive?"

"They were at least strong enough to make me glide and I landed on soft ground."

"So you decided to live with our greatest enemies. The people who brought us into that misery at first place."

"Well, I just had the decision between being punished for my kleptomaniac acts on the Citadel and a new life on the hated Meridell. Believe me, I didn't like the thought of leaving my home but if I stayed I would have ended up in a cell or worse. And even if they had let me free after some time I would have been starving on the streets again and then I would have had no other choice than stealing if I wanted to survive. It would have been a never ending circle. Only starting a new life could have gotten me out of this. Meridell was no home for a Draconian as well. Even after the war had

stopped long time ago they still feared my appearance. You don't know how often someone wished to see me dead. After months I finally found shelter. Some girl showed me a place near her father's farm to hide at and she brought me food. I spent my time training ball games like we two used to do during our childhood when we still had the hope to escape this all by joining a sports team of any kind. After months I heard the message that Darigan was searching players for their new found Yooyuball team. Also my wings had gotten stronger over time and so I decided to say goodbye not just to my new friend but also to my old life and fly back to the Citadel. None of the guards were after me anymore. The hunted boy Zephyr had died so no one cared if a formerly completely unknown adult named Tandrak Shaye appeared."

"Hm, interesting", Terr said in the same cold tone as if he wasn't interested in the whole story at all. "Care if I smoke?"

Tandrak sighed. "I wouldn't even care if you were burning."

The Lupe chuckled. It was his first sign since they had met that he still possessed other feelings than the coldness. He lit his cigarette and silently spent some time blowing smoke circles into the air.

"You know, that this isn't good for your health", the Gelert finally said.

"I asked you and you said you don't care. And besides, those new 'power-ups' aren't too good for your health as well."

"We Draconians don't take them."

"You should, healthy or not. They would help you a lot to get your needed wins."

"No thanks, we rather play fair."

For another few seconds they remained silent until Terr spoke again.

"Ya know, Zephyr..."

"Tandrak."

"... whatever, I actually just was mad about you for not showing up for such a long time. The whole criminal thing doesn't bother me. It did when I still was a stupid kid and thought only the legal way is the right way. But now I nearly have to thank you. Just taking things instead of begging for them really makes everything easier and as soon as I had my money I could start my own independent life. And your mistakes showed me what to do better. I never strutted around calling myself the greatest thief of the Citadel so the guards just saw an ordinary hobo stealing for food in me. As soon as I had enough to at least survive for a few days I left the Citadel. Not because I had to, rather because I wanted to look for some new ways of business." He looked amused at Tandrak who was staring at him with wide opened eyes and slightly opened mouth and blew a little cloud of smoke into his face.

"So you're sliding down the same swamp I have once been in", Tandrak said and tried to wave the smoke away.

"No, I'm already out of it. My business is legal now. Or let's just say half legal." He searched for something in his pockets and put it on the table. "You know that?"

"Yeah, it looks like one of those speed power-ups."

"It is but with a slightly changed mixture. The effect will last twice or three times as long. But no one would be able to prove if you have taken the official powerups or the extra kick because they only will find the allowed amount of speed in your blood. It's just the mixture that makes it stronger."

Tandrak opened his mouth but before he could say something Terr added, "I can freely tell you about my business because I trust in you as an old friend. You won't say anything that could harm me."

"As old friend, huh? Not because you else could reveal some delicate information

about my past?"

"No, not at all. I now watched and listened to you long enough to know you are a fair player. You might not trust me at all but the same time you remember that we have been friends once and it wouldn't be nice to feed an old friend to the Meepits."

Why didn't he just stand up and go? He wasn't sure how much he still wanted to hear – it already was more than enough. But something was holding him back. Was it the fact that he still saw some kind of friend in the Lupe or was it just morbid fascination for someone who willingly laid his criminal life open?

"I bet a life as Yooyuball player is fun", Terr changed the topic all out of sudden.

"Money, luxury, a lot of pretty girls to sleep with... I bet a sexy player like you can choose from tons of fangirls each day."

Tandrak nearly choked on his coffee. When his coughing fit finally was over he brought out, "First of all why on Neopia are you calling me sexy and second I'm not the kind of guy who wants to take advantage of his fans. Why does everyone in the whole wide world want to see a playboy in me?"

"To your first question: because I have eyes. To your second question: every celebrity loves to have some fun with groupies once in a while. I don't think you are just there for playing your heart out and worrying about your team's standings. But then again... as much as I heard from your fangirls what you were fighting about with that Pirate guy and your head-slamming action I saw later ... Yes, you really could need some more fun in your life."

It was like a déjà-vu at the moment. In his thoughts Tandrak found himself hiding in a storage room together with Hale. But this situation now got kind of creepy. He stood up. "I think I gotta go now."

Terr stood up too, tightly grabbed the other's wrist and dragged him back. "Just wait one more sec, sexy."

And then he felt those rough lips on his own. This wasn't a déjà-vu anymore, this was for real. But this time they weren't in a quiet little storage room but in a crowded café and this time he didn't return the kiss and just pushed the Lupe away as hard as he could.

"Fuck, Terr! What was that good for?"

"Just wanted to show you some fun if you already decided to stay without a partner forever", the other one shrugged.

"I know fun and I'm already taken."

"Oh, I see... So why didn't you go to your loved one after your lost match instead of torturing an innocent wall. I bet she or he would have taken your pain easier away."

"Because..." he started. '...I kicked him away', his brain finished.

But Terr didn't seem to need an explanation and just continued, "Hm, I wonder if they really love you or just your fame. You know what? An unknown and unexpected past life would be the best proof. I wonder what they would say if they knew about the criminal part in your life."

"Nothing 'cause he's a pirate", it was out of Tandrak's mouth before he could choke it back. Shit!

The Lupe just grinned. "Ah, jackpot... Well, alright, if you already have a boyfriend then there's not much I could do. You wanted to leave as far as I can remember. It was nice to talk to you again after such a long time and we can repeat that whenever you want to. Good night and greet your pirate boyfriend from me." He gave him another mysterious smile.

Tandrak just nodded turned around and already was a few steps away when Terr

yelled after him, "And tell him your groupies said a Yooyu on his head just looks ridiculous."

The Gelert winced. How had he found out? Or was it just a shot in the dark and he wanted to see his reaction? In that case his wince was proof enough. He didn't look back anymore, just stumbled forward until he was standing outside again and could breathe in the cool night air. His thoughts were spinning around. Why did everything have to happen within just one day? Well, at least now the loss against Krawk Island just seemed to be a bad but nearly forgotten dream. There were too many other things he had in his mind now. Hale, his past life, Hale, Terr's strange behaviour and – especially – Hale. What time was it? Why on Neopia had he been stuck in the Krawk Citadel with someone who really gave him the creeps for so long while he already could have apologized to Hale so many times? He started running, back to the quarters.

No one was seen anymore on the corridors and he also barely heard any sounds. Could it be possible that Hale was already sleeping? And if he wasn't how would he react if he saw Tandrak again after so many hours? He nearly was afraid to knock at the door to Hale's room but he did it anyways. The door was opened so quickly as if Hale had already waited for him to finally show up.

"Shaye, where the fuck have ye been? I already started to worry 'bout ye."

Well, that was least expected.

"I ... just was walking through the streets for some time and tried to get my head clear." An out-and-out lie. His head felt more stuffed than ever but at least he didn't think about lost games anymore. "Sorry about what I said to you earlier."

The Bori just shrugged it off. "Blah, maybe I was overreactin' a bit as well. I mean, after four years I should be kinda used to yer touchiness after ye've lost important games. Why are we even talkin' on the corridor? Come in if ye wanna."

Tandrak looked up and down the corridor a last time then slipped into the room. The Snow Yooyu was lying coiled up in a corner and slept again.

"How does your ear feel now?"

"Still a bit burning but better than before. Don't bother 'bout it too much. It's not like I'm not used to injuries."

He let out a rough laugh.

"And 'bout that thing", he nodded over to the Yooyu, "I think I'll return it tomorrow. Or just keep it. Wouldn't be a pirate if I wouldn't steal something from time to time. Hey, just kidding", he quickly added when he noticed Tandrak's gaze.

"What? Oh, sorry, it wasn't about the Yooyu. I was just reminded ... well, never mind."

He didn't want his thoughts to bother him anymore, not yet, not now. Being with Hale was all that mattered at the moment. Carefully he touched the singed hair on Hale's ear. At least it wasn't swollen anymore.

And suddenly this feeling was burning hot inside of him. Others might have needed drugs to forget their pain or compete at their physical best. His only drug that made his powers run to the max was called passion. He gave Hale a demanding kiss, literally pushed him back where the bed was located. Hale tried to keep from stumbling over his own feet but couldn't help but fall on the bed as Tandrak practically climbed up onto his body. His hands were running free through bluish-grey hair, over those muscular arms and chest.

"Wow, didn't know ye had such a storm in you", Hale said with a smirk after their lips finally parted – for getting some air and to easier get rid of disturbing shirts.

"Well, the savageness of youth", was Tandrak's answer before he continued kissing

the other hungrily. He started to move his hips in a pelvic thrust manner, ripping a low moan from the Bori's lips.

"Fuck, Shaye, stop being such a tease", Hale groaned and grabbed the other's pants to slide them down, set up a bit to get rid of his own remaining clothes. He let his lips slightly wander over the other's cheek, down to his neck, began to kiss and suck the flesh underneath the fur and tried to gently push the Gelert back onto the bed but Tandrak turned around and ended up on top again. It was an unfamiliar experience. Normally Hale was the more active part but he seemed to be alright with this place as well. For a few seconds they just stared at each other. Their positions felt wrong but oh-so right the same time. Then Tandrak moved down again for another kiss. He pressed his hard-on against Hale's causing them both to groan. The Bori's hands went down. He held both erections for a moment then with one last stroke let go and let his hands wander up again over Tandrak's belly and chest.

"Don't start something you don't intend to finish", the Draconian warned him breathlessly, half laughing and half groaning at the touch on his over-sensitized flesh. Hale grinned and let his hands wander over the other's spine, dragged him even closer, pushed their hard-ons together once more. Then instinct took over and they started to move against each other. They both felt like they were on fire, reveled in the sensation, kissing and licking at whatever bits of each other they could reach. The Bori let one hand wander down again, let his fingers run over their lengths, the other was still sliding over Tandrak's spine. Then he suddenly dug his fingers deep into the fur of the other's back and let out a cry of passion. Only a few seconds later, with a wail muffled in Hale's shoulder, Tandrak shot over the edge as well. He collapsed on top of the pirate who grunted softly but wrapped warm, comforting arms around him. Whatever had happened to him before, whatever he was reminded of before, it had gone out of Tandrak's mind, at least for now. The world outside could be dark, cold and cruel – they now were wrapped up in their own private cocoon of warmth and wonder, laughter and love.

They held onto each other as they listened to their unison heartbeats and stayed like this until they drifted down from their high and slowly into sleep.

When Tandrak finally awoke Hale already had been up for some time. Right now he was kneeling on the floor playing with the Snow Yooyu by holding a brandy praline over its head which the little Petpet desperately tried to reach.

The Gelert rubbed over his eyes and set up a little. "You are feeding it with alcohol filled chocolate?"

"Oh, morning, love. Yeah, tried several different things but the only he really liked to eat was that."

"This Yooyu is an alcoholic."

"He's a true pirate", the Bori answered with a proud grin. "I think I'll call him Bob."

Tandrak just chuckled and slowly shook his head then his gaze fell on the alarm clock at the side of the bed. "Dammit, just two more hours until we have to face Terror Mountain. I better should be prepared."

"I'll leave with ye", Hale said and stood up with Bob in his hands, "Need a bit of training in goalkeeping. Those pesky Maraquans really were able to score a last time and draw with us just because I'm still lacking a bit practice."

The Darigan player couldn't quite hide a brief smile. The only reason Maraqua had been able to shoot their last goal was because Hale mistook their Kiko for the ball and kicked him away instead.

